

SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ACT, 2013 /

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 7, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act respecting collective bargaining in Ontario's school system

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker.

Applause.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: And thanks to all those who applauded; I appreciate it. I am honoured to speak today to this bill, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

As you are well aware, Speaker, this morning all across Ontario, millions of children went off to school. When parents drop their daughter or their son at the front door of the school, when they get them out to the school bus, when they simply do everything they can to get the children out of the house in time in the morning for those children to go to school, they have taken a big step. They have entrusted the safety, the training and the future of those children to this province's education system. Teachers and education workers, principals and trustees, thousands of people do critical work, year in, year out, transferring the skills and knowledge that will be needed for the coming generation.

I just need to note, Mr. Speaker, this is my leadoff speech, and I believe I should be allocated an hour's time on the clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We recognize that this is, in fact, the leadoff speech by the New Democrats, and I'll ask the table to fix the clock. I return to the member for Toronto Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I'm appreciative to all who made this possible.

Hon. John Milloy: Give him four hours.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The government House leader has a twisted sense of humour.

As a society, we build our future freedoms and prosperity through the knowledge, values and skills we pass to the next generation. If we want to have a free society, if we want to have a democratic society, we need to instill in our children an understanding of the world and how it works around them. We have to give them the skills to sort out truth from static, the values that allow us to work together and to take the lead. If we want a prosperous society, we need to give all our children an equal start. A fairer society is a more prosperous society. If we as Ontario want to stand on our own two feet, then the next generation needs to have the skills—the ability to think, to read, to create, to use mathematics—to be players in a 21st-century economy. If we

want a healthy society, then our children need to have physical education and the knowledge of health issues to make sense of the world.

This is delicate work at times, demanding work and, since we're dealing with people, not with widgets, work that is often emotionally fraught. Parents put everything they have into their children, and at the same time, they put a big chunk of their hard-earned cash into the hands of governments to ensure that their children are given the best possible chance in life. Such complex and important systems as the education system here in Ontario don't do well when key players are sidelined, as trustees were in the last round of bargaining, don't do well when the front-line workers in the classes and in the hallways are demoralized through actions that take away rights guaranteed by our Constitution, as our teachers and education workers were under Bill 115, the bill with the Orwellian title, Putting Students First Act, 2012.

Speaker, as we came to the end of the disastrous Bill 115 reign, which I must note was a project coming out of a partnership between both the Liberal and Conservative parties, it was clear that no one wanted to go through that again. No one wants to go through the chaos and demoralization that were damaging to the families of this province and to those who worked in our schools.

When the current minister, Mrs. Sandals, introduced the bill, she had this to say:

“When I was first appointed Minister of Education, my first priority was to rebuild relationships with our partners so we could move forward with a common purpose to improve student achievement. This means putting previous challenges behind us and working toward a bright future. This innovative legislation I am introducing here today will help the education sector move forward with a clear process and common understanding of collective bargaining in the education sector.”

Speaker, the minister didn't say why relations had to be rebuilt. The bill whose name will not be spoken, Bill 115, was only alluded to. The bill that poisoned relations with the education community is the “previous challenge” to be put behind us.

This bill is apparently meant to prevent this kind of conflict in future. It may do many things, but it does not have the power to do that. If a government is willing to ignore the Constitution of the land and strip away the rights of Ontarians to negotiate contracts with their employers, then what does the existence of a mere bill mean? If the Constitution is irrelevant, no bill can stand against a government that's determined to do away with democratic rights.

This is what I had to say last year about Bill 115:

“The bill goes well beyond any prior attempt by the provincial government to constrain collective bargaining. The authority given to the minister and cabinet effectively enables them to control both the process of bargaining and the results of bargaining, including the right to strike or lock out, and imposing collective agreements or their forms without any accountability to the Legislature. So all of you in here who are going to get a chance to vote know that you are delegating huge power to the cabinet. We are being asked to sign a very big blank cheque. So ask

yourselves: Do you trust this cabinet with that blank cheque? I ask the Conservatives: Do you trust this government, this cabinet, with that blank cheque? Aside from sitting ministers who would like to be seen well by their Premier, is there anyone else in this room who thinks that giving the Premier a blank cheque is a good idea? I don't.

“The act interferes with the collective bargaining process set out under the Labour Relations Act on significant matters, such as wages and sick leave. It violates rights to freedom of association under section 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have to say, this bill before us will not prevent that from recurring. If a government is willing to restrict the use of the Human Rights Code or the labour board for anyone to protect themselves but ensures those mechanisms can be used on the part of the government—in other words, if the scales of justice can be dashed from the hands of justice itself—then let's face it: A bill that formalizes a bargaining framework is not going to stop a repeat of the offence in future.

The problem with Bill 115 was not just a lack of process; it was disrespect for democracy and disrespect for those who work in our schools. It remains to be seen if this bill will help improve

the situation in our schools. There's still time to debate. There's still time to hear useful public input at the committee stage.

Having talked about Bill 115, what's the impetus, what's the origin, of the bill that is before us today? The bill attempts to formalize a set of education bargaining practices and solve representational issues that essentially flow from the removal of the ability of local boards to set their own tax rate, an education levy that was on the property tax.

The removal of the ability for local boards to levy their own property tax gave the province complete control over the educational purse strings. However, the formal legislative bargaining framework didn't evolve with this change in education financing.

It's very interesting to me to find that, twice, the minister notes in her leadoff speech that this new system is required because of fiscal constraint. For instance, and I quote the minister, "The current method of collective bargaining may have worked better when school boards had taxation powers, and during periods when investments in education were increasing. But in these times of fiscal constraints, we need a model that encourages creative, collaborative discussions where everybody works together to find solutions to challenging issues."

She refers again in her speech—and I will note that, when I come to it in mine—to fiscal restraint being part of the driver for this bill.

Her parliamentary assistant, the member for Scarborough–Rouge River, comes back to restraint in his speech as well: "Since the government funds education in Ontario, it puts us at the central table, where issues tied to funding are discussed. This will be essential as we move forward in our time of financial constraints. We need to protect our world-class education and find a better way to negotiate while working within our fiscal parameters."

It would be helpful if the government were to clarify in subsequent debate why their focus is so much on needing this bargaining framework to carry forward the agenda of fiscal restraint.

I read the speeches by the minister and by her parliamentary assistant. There were substantial issues like this that were not enlarged upon and need to be enlarged upon. We have several hours of debate ahead of us. The government has the opportunity to clarify these issues and set out to the people of Ontario exactly what this focus on fiscal restraint means in terms of this legislation.

Others have talked about the main components of the bill, and I'll just touch on them briefly.

The act changes the collective bargaining framework in two main ways. First of all, it formalizes the process of central and local collective bargaining. Secondly, it provides for central grievance arbitration.

The act mandates a system of central bargaining on fiscal matters and key matters of provincial educational policy. For support staff, access to central bargaining is not mandatory and, on the surface, appears to be subject to the approval of the minister, although I think there's an assumption that, if one of the parties requests it, it will be granted.

At the central table, the crown is a formal participant but does not appear to be a party in the sense of being subject to the bargaining and good-faith rules under the Ontario Labour Relations Act. Therefore, the central table is a three-party structure, but the crown has slightly different status than the other two parties.

At local tables, the standard employee/employer structure prevails. The crown can designate additional matters to the central table, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board will be the body to determine if these additional items are central or local in cases where the parties do not agree. There's also a two-track arbitration process in which the crown can participate in the arbitration hearing. The employer—the boards—is not permitted to settle a local case without consent of the crown.

It also appears that a central award decision on language prevails over any local settlements or local arbitration decisions, and there's some clarity that needs to be brought there. A union can be a designated bargaining agent if it represents at least 15 bargaining units.

Speaker, that's the bare bones of the bill that's before us. I think there will be consequences that flow from this centralization of bargaining—not necessarily negative consequences, but consequences nonetheless.

The trustees' associations that function on a province-wide basis will have to invest much more in the activity of the central bargaining body. There's no doubt that the person who runs to be head of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association or the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association—those people will be in a far more powerful and influential position. Within the unions in the education sector, obviously central bodies will be of greater consequence. They will have more formal direct power in terms of bargaining.

The impact of all that is yet to be determined. My guess is that, in the course of the debate and consultations that will happen over the next few months, much of this will become clearer. I've had a chance, since last fall, to talk to stakeholders about bargaining in the post-Bill 115 world, and certainly, as this bill has come forward, those discussions have intensified.

There are a number of issues that have been raised that I want to address this afternoon, and I ask that the government address these issues in the course of the debate. I won't be raising everything that has been raised with me—after all, I only get an hour to speak, although the government House leader was very gracious in suggesting that I be given four hours—but there are some substantial issues that have to be addressed here.

First of all, from the perspective of education workers and teachers, there are issues they believe still need to be sorted out for this bill to go forward, and I would be very appreciative if the government would put forward its response to these concerns.

The first has to do with whether the government is going to be governed by the labour laws that require fair action on the part of employers and employees. As teachers and education workers put it, currently in the bill the government status is as a non-party. It's part of the process, but, in some important ways, stands outside it. The government is part of the negotiations. It will have a

major voice in steering them, but it appears that the government is not governed by the Ontario Labour Relations Act rules regarding good-faith bargaining as it is not a formal party according to the Ontario Labour Relations Act—more on this when we talk about how the trustees have responded.

Teachers' groups argue that it should be a formal party; in other words, there should be clear provisions ensuring the government's obligation to bargain in good faith and adhere to fair labour practices.

Here's what Minister Sandals had to say in her leadoff speech at second reading:

“Now we are in a time of fiscal restraint and facing a challenging mandate. In order to produce an improved process more ready to deal with the coming challenges, we want to move to greater consistency. The process should be made into a legal framework that more clearly recognizes boards as employers and provides a clearer role in bargaining for the government as the funder.” I note that again: “a clearer role in bargaining for the government as the funder.”

“If passed, it will move beyond the voluntary discussion tables and establish a clear legal framework, with clear roles and responsibilities for all parties involved in negotiations. And it will allow the government, as the funder of the public education system in Ontario, to have a prescribed role at the negotiating table where it can bargain directly.”

Further on in the speech: “Management representation at central tables would be made up of both the government and the provincial trustee associations.”

And again: “With the newly prescribed role for government at the central table, we, as the funder of education in Ontario, will be able to bargain directly about issues that are connected to funding.”

Two things: It would be very useful for the minister to speak, as I mentioned earlier, about how she sees this bargaining framework being important in a time of fiscal restraint. I think we, in this chamber, and those who are following this out in the broader population, need to understand that. The second is that it appears that the government is bargaining directly, referenced directly by the minister herself. That reinforces the point that teachers have made that the government has to comply with parts of the law that force both sides in bargaining to act fairly. We need the government's explanation of their position. Maybe there are other factors in this bill that don't immediately come to light or are not immediately visible. It looks like the government should be bound to act in fair ways that the school boards and their employees are bound to act in.

Since the absence of fairness was one of the defining elements in the Bill 115 era, one has to ask why this approach was taken in this bill. Does the government plan to act in ways outside the Labour Relations Act, to take advantage of being outside that framework? Minister, we need your argument here.

I appreciate the fact that you're in the chamber. I know that ministerial duties are not light. Your time is not—what can I say?—unconstrained, and so I appreciate the fact that you take this

debate seriously. I think that we, in this chamber, need to hear back from you. What is your analysis on the Labour Relations Act? What is your position on this approach, this concern that has been brought forward by those in the education community?

The second matter has to do with arbitration criteria. My guess is that most of you who are watching this or are in this chamber today don't spend your time studying labour law. I need to note that Ontario provides for third party arbitrators to settle disputes over pay, working conditions and other workplace matters. The arbitrators function like judges to give a decision on a fair settlement between two opposing groups.

The section in this act is very explicit in telling the arbitrators that the ability of the employer to pay has to be considered, but there's no mention, on the other side, of fair remuneration, decent working conditions etc. as criteria.

I know the government argues that they are carrying forward existing conditions, existing language from the Education Act. That may well be so, but that doesn't mean it makes sense. In fact, in a world where there's constant pressure to roll back the gains that working and middle-class people have made to secure a decent life, the loading of the instructions against the employees could have a very damaging effect. If the government is not going to take out the ability-to-pay language, then it makes sense that they update the language to reflect fairness on the other side by recognizing qualifications required, responsibility assumed and nature of the work done.

Again on this, I look forward to the government's response. If we are going to have fairness, then we need as fair a playing field as possible. This is a reasonable concern on the part of those who work for us, looking after our children, educating them day after day.

Also on the manner of the arbitration, I have had it pointed out to me that arbitrators will be asked to put forward findings that apply to the whole system, but whose findings are not binding on the school boards—the employers. So, a contentious issue is brought forward. It's sent to an arbitrator. It's meant to apply to all employers in the province. The arbitrator may well find a particular position, and yet the individual school boards won't be bound by that. Where there's a conflict, the teachers or education workers will have to take the individual board to an arbitrator through a legal procedure to get the matter settled.

That seems a waste of time and money. I don't understand why it's been structured that way, and without a very good reason, I would say that needs to be changed.

Teachers and education workers have said that the scope of ministerial ability to reserve items for the central table is extremely large. I can understand where the government, as the central funder, would like to preserve the ability to define what is happening at the central negotiating table, but it seems to be in conflict with the idea that the division of items that get debated centrally and locally is the subject of the first round of discussion. The government needs to explain why it gives itself the power to make such definitions right off the bat.

Another matter that comes up is that the term of the collective agreements can be set by the government, be they two years or three years or four years long. Teachers have argued that the term of a contract needs to be negotiated, not set by the government.

It's pretty standard to negotiate the length of an agreement. Both sides see value in setting the term to address issues in a given time period. If you are a teachers' federation or you're a custodial worker in CUPE and you're in a period of high inflation, then you may want to have a very short term contract so that you can renegotiate in a much shorter time frame to protect your purchasing power. On the other hand, governments may want stability. They may see an election coming up in the next six or 12 months and want everything put off for two, three or four years. There is great value in being able to determine the term of a contract, the length of a contract. Here again, the government needs to come forward and explain its logic. If it is solely for their political convenience, they should think again. It's not a good reason to move this part of negotiations out of the hands of the people they're negotiating with.

Now, those are a number of the major concerns that have come from teachers and education workers, and as I said earlier, I'm not covering everything, but a number of main points.

I want to note as well that the Ontario Public School Boards' Association sent forward a number of their concerns, and I want to touch on those as well. I imagine that I will hear from all of the school boards in the next while, before this bill is settled.

One of the concerns of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association is that the minister may, by regulation, require a school board to pay fees to the central organization to support the collective bargaining process, the manner of determining fee amounts and other matters respecting the fees. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association recommends that the government directly support or fund the employer bargaining agents as they have in the past.

Now, it's one thing to say, "You have to come together and bargain collectively"; it's another to say, "I'm going to tell you how much you have to allocate. I'm going to tell you the manner in which the funds are allocated." As we all know, school boards are financially stretched and stressed. Having negotiations at two levels is a useful thing, maybe a beneficial thing, but it can be a costly thing. We don't want to be in a situation where school boards are forced to take money away from their operations, away from their classrooms, in order to pay for these negotiations. It's a cost of running the education system. There's logic in the school boards' association asking for financial support to do that.

The provision that allows the employer bargaining agency to be substituted if, in the minister's opinion, the employer bargaining agency is unable or unwilling to perform its duties—in other words, if the government says, "You public school boards aren't coming to the table. You aren't bargaining. You're staying away. We're going to appoint someone else, and they'll negotiate on your behalf"—is a pretty substantial move. I'm curious as to the government's thinking. I assume that there may, from time to time, be extraordinary circumstances, but such powers have to be constrained. Such very substantial powers in dealing with another level of government have to pass a variety of rigorous tests and be used only in very narrow circumstances.

Here again, we need to hear from the government. If a province-wide federation of school boards decides—and I say this even though I believe it's unlikely—to play some kind of game with bargaining and holds back as a way of exerting pressure on the province or on their employees, then I understand why the government may want to step in. But frankly, the restrictions on such activity have to be very tight. Arbitrary action on the part of the minister, any minister, in this matter has to be constrained.

The public school boards go on to say that the provision that an employer bargaining agency, in this case the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, "shall co-operate in good faith with the crown in preparing for and conducting central bargaining" when there is no reciprocal requirement for the crown to co-operate in good faith—that strikes me as pretty fair. If the government of the day doesn't deal with the school boards in a way that shows good faith, doesn't show a reasonable approach, if the government of the day isn't held to the same standard as the legitimate school board governments are held, that doesn't strike me as fair, reasonable or, ultimately, workable.

There's one other matter I want to address briefly—and it's one that is going to have to be worked out, I think, by the players involved and by the government—and that's the nature of bargaining in the francophone school system. I've had interest expressed on the part of the association of francophone teachers, AEFO, that they would like to bargain with both boards in the francophone system at once at a central table. Now, things that may appear simple at first glance sometimes become wildly more complex than one would want. I am not suggesting that we thrust anything upon the employers or the employees in the francophone system, but I would ask that the minister, who has said to me that she believes there's a way to work through this, talk with the employee associations, talk with the employers and see if, in fact, there can be a meeting of minds on this so that the quality of the negotiations in the francophone system is as high as the quality of negotiations in the English-speaking system. When you have relatively small school boards, they don't always have the same level of resources to carry forward the analysis and negotiation that one needs. I hope that the minister will take the time to sit down with the players and find a way forward on this.

We in the NDP have not yet decided on the amendments that we will be putting forward, the amendments that we will be supporting, but we have decided that this bill should go forward to committee for public input, for debate and for amendment.

I want to talk about the larger stresses that the education system faces. I want to talk about those factors that will make it possible to come to negotiated agreements and not come to negotiated agreements, because I believe that far bigger than the question of the framework is the question of the funding that's on the table. A system that is constantly stressed, that is not able to provide the resources necessary for the task at hand, is going to have a great deal of difficulty coming to an agreement with the women and the men who actually provide education in this province.

I also want to talk about what I see as a growing problem in the education system, and that's inequality. Speaker, as you and many others may well be aware, I don't have a long history with the education system in this province. I'm relatively new to this as a critic. But one thing that has struck me in the few years that I've had the opportunity—actually, the privilege—to work on this

portfolio is the stress on the system. I see parts of the education system left untended, underfunded, so that other matters can be taken up, so that announceables or photo ops can be properly funded. I'm worried about this moving around of funds to increase the chance for photo ops while substantial education funding matters are set aside.

As of 2013, the Toronto District School Board alone—I'm not talking the Toronto Catholic District School Board; I'm not talking Ottawa, Hamilton, London, Thunder Bay, Timmins—just one school board, reports a deferred maintenance bill of \$3 billion. That's a lot of undone maintenance. That's a lot of leaky taps, leaky roofs and masonry that's not attended to. I know that looking after the students, the children in the classes, is our first priority, but ultimately, if the building is not in good shape, it has an impact on the health and the safety of all those who work in it.

I'd just note, for curiosity's sake, that at the same time, the Ontario colleges report a deferred maintenance bill of almost \$600 million.

Effectively, this government is borrowing from maintenance budgets to pay for other education investments. This is a very, very expensive way to borrow money. It's invisible at first, but when the bill comes due, it can be extraordinarily large.

People for Education, in their 2013 report, note that the number of students per special education teacher continues to increase. We need to deal with special education. Children with autism, children with any exceptionality that requires extra support, deserve good support.

The number of children waiting for special education may have declined, but the size of the workload for special education teachers has gone up, effectively diluting their ability to serve those children.

The number of schools with music teachers and librarians continues to decrease. Again, key investments that allow the government to claim they're meeting their goals are where the money goes, and the rest of the system is forced to carry the stress. And that approach has to change.

The Liberals are moving shells around with the money underneath, dealing with the most visible, the most politically salient issues while others and other parts of the education system are picking up the bill.

Part of the function of our education system is to reduce inequality. To the extent that every child gets an equal start in life, we increase the chances that all will have a chance to live well. To do that, we need to ensure that our system can correct for inequality in the larger society. It will never do it perfectly, but it does have to, even in part, be addressed.

In the city of Toronto, the model school system has been an attempt to address that inequality by putting more resources into schools that support a larger population of students facing disadvantage at home. The province allocates Learning Opportunities Grants to school boards to boost funding for schools with a higher percentage of students that need extra support, but, as

Social Planning Toronto reports, these funds are not “sweatered”; they’re not locked in, so they can be reallocated to other purposes.

Because the overall funding doesn’t match the needs of the Toronto board, two thirds of the Learning Opportunities Grant is reallocated to other needs. Here is what Social Planning Toronto had to say in their recent report, A Triple Threat to Equity:

“Given the terms of the LOG and ESL/ELD funds it looks as if the needs of the province’s most marginalized students are protected. The reality in Toronto schools, however, is much different. As the Toronto District School Board endeavours to provide an education that will prepare students for the 21st century on increasingly tight budgets, the board has taken to balancing its budgets using the ‘unsweatered’ (unprotected) LOG and ESL/ELD grants—money intended to support Toronto’s most marginalized students. This leaves teachers and schools without the needed resources to provide equitable learning opportunities for their students with the greatest need.

“The TDSB, and many other boards in the GTA, find themselves in this situation due to declining budgets and flaws inherent in the province’s education funding formula, which, despite promises, has not been renewed since its creation 16 years ago. In 1997 the province undertook a massive restructuring of the educational system, which introduced the funding formula, saw the amalgamation of a number of boards and at the same time, removed the ability of local boards to issue taxation levies to compensate for the provincial funding gaps. Ever since amalgamation, the TDSB has experienced massive budgetary shortfalls and faces a growing structural deficit.

“The funding formula does not provide sufficient funding for the basics of the system—the payment of teachers and administrators as well as the operation and maintenance of school facilities.” Here, they cited Hugh Mackenzie of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. “The TDSB reports that over 85% of its budget is used to pay for operating line items such as salaries and benefits. The board faces an additional challenge as a result of fluctuations in enrolment. Enrolment declines have had a negative impact on the amount of funding it receives annually, as funds are tied to each student. Additional funding challenges have arisen with the rollout of the province’s full-day kindergarten program. The most conservative estimates find that the province is annually underfunding the board by approximately \$338 per child for this program, contributing in large part to the TDSB’s structural deficit.

“Additionally, the TDSB experiences shortfalls amounting to tens of millions of dollars in funding for special education, learning opportunities and English as a second language.”

These sorts of problems are not just felt in Toronto; they are felt across this province, but they are especially present in urban boards, where poverty, unemployment and immigration rates are higher. In this I cite, again, Hugh Mackenzie from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. In practical terms, that has meant that inequality of opportunity for students is perpetuated.

This past weekend, reporters Caroline Alphonso and Tavia Grant reported in the Globe and Mail that school performance reflected the income levels of the community the school was situated in.

The headline, “Where Earning Meets Learning,” was really great, because it summarized the whole article.

“In Toronto, income inequality is the highest in Canada—and wealth and test scores are going hand in hand. Rich areas are home to high-scoring schools, while schools in poorer areas lag.”

It’s pretty straightforward: If you’re in a school that has a high-income catchment, then there are a lot more services and supports provided, and the reverse is just as true.

People for Education, in their 2013 report, *Mind the Gap: Inequality in Ontario’s Schools*, make it clear that the problem is not just in Toronto. Children are being left behind, and that means trouble for them and our society. Here’s what People for Education had to say in their 2013 report:

“Learning Opportunities Grant:

“There is some provincial funding provided to boards that is partly based on student characteristics such as family income, lone-parent status, and parental education. But the funding—known as the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG)—was cut substantially in 2006, and its focus diluted so that it is now intended to fund a number of programs for all students, including a variety of literacy and numeracy programs, and the province’s Student Success Strategy.

“There is no requirement in Ontario’s education policy that school boards spend the LOG funding on measures that have been shown to ameliorate some of the impacts of socioeconomics.

“In addition, the province has not acted upon long-standing recommendations to strengthen the grant and measure the effectiveness of the programs it funds.”

They note:

“A recent study by the Toronto District School Board used detailed administrative records and school and individual level demographic data to show other worrying trends in special education:

“Students in schools with higher family incomes were much more likely to be identified as gifted, learning disabled or autistic”—it was much more likely that someone had the time to do the identification and make sure they got support.

“Students in schools with lower family incomes were more likely to be identified with language impairment, developmental disability, mild intellectual disability, or behavioural issues.

“Students in schools with lower family incomes were also somewhat less likely to be formally identified (which entitles them to services under the Education Act).”

Inequality can close off options to people—to children—for their whole lives. It can damage their lives. But inequality also damages whole societies. The International Monetary Fund

reported recently that greater income equality increases the strength of economic growth and reduces the frequency of boom-and-bust cycles, as well as making sure that more investment is available. In other words, equality is good for the economy; inequality weakens it.

Poorer health outcomes, more crime and more social unrest are all part of the impact of inequality. Inequality of opportunity that comes from a failure to invest in our students means that our society will be poorer. It increases the pressures that lead to inequality in our schools. This is a downward spiral.

I raise this because this bill is not being debated in a vacuum. Schools don't exist in a vacuum. They'll be affected by bigger factors that will determine if talks about wages and working conditions in any framework will work or not.

One of the big factors that will determine the failure or success of any future talks is the state of provincial finances. We've had a decade of corporate tax cuts, which has left what Mark Carney, former head of the Bank of Canada, called piles of "dead money" in corporate vaults, money that's not creating jobs. That policy failed, and at the same time that policy squeezed the lifeline of adequate funding to the education system as well as the rest of the public sector.

In 2012, in the lead-up to the budget, the Toronto Star recognized this negative impact of corporate tax cuts in an editorial. "Corporate Taxes: Now Is Not the Time for Ontario to Cut Them," was their headline.

"Ontario can not afford to cut corporate taxes again. Besides, they are already more than competitive."

Yes, Speaker, we have been cutting corporate taxes, leading to underfunding of our education system, a lack of support for our children, leading to conflict with educators, and we've done this more than was necessary to carry through an agenda that the Liberal Party has been promoting. Even the Star recognized that Ontario's corporate tax rate is already competitive with other provinces and well below those in Great Lakes states. At 11.5%, Ontario's rate is the lowest in the country but for three provinces at 10%—British Columbia, Alberta and New Brunswick—and BC's latest budget calls for its rate to go back up to 11% in two years.

They write: "There's good reason why Bay Street has barely raised an eyebrow at the increasing suggestions that the provincial budget will halt plans to drop corporate tax to 11 per cent this July and 10 per cent next year. The substantial corporate tax reductions that have already taken place, elimination of the capital tax on business investment, and the introduction of the harmonized sales tax are already saving businesses \$7 billion a year."

Speaker, \$7 billion is a lot of money; \$7 billion would make a real difference in terms of the operation of our schools, in terms of dealing with our deficit, in terms of addressing a myriad of problems that we need to have addressed if we're to build a society that's functional, sustainable, fair and prosperous in the long run.

There is ample evidence that most businesses have hoarded their tax breaks and banked their profits rather than put them into job creation and productivity growth, the key to future prosperity. We spent a decade cutting corporate taxes to create jobs, which weren't created. We spent a decade cutting corporate taxes and smothering investments that are needed in the infrastructure of this province, in the people of this province, in the children of this province. A continuation of that policy, a continuation of further tax cuts, of privatizing in this province, means less money for schools.

This bill may or may not pass. This bill may or may not be the right answer to what is before us. But I know very well that in the long run, if we don't deal with the financial matters, this bill will be irrelevant, because it will be the availability or lack of availability of money that will determine the success of bargaining in years to come. We need fairness in our agreements with teachers and education workers so that their morale is high, so that we can build an atmosphere of co-operation and respect. This bill alone can't address the issues that need to be addressed to make our schools function well. It can only address part of those issues.

Speaker, I've asked the government to speak, to address a number of the concerns that have been raised by school boards and that have been raised by teachers and education workers. My hope is that they will, in the course of these debates, answer those questions so that when we go to committee, when we get another round of public input, we'll be in a better position to decide what needs to be changed, what needs to be left as is.

Parents may not have deep training in education theory, but they are powerfully invested in their children and in the well-being of their children. This is a part of life that touches on the most profound hopes and concerns that we have as people. When we address issues in this sector, we engage the public in a way that we don't in any other area, bar none. I expect I will be hearing from more parents as this process goes on.

The bill is relatively technical. It appeals more to stakeholders who spend a lot of time studying labour law and negotiation. But I have to say, Speaker, all of us will hear from parents if this act doesn't add to the stability of the system.

There's a real and substantial challenge here for all of us. We should not hesitate to take up that challenge.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 122.

I listened attentively to the member from Toronto–Danforth and his remarks. I want to be on record to say that the proposed Bill 122 is good for Ontario. It is a made-in-Ontario bill that will support the work of public education, support the work we have done over the last 10 years.

But more importantly, the proposed legislation, if passed, is to create a central table for collective bargaining that will formalize the roles of both the province and the local school boards as well as the various unions.

I also want to respond to the comments made by my colleague from Toronto–Danforth, having been a former trustee for the Toronto District School Board. The sweating of the different envelopes that the province gives to local school boards provides an opportunity for the schools to have local autonomy and provides the school boards with an opportunity to make local decisions.

We had an opportunity, when I was there at the school board, whereby the ESL funding was used for other things. Through my motion, that motion was protecting the ESL funding so that that funding would not be used to pay for hydro, water or what have you. That sweating provided that opportunity for local decision-making.

The other thing the member opposite said about the relationship between income and student success: I'm going to challenge that statement, because I know several schools in my riding—Kennedy Public School, David Lewis Public School, Dr. Norman Bethune—have outstanding students because they have great teachers, great support staff and very engaged parents. Those are the ingredients for student success, and those are the ingredients that ensure students will be successful in the future.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise and comment on the member from Toronto–Danforth. I'm glad to see that he has hope in this legislation—we don't see a lot in it. A lot of it is relying on the regulations.

Education in Ontario has slipped. We've heard people in my own riding talk about the consequences of trying to hire local students who have now learned, or it has been ingrained, that you don't have to do things on time; you don't have deadlines to meet. Part of that is the direction coming from the ministry, coming from this government, not to—sometimes we're more concerned about not offending people than we are with actually getting the job done.

We have a lot of hope that this will make some changes too. I have two daughters and a wife who are teachers, and I hear some of the issues they have. A lot of those issues come from this government and changes they've made over the last number of years. I think it's important that special education—that things that were put in place for the right reasons are actually there when the teachers need them, and the funding is there. I guess he highlighted an issue where the funding is now being siphoned off to pay for basic hydro bills, expenses that it shouldn't need to go to, because these costs have outpaced inflation. When we look at some of these regular inflationary increases, hydro was going up 6% just last week or the week before, and that's not the only increase this year.

We look at trying to get money down to the students, where it makes a difference. We have the basis here in this province for students that should be able to lead the world in education. We want to see that, and we want to see at the end that there are actually jobs for them.

I look forward to further discussion on this bill.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise to comment on the leadoff done by my colleague the member from Toronto–Danforth on Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. He spoke about the technical nature of the act and the fact that it does attempt to remedy some issues in relation to centralized funding.

I really appreciated his synopsis, of course, but I appreciated how he framed the overall situation of our education system in the province as a stressed system, and historically stressed, really dating back to the Mike Harris era. Chronic underfunding—a funding formula that is yet to be rectified by the Liberal government, yet through various elections, they championed the fact that they were eventually going to rectify the funding formula—has certainly had an impact on schools in my community: schools that have closed due to underfunding, schools that have high ratios of specialized students and those who have special needs, to EAs who support them.

He mentioned something that was news to me, and I think it was probably news to the majority of people who are watching today: There's roughly a \$300-billion price tag out there in deferred maintenance costs for one particular board—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's \$3 billion.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's \$3 billion. What did I say, \$300 million? It's \$3 billion, and \$600 million in colleges, a price tag, a bill of sale that is yet to be paid that will be a challenge for any government to undertake. We certainly don't see any efforts being put forward on the part of this government to address that issue, which my friend raised today.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to respond to the speech on Bill 122 by the member from Toronto–Danforth. I couldn't help but notice the suggestion that somehow this is a system that's under a lot of financial stress, and because of that, there wasn't any job creation—we hadn't created any public sector jobs. Somehow or other, corporate tax cuts and no jobs all got connected.

I think we need to keep some perspective here. There have been tens of thousands of jobs created in the education sector. For primary class size, for full-day kindergarten, for specialist teachers in the elementary panel, and for student success teachers and specialist high-skills major teachers in the secondary panel, there has been a substantial number of new teachers brought into the system so they can support our students in providing better education for them. I think that parents really appreciate that.

Another thing that parents need to understand: Back in the Harris years, or if we go further back, when school boards had taxes, we would bargain multi-year agreements because that gave stability to the system. It meant that from the point of view of parents, when we had multi-year agreements, we worked with our teachers as front-line professionals for multiple years.

Then we went to the Tory model of bargaining, where we only had one-year agreements, and there was no taxation, no stability. It's important to get the government back to the table with its funding so we can have that multi-year stability in collective bargaining and provide our employees, our students and our parents with a stable education system that's focused on student success and teacher professionalism, not the annual bargaining fight.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My thanks to the members from Scarborough–Agincourt, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry—I always have to look at that to make sure I've got all of them—Essex and the minister herself for their commentary.

I want to speak first to the question of sweating and local decision-making. I don't disagree that local school boards have to be able to make decisions, and not every item needs to be sweated. But if we're in a situation where the school boards are consistently receiving less money than they need to carry out their full functions, then we're going to get reallocations from areas that I would say most of us don't think should be reallocated. That's a concern, and I think that we in this Legislature are going to have to consider not just sweating but the whole question of how our schools—how our school boards—are funded.

The member from Scarborough–Agincourt was correct in saying there are schools that do very well, even in areas that have fairly low income. Low income is not a determinant of intelligence, but certainly, if you look across Ontario, schools in wealthy areas tend to have more resources and the families in those areas have more resources. There is a correlation between income and school outcome. We need in this province to make sure that every child, no matter what their background, gets to fully develop their skills and their talents so they can live their lives as fully as possible and so this province can be built as much as possible.

To the Minister of Education, I appreciate her comments. I want to say that in terms of the relationship between taxation and job creation, my argument is this: that time after time I've sat here and listened to budgets brought forward that took part of the taxes out of the corporate sector, with the explanation that it would lead to a lot more jobs being created. I haven't seen it, nor, frankly, has the current Minister of Finance.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure for me to rise. I guess I was a bit surprised that the government didn't take a rotation to speak to Bill 122, School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. I'm a little surprised at that.

I'm proud of my relationship with schools in my riding of Leeds–Grenville. In fact, I had the opportunity during constituency week, on Friday, to return to my former high school, Thousand Islands Secondary School in Brockville. I was pleased to speak to students in Conrad Walpot's civics class. I can tell you that we had a great discussion with the students in that class. I know we're just a little too far—a three-and-a-half-hour drive for students to come to take part in

question period. They were very enthused until I told them they'd have to get up at 4:30 in the morning. The ones in front of me were enthused; I don't know about some of the other members. I did say that if they came, we'd welcome them and greet them well.

During the Thanksgiving constituency week, I attended another high school in my riding, Brockville Collegiate Institute. I hope the members will indulge me for a moment. I want to take a few moments while we're debating an education bill to talk to you about something incredible that the students and staff at Brockville Collegiate have accomplished. In fact, as I'm standing in the Legislature, there is a big celebration taking place at that school. It's going to be quite an emotional day for all the students at BCI.

Last month the students launched a safe driving campaign with Amy Neuman from State Farm Insurance in Brockville. Their inspiration for the Celebrate My Drive campaign was Aaron Stevenson, a classmate they lost this summer when he was struck and killed by a vehicle just days before the start of the school year. It was a horrible tragedy that claimed the life of a very popular 16-year-old, a really great young man with a great, bright future.

In grieving the loss of their friend, BCI students decided that they wanted to do something that would honour Aaron's memory. This afternoon, a month after launching the Celebrate My Drive campaign, the school is being presented with a \$25,000 cheque from Amy Neuman and State Farm. I'm very proud of that. Part of the money is going to be used to create the Aaron Stevenson Music Award and ensure that his name will live on and inspire future generations of students to pursue their passion for creating music. It's a wonderful story. It's a great lesson for these students to show that something good can come out from even one of the worst tragedies that they'd experience in their life. I think they've done a great job in transforming their grief into something very positive that's going to live on for many years to come.

I appreciate the indulgence of my colleagues. I want to thank the BCI school community and Principal Bill Loshaw on doing a great job with the Celebrate My Drive campaign, and I want to congratulate them. I wish I was there helping them celebrate this afternoon, but I'm here debating Bill 122.

Our education critic, the member for Cambridge, Mr. Leone, I thought did an excellent job for our caucus in his one-hour leadoff on this bill. I have to say, as he did, that it is a bill that I think we're prepared to support. We do believe it does implement some things that need to happen when it comes to the collective bargaining process. But at the same time, I think the critic articulated very well that we have some suggestions on how to improve that bill, because, let's face it, we all know what the bill is about. What we have here is the Liberal government's latest attempt to kiss and make up with their former friends in the education system before the next election. The bill is designed to help repair a relationship that their complete and utter bungling of the last round of negotiation left in tatters.

How bad is it, you ask? Do you know what? I think maybe we should ask Ken Coran, one of the union friends of the Liberal government that they hand-picked to be the colour-bearer for the party in the London West by-election that summer. That story, for the government, didn't end the way they wanted it to. In fact, they had held the riding for a decade, and they finished with a

distant third-place showing at that by-election. If you asked Ken what he thought, I'd be interested to hear what he'd have to say. I think the result was, in large part, due to the anger the government had sparked among its former friends in education and the disaster they had in the last round of negotiations.

That's a big part of why, despite all the substantive issues we have in education today, we're debating Bill 122 this afternoon. Repairing the relationship with the teachers' unions before the next election is this government's priority, which I have to say is not only disappointing but I happen to think is doomed to fail. I'm sad to say to the Minister of Education that I highly doubt this one bill will suddenly make your partners forgive and forget. I know you had to try something, and this is it. So, hats off to you for at least putting something in the legislative hopper and debating. Again, I'm interested that no one decided that they were going to actually take a 20-minute rotation and speak to it, but at least they've tabled it and called it for debate. So there you go.

The minister, as I think we all know, has spent a number of months reaching out to her partners: the trustee associations, the school board staff, the teachers and, of course, the unions. I note the one key stakeholder that that misses—and, again, normally misses when these folks across talk about education policy; they don't seem to consult them—and that's the parents of Ontario's more than two million students. If parents were ever asked to put on a list what they think the most substantive issues in education are, I doubt very much that they would include anything that is included in Bill 122. I was at lots of events during constituency week. I saw lots of parents. As I mentioned, I was in a school and saw lots of people, and nobody brought the issues that are incorporated into Bill 122 forward.

If parents did get to voice their concerns about how Ontario students are faring in math and science tests or whether our system is truly preparing them for life in this increasingly technological and competitive world, I think that's what parents that I talk to—that's what they want. They want to know that their children are receiving the best-quality education when they're headed off to school every morning, the kind of education that is going to give them the best chance to be successful in whatever future career path those students may want to choose. I think, again, that those are the things that people in Leeds–Grenville tell me they want debated, rather than this.

I have to again talk about the impetus for Bill 122 and the reason that we're not dealing with issues that parents want us to focus on, and that's because we have, in the bill, one repentant partner in a relationship making another desperate attempt to patch things back between the unions and the government. They spent the past several months, as I said earlier, meeting with their partners, and do you know what they're trying to do? They're trying to remind them about all the good times they had together over the years—the good old days, Speaker, when the Liberal government rolled along. But do you know what? Finally, they woke up and, for the first time in a decade, they actually looked around at the financial mess that they've created in the province, and look what happened.

Now, don't get me wrong. The recognition didn't bring about any real change in this government's spendthrift ways, but we know that because the province's economic and fiscal

woes are worse than ever, that did lead them to introduce Bill 115 last year. It was a bill that our caucus supported, because it was the first time we'd ever seen the slightest hint from that side of the House that there was a problem. It was the first time.

However, our caucus would have preferred to deal with everybody in the same way. I think it was pretty obvious what our position was; we articulated it many times in the House. Our caucus and our leader, Tim Hudak, preferred that we treat all employees of the broader public sector the same, with a two-year wage freeze. We didn't see the need to try to deal with one group over another. We felt that everybody needed to share in the recovery. It was a pretty easy thing for us to talk about, because the government kept talking as if they were going to provide some measures. So we supported them.

But you know what? This government again, despite all the wooing that they've done—I just don't see how this bill is going to provide them with a happy marriage again between the government and the unions.

From what I've seen, and from what the partners have said, no one has come out enthusiastically embracing this bill and has given the government the assurances that all is forgiven. I think it's obvious: There's a lack of trust that people in education have with this government after what transpired last year with Bill 115, and they're going to withhold judgment until they see how Bill 122 plays out.

Again, as our critic, Mr. Leone, indicated, he's prepared to support and we are prepared to support this legislation. There are some amendments that we want to put forward, and I'll get to those in a moment.

This is a very technical bill. I think the member for Toronto–Danforth also mentioned that it's a bit complex. We're talking about a process bill. We're not talking about anything that improves education. It establishes just a framework, essentially ground rules, under which the collective bargaining process in the education sector will happen. It's a two-tier negotiating process.

I think it's a good thing, because we know that collective agreements don't just have an impact on individual school boards but, obviously, on the province as a whole. Because the province funds education, I think it's appropriate that there is some formalized collective bargaining process, particularly on the matter of compensation. Going forward, we'll see those issues like compensation, that have broader impacts across the province, being negotiated at that central table.

Anybody who has read the bill knows that it deals with the four boards—AEFO, ETFO, OECTA and OSSTF. There's a notable omission, of course: The support staff have no formal role at the central table. However, it does give the minister authorization to give them access by designating a union bargaining council representing support staff.

It was interesting: I had a meeting with Susan Hanson and Tracey Pinder from CUPE, and I brought that up to them. We had a nice discussion about that, because the way I read the bill, at a

minimum, to have access to the central table, a council would have to represent 15 bargaining units. That's the central bargaining component.

The second of the two tiers is that it establishes a process for matters of local concern that will be bargained at the local level between individual school boards and their employee groups.

It should also be noted that the two sets of talks can take place concurrently. One doesn't have to conclude before the other one begins.

Again, I think you need to ensure that the government is at the table to protect the \$21-billion investment that taxpayers make in the education system every year, but I think it's clear that at the same time, there needs to be flexibility to allow individual boards to directly negotiate with their employees.

I'd like to stand here and say that Bill 122 has got the balance right. I think our critic was pretty clear in his assessment of the bill—that we're going to have to go through at least one round of negotiations under Bill 122 to really find out. That's why the member for Cambridge, Mr. Leone, suggested that a very excellent measure, I think, should be included in the bill. He recommended that a sunset clause, to give us an opportunity to review how the legislation worked following the first round of negotiations, should be put into the bill.

It's not unprecedented, as many of the pieces of legislation that we do pass here contain a provision for the minister to review. But in this case, I don't think it should be five or 10 years down the road; it should be right after the first round of negotiations. So I agree with Mr. Leone that we need to have that amendment put through. I think it makes a lot of sense. Everyone knows that the current contracts in education will expire next summer, and the framework that is laid out in Bill 122 will be the process under which these new contracts will be negotiated.

I had a chance to read Mr. Leone's speech, the member for Cambridge's one-hour lead. I have to say that I sensed a bit of frustration in his voice. This is a structure bill; it's a process bill. He's new to the education portfolio. He just had a change in critic portfolios in September, and I know he's quite eager; he's very keen. I think he would much rather be debating more substantive education issues than a process bill. But really, I'm not surprised by the government. We've seen this government's legislative agenda, if that's even what you want to call it. It's a bit of a mishmash of bills that they've introduced. Even after we helped them clear the decks and had a programming motion to allow some of the legislation to come through so that the government could get on to a more rigorous agenda to create jobs and to get our deficit under control, again what we see is a bunch of bills with quite catchy titles, but in the end, they don't help bring in more private sector investment. They won't create any jobs, they won't get a handle on our province's out-of-control deficit, and in the case of Bill 122, it's not going to implement any changes to improve the quality of education that our sons and daughters are receiving.

I mentioned at the start of my address that I like to go into schools. I love talking to students, teachers and people in the education field. I'm not afraid to talk to people in education, even though there are some things that I support that maybe they don't. I spoke earlier about the across-the-board wage freeze. Again, I let them know my position—that we've got to get our

economic fundamentals right; we've got to make some changes in how we do business. But at the same time, I have the utmost respect and admiration for people, like teachers, who spend their time in the classroom. I have the same respect for the non-teaching support staff and the administrators, the trustees. I've seen it with my own kids, and I've seen it every time I visit a school anywhere in my riding. That's why I'll stand up here today and advocate for changes to the system that are going to help teachers do their jobs better and improve the resources that they have. If I see it, I'm going to talk about it.

I think that would be a far more important discussion for us to have here in the Legislature. I can assure you that's what parents, teachers and school trustees want to talk about. I look at our white paper for education, and the 18 bold proposals that we put forward are examples of things I think we should be debating in this place. The first of those ideas we talk about is to focus on literacy and numeracy. We want to set a target for students to achieve 90% competency in reading, writing and math.

In fact, the first three proposals in our white paper were all on improving student achievement. I just want to quote from a newspaper report that was in my riding last week from the Upper Canada District School Board. The headline says, "Board 'all in' on math scores." The Upper Canada District School Board has recognized it has a problem with decreasing scores on province-wide math tests and needs to do something about it. A very interesting statistic contained in the article really surprised me: The report presented to the board indicated that only "2% of teachers in the public school board have studied mathematics during their post-secondary education...."

Recognizing this, the board—and I want to applaud them for this—has launched a plan to help its grade 6 math teachers deliver a better program to students. They have five math specialist tutors visiting schools throughout the board in an attempt to sharpen the teachers' skills. I think it's a great idea and certainly something that fits with our proposal to hit a 90% achievement target, which we put in our white paper. I wanted to bring that up today. I think that's the type of debate we should have in this Legislature. Again, I think that with Bill 122, there's a small measure. It's one we can support with amendment.

I look forward to hearing the questions and comments of my colleagues on this bill this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I take pleasure in commenting on my friend from Leeds–Grenville and his very informative comments on this bill. I noted that he went to the Thousand Islands Secondary School in Brockville, and spoke to the civics class, and then to Brockville Collegiate Institute, BCI, where they lost 16-year-old Aaron Stevenson. Coming out of that loss, as the member suggested, I think a very positive experience will come from the scholarship to help people enjoy music. I wish we could see more of that across our education system.

Then, I had to chuckle when he talked about the recent by-election in London West, where a gentleman from the OSSTF was running for the Liberals after being on the opposite side of the bargaining table when a whole bunch of stuff went down that is still reverberating. It reminded me that the Conservatives were supposed to win that riding. The polls indicated they were well ahead. In fact, in my understanding—I could be wrong—the leader of the official opposition was in a car being driven to London on the night of the election when he got a phone call that said, “Sorry, Tim, you’d better turn around and go back.”

Miss Monique Taylor: Oops.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Oops, something happened on the way to the polls. Of course, that was Peggy Sattler, a long-time school board trustee in London, a long-time advocate for quality education and special education. Oh man, did she win that riding. She whopped them, I tell you.

So, yes, thank you for that reminder, member. That was great. I just have to say what a great member the new member, the New Democrat from London West, is to join us in this House in this debate. Thank you very much for that reminder.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The Minister for Community Safety and Correctional Services and responsible for francophone affairs.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2013.

It always amuses me when the members of the Conservative Party stand up to speak about education. I understand that the member from Cornwall speaks about energy and job creation and not about education, especially if his wife and his daughter are educators. I wouldn’t speak about education also, and against Bill 122, because before we came to power, when the Conservative Party was in power, they had to pick a villain, and the teachers were the villain. Everything they did was to put down the teachers. The kids were more often out of school than in school, with the result that we have all seen: 60% of the kids were graduating from high school. Where the 35% were, I don’t know.

They talk about student achievement. Student achievement is now—we have been recognized in The Economist of October 2012 as one of the three best education systems in the world: not in Canada, not in America, but in the world. Because of what? First of all, we re-established a good relationship with the teachers and valued the teachers, because they do a good job. Every morning, they go to work and do a good job, and it shows in the results of the students.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It’s always a pleasure to comment on my colleague Steve Clark from Leeds–Grenville. What I’ve found since coming to the Legislature is that he’s a guy who does his homework. He always looks at both sides of an issue. When he brings his thought process to the table, it’s done in a balanced fashion. He certainly is a guy whom I watch. He’s out in his riding,

as he referenced, out to many of his schools, getting grassroots feedback. He's hearing at the grassroots and then he brings those thoughts which we're all supposed to do.

Like him, I share a great mutual admiration and respect for the teachers and, in fact, all the teaching and non-teaching professionals in our system. But what I think he really pointed out in a couple of very insightful ways is that this bill is really nothing about kids and education. This is a technical bill about labour relations. I'm going to just paraphrase myself. This is almost a backtracking on labour relations because they made a mess of their greatest colleagues—the unions—going through the last election, and this is their attempt to backtrack and try to make friends before we get to the next election.

He noted that none of the partners have really come out excitedly about this plan. No one has really got that trust level back yet, to say, "Yeah, we really trust what they're doing," because of how poorly they've managed this, amongst many other files.

Our colleague Dr. Leone from Cambridge—we're prepared to support this, but there are significant amendments. If I recall the number of times I've spoken in this House in the last two years, I seem to see that as a recurring theme. They come out and throw some legislation; then they backtrack and they want to look like heroes, that they've made this wonderful legislation.

Why can't we just do things right the first time and quit wasting so much time, energy, resources, not to mention money? I'm going to throw in the \$1.1 billion squandered on gas plants, Mr. Speaker. What could that do to actually improve education across this great province of Ontario if they had not mismanaged our funds on just that one file?

We have said from day one that there should have been a wage freeze across the board. Everyone would have been treated fairly. We wouldn't be in the mess we're in, and we wouldn't have had to bring in legislation like this to try to backtrack. My hope, going on, is that we actually find bills that are going to help students in our great province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to follow on the comments by the member from Leeds–Grenville. Member, you addressed a variety of matters before us. I found it interesting that, like your critic, it seems that you are accepting that this bill will go forward at least to committee for debate and amendment. It isn't often that, so early on in debate, it's clear that all three parties want to see this go to committee—interesting for me.

The sunset clause that you mentioned, the item that was raised by Mr. Leone: I see more problems coming out of that than solutions, but obviously it's an amendment that I want to hear Mr. Leone expand on. I understand why there's an interest in that. This is an untried system, but at the same time, frankly, we've had untried systems for the last decade. We do that a lot around here. I'm not sure I want to go through a second round of debate on the negotiation process.

I think that you, member, were correct. I think there's an extraordinary effort being taken on the part of the government to try and make up with the people in the education community after they

dragged them through the dirt with Bill 115. That was a pretty ugly time. I need to re-emphasize that this bill, whatever its virtues and whatever its workability, does not prevent a future government from acting in a way that's anti-democratic, biased, discriminatory and, frankly, an abrogation of the rights that people in this province have come to expect from their government.

This bill may give a framework that facilitates negotiation. Unfortunately, this bill does not provide a democratic firewall against bad decisions in the future.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks very much, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and francophone affairs, the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and the member for Toronto–Danforth for their questions and comments.

There was one thing, Speaker, that I didn't have a chance to address in my 20-minute rotation that I'd like to touch on. It's something that a number of people write to me about and express that this should be changed in the education sector: the need to modify regulation 274 to ensure that the best-quality teacher, regardless of their seniority, is hired to do the job. I've heard from young teachers and their parents who praised my MPP neighbour Ms. MacLeod, the member for Nepean–Carleton, for her private member's bill to rescind regulation 274.

In my opinion, we can't be tying principals' hands when it comes to hiring teachers. I think if the minister is serious about improving the quality of education in Ontario, she will get serious about changing this regulation. It's something that I think will come up in the next round of negotiations, and I don't think she can wait any longer to put those students first and to make that regulation change.

I also find it funny that in Bill 122, which I call the "kiss and make up" bill, the government didn't mention their tattered relationship with the unions. I think when you look back at this government's record, since they took office in 2003, spending has been up by \$8.5 billion in the education sector, and that at the same time when there are a quarter million fewer students in the system. I'll just leave my final address with that last statistic.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill 122. I want to acknowledge so far all the comments and conversations and debates that we've had and insights that have been brought forward by the members here today, because it helps us to understand the perspective of other members, as well as the public that is listening today, the perspective on other parties' views on this bill being presented. We need to have that; we need to have a fulsome debate on every bill so that people are educated, aware of what's being presented in the House, and they can understand a little bit about it, because it is a very confusing process sometimes when we bring bills forward and they're debated, and on some occasions, there aren't debaters put up, so the public doesn't get a full view of all the members' perspectives on it.

This bill, as I understand it, attempts to formalize a set of education bargaining practices and solve representational issues that essentially flow from the removal of the ability of local school boards to set their own rate on an educational levy or property tax. In other words, the province is trying to gain full control of the educational purse strings.

I must admit I'm feeling a sense of déjà vu on this bill, on this issue as well. Didn't the Liberals recently attempt to force agreements and legislation on teachers last year under the previous minister? Didn't we see our schools in a state of chaos because this government refused to negotiate with teachers' groups and boards in good faith? Weren't our children locked out of extracurricular activities while the province sat on the sidelines watching the mess they created?

Certainly, it feels that we have gone back in time and we are watching the Liberals, this time with the new face on the ministry, try to find ways to prevent them from sitting across from our partners in education. But they refuse to sit at the table without an ace up their sleeve. They refuse to play on an equal footing and continue to drum up ways to usurp the bargaining process.

It started with Bill 115, when the government sought to introduce legislation that they knew would not hold up in a court of law, but they did their best to ram it through anyway.

By third reading of Bill 115, we saw truncated committee hearings. There was no public posting of hearings, and in total only five hours of hearings held, not to mention that deputants were notified only hours before they were expected to speak.

Teachers, principals, trustees, boards and education experts who presented at committee hearings echoed much of what the NDP had been saying about the bill all along: that the government manufactured a crisis in our education system. Schools were open and there was no threat of a strike. The bill was not about improving education. In fact, there was not a word in the bill about helping students, despite its deceptive title, Putting Students First. I guess "putting government first" was already taken, Speaker. That bill was entirely about shifting powers into the hands of the government, gaining an edge so they could demand and take what they wanted at the bargaining table rather than understanding that the teachers are our allies, our partners in education, not our enemies who need to be controlled or bullied.

But again the worst part of that bill was in the government's intention of ramming through legislation that they knew would not stand up in a court of law. The very same course of action was tried in British Columbia and cost the province millions in legal fees and settlements. So I must ask, why is this government taking such a stance? Why would this government copy a behaviour that was so egregious that it was overturned and resulted in settlement amounts that left the BC provincial coffers depleted?

It seems as though this Liberal government has become the "say anything" party. They have and continue to actively undermine the collective bargaining process and deny the importance of the roles and responsibilities of locally elected school board trustees and boards.

Speaker, can I ask for two glasses of water, please? Sorry about that.

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: You get dry in this place. It's very warm.

All of this action took place while rushing the time necessary for adequate consultation. Even through third reading, the Liberals refused to retract their stance and introduced only one amendment that indicated that the measures in the bill shall not override the Pay Equity Act or the Human Rights Code.

While many in this Legislature will disagree with that assessment, I urge you to recall the statements made by sector partners, including Annie Kidder from People for Education, who said, "The bill shifts significant control out of the hands of school boards and up to the province.... All of this is happening with no public consultation, and under the cloud of a manufactured crisis."

Ken Arnott from the Ontario Principals' Council said, "This legislation is premature and is unlikely to withstand a charter challenge. There is no crisis requiring legislative intervention."

Recently, we have seen the Liberals pulling the same hijinks with EllisDon, and it leaves many of us wondering where exactly this government stands on good-faith collective bargaining. In the case of EllisDon, the Liberals fast-tracked legislation for a long-time party donor, allowing for the organization to shy away from their own obligations in regard to collective bargaining. Are we beginning to see the start of a trend? From this vantage point, it sure looks that way. It appears as though collective bargaining is something that Liberals now feel the need to demonize and shut down. Quite frankly, if the Liberals have changed their position on collective bargaining, the benefits reaped by that process, I urge them to be honest and come forward and declare their intentions publicly rather than continuing down this road of double-talk where they say one thing but mean another.

After last year's manufactured crisis with EllisDon, the Liberal government has shown their true colours. What's interesting is that while the opposition have tried to call out and blame the NDP for siding with the government, they are clearly blind to who is lying in bed beside them. The Liberals have clearly adopted the Conservative bedside manner of union bashing, cleverly disguising attacks on public sector workers as good for all of us. But we know these tactics for what they are: thinly veiled attempts to drive down wages and divide workers while putting more money and control in the hands of the government.

Now, besides this government's new-found position on collective bargaining, there is a major issue at hand that can no longer be ignored. The Liberals seem to have reconnected with their old habits of reckless spending of public tax dollars. We have good reason to be concerned. We only need to look as far as Ornge, eHealth and the gas plant scandals to see who the Liberals continue to prioritize. Well-connected party insiders are clearly winning the day around here, and I and my NDP colleagues refuse to let that behaviour go unchecked.

There is a reason why, in the most recent budget talks, the NDP negotiated for the creation of the Financial Accountability Office. The public made it clear that they didn't want another costly

election, and we listened. Instead, they asked us to make this minority government work once again, so we did just that. We took the steps that no other party in this Legislature was willing to take, and we created a measured and a balanced response to protect our public dollars.

But now, under Bill 122, the government is once again seeking to have greater access to and control over regional school boards and their budgets while removing their own responsibility as an education partner at the bargaining table.

This new act proposes to change the collective bargaining framework in two distinct ways. It formalizes the proactive process of central and local collective bargaining and also provides for a central grievance arbitration.

At the central bargaining table, the crown is a formal participant but does not appear to be a party, meaning they are not required to bargain in good faith as set out by the Ontario Labour Relations Board. Therefore, the central table is a tri-party structure. However, the crown has a slightly different status than the other two parties. The crown can designate additional matters to the central table, and the Ontario Labour Relations Board will be the body that determines if these additional items are central or local in cases where the parties do not agree.

It also suggests that any local settlements or local arbitration decisions can be overruled by the central bargaining table. All decisions made by the central table will, in fact, override those made at the local table.

Further to that, the government has created a two-track arbitration process in which the crown has the ability to participate in the hearings, and the employer or the school board is unable to settle the local disputes and hearings without consent of the crown.

The crown in this matter is also seeking to amend the designation of who is entitled to be a bargaining agent. The government is now requiring that a bargaining agent must represent at least 15 bargaining units.

In our discussions with our education partners at ETFO, they detailed more than 10 serious concerns with the bill in its current form. That is a lot of concerns for a single bill, which is very telling. Moreover, when OSSTF, EFTO, CUPE, OECTA and AEFO recently met with the Minister of Education, on November 6, they collectively identified five distinct shared concerns.

The first item they noted was the designation of the crown as a full and equal participant in negotiations. They believe that the crown must be bound by the duty to bargain in good faith as well as be bound by other unfair labour practices provisions under the act, namely sections 70, 72, 73 and 76 of the Ontario Labour Relations Act. Those sections are specifically—I had to look them up; I'm just going to pull those out here.

In section 70, the first one, it says: "Employers, etc., not to interfere with unions." That's section 70.

Section 71: “Unions not to interfere with employers’ organizations.” I have to retract that; no section 71.

Section 72: “Employers not to interfere with employees’ rights.”

Then section 73: “No interference with bargaining rights.”

Section 76: “Intimidation and coercion.”

When we talk about that, we want to make sure that those things are in here, because those are concerns of education experts when we have the crown at the table.

They also have identified the need for the creation of a central table for support staff, and the newly proposed definition of a bargaining agent to be reduced from 15 to representation of 11 bargaining units only.

But most importantly, they believe firmly that the five criteria in the act surrounding the government’s interest in arbitration should be removed from the bill and that arbitrations must be entitled to continue without government interference. They state: “If they are not deleted, the act should be amended to add a factor favourable to unions such as: ‘The need to establish compensation and other terms and conditions of employment that are fair and reasonable in relation to the qualifications required, the work performed, the responsibility assumed and the nature of the service rendered.’”

The crown must also allow for organizations to be insulated from their intrusions. While we know the government is seeking to increase their control through this bill, they must recognize that there are important changes that all parties would welcome. For example, the sector partners indicated that the proposed legislation needs clarity once a collective agreement is finalized. That goes beyond a mere declaration. They go on to highlight that this approach gives rise to the ability to issue a direction so that the local boards have to implement whatever decision is made by the arbitrator as a means to avoid the unnecessary duplication and re-arbitration of issues in order to obtain appropriate remedies.

Lastly, they identify that the terms “and other powers of the crown” need to be amended. The groups feel that the crown should not have the ability to dictate the terms of the agreement, whether they be two-, three- or four-year agreements. They also disagree with the idea of the crown or minister being entitled to unilaterally decide, based solely upon their opinion, what matter will be discussed at the central bargaining table.

The groups of sector partners believe that all issues, including terms of agreement, should be bargained freely. My colleagues and I agree that greater government control, coupled with unequal footing, does not help our education system evolve in the best possible manner.

This bill is very concerning. It’s a very concerning step, but I wish I could say it is a step in the right direction. In its current form, this bill proposes more problems than it solves, and I urge that this government heed the calls for change by our education sector partners.

But I caution the public and our sector partners that this bill does not take any steps toward addressing the manufactured crisis created by the Liberals last year, nor does it prevent this or any other government from heading back down the path to Bill 115 again. Establishing a fair and balanced framework for negotiations is a credible concept that should be pursued, but I believe that fair play must be shown on all sides if we truly want to achieve the best for our students, teachers, support workers and everyone concerned with education in this province.

I know that our education critic earlier has said that we want to see this bill pass forward, and of course we do, because it's important that we hear from teachers and support workers on this bill so that we can make amendments. We can make it better. We can insert new information if we need to make those changes to this bill. So it's really important that we do have a fulsome debate today on this. It's the future of education and relationships between this government and the education system and trustees and the boards, and this is a really important step.

If we get this wrong, we can end up in a situation like Bill 115 again, and nobody wants to see that happen. I know that teachers are very dedicated to making sure their students are the best-educated pupils that they can have at the end of the year, and I know that students love their teachers when they go to school. We don't want this to become any kind of contentious issue. I hope that we are mindful of what this bill will do to collective agreements and that we do the right thing and make sure that all parties have an equal footing when it comes to talking about collective agreements.

I'd just like to summarize by saying that I'm looking forward to hearing more debate on this issue from all sides of the House.

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

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 122 and add some comments to those that were just given in a very eloquent fashion by the member from London–Fanshawe.

Very little of what she said I would disagree with. Obviously, there are some differences of opinion around the House as to how things got to here, but this, to me, seems to be a good step forward. The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, Bill 122, provides a framework where we're able to move forward with the trustees' associations, where the government plays a role, obviously, and where the unions that represent our teachers and our support workers in the schools can come to the central tables and bring forward any sort of monetary considerations they may have. Any policy issues they'd like to bring forward can be discussed in an environment where free collective bargaining is the method that is used to achieve a settlement.

We have always been able to achieve settlements in the past. Often, relationships get frayed, as they will, in collective bargaining. That's the nature of the beast, unfortunately. But at the end of the day, what happens is, the parties come to a resolution and they move forward.

I think all parties in this House value the public education system that we've been able to build in the province of Ontario. I think it has come a long way since 2003. I'd hate to see that go to

waste. I think our students in our public education system are doing incredibly well, especially when we compare them to other jurisdictions around the world.

What Bill 122 does is provide a framework that allows us—when most of the collective agreements expire on August 31, 2014, if all parties bring the right attitude to this framework that's being proposed, we can move forward in a very smooth manner that's not going to impact on the teachers, the students, the parents or all those others who rely on the public education system, either as their place of employment or as where their children attend.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm happy to rise to talk to the member from London–Fanshawe and her discussion on this bill.

It's interesting. She brought up a few issues, one on EllisDon, the private member's bill that we saw changes back and forth on and the Premier flip-flopping, to support and no support and abstaining. I hope we don't see it in this bill.

This bill, as we said, is a process bill. It has nothing to do with education. It doesn't include the parents of the children. But it does look at the process of trying to fix an issue that was created on their last attempt, when they went through Bill 115. They see it now as a threat to this party, as it led to a number of defeats at the polls as people were starting to hold this government to record, whether it be in education or some of the fiscal issues. We talked about an issue brought up as well, some of the issues they've had in the past with eHealth and Ornge, and Liberal insiders who actually did quite well, but at the expense of this province.

I do note that we also talked about some of the issues that this government has supported. I look back at some of the things that they have allowed to happen, like the horse racing industry. Their support allowed this government to literally kill that industry. We look back now, as we've seen racetracks closed, jobs lost—again, just failed policies.

We're hoping we can make the amendments necessary to make this a successful plan. The sunset clause was something we think is important because we need to evaluate just what has gone on after we have a full round of negotiations, and correct the errors that show up with any legislation.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently, as I always do, to the member from London–Fanshawe. She has been here but a short time, but she has a real grasp of the legislation that comes forward. I really appreciate her balanced and measured approach to looking clause by clause and being able to actually say what the clauses were. Too often in this place, people have notes. Too often in this place, people don't take time to actually read the legislation, particularly tough and complicated legislation, clause by clause. But obviously, the member from London–Fanshawe took that time.

I want to thank her too for pointing out some of the pitfalls that I think were inherent in the legislation from the beginning—pitfalls such as the government superseding the rights of the actual bargaining agents, putting themselves over top of both the unions and the school boards, being able to dictate. This is highly unusual in any kind of democratic procedure, especially when it relates to collective bargaining.

I also want to thank her for talking about the fairness principles, how we have to treat carefully and fairly those remarkable people—teachers, support staff—who work in our schools, who teach our children, who make sure that our children, the next generation, have the tools and abilities that will be required from them or of them after they leave school and go into the workforce. It is important that we treat those people with the utmost of respect. As she so correctly and rightly pointed out, this has not always been the case, either with this government or preceding governments treating school teachers, educators, people who work with our children, with that kind of degree of candour, honesty and fairness.

I would like to thank the member from London–Fanshawe for what she had to say. I would like to thank her again for her balanced and measured approach. I would hope that the members of the government, especially, take her words to heed as we proceed with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question and comment.

Mr. Phil McNeely: I'm pleased to stand in my place here today to respond to the member from London–Fanshawe on Bill 122, An Act respecting collective bargaining in Ontario's school system.

I think we all know of the chaos that has occurred in the bargaining processes in the last 20 years, and this bill formalizes the collective bargaining process and brings more order to the system. It does involve the kids; we know it involves the kids. There have been periods in our history that the youth in our schools have been the bargaining chips, used by all sides at times. So we don't want that.

If we bring more order to it, we'll get a system that's going to come out with a fairer result, and we'll treat all sides more fairly. It will give it that structure. It's a complex structure, with the four main boards and all the local interests and the unions and the government. It's not easy, and bringing more formalization to the collective bargaining process is obviously very good.

In Ontario, we have to be proud of what the teachers have done, what the trustees have done and what the educators have done overall in the province. Since 2003, I think the graduation rate of our high school kids has gone from something like 68% to 81%. Tens of thousands of kids now are proud of the fact that they graduated from high school.

We've got a good system. It's getting better every year, and that has been shown by independent organizations. It shows that the Ontario system is an excellent system.

This will make it better. This will bring more order to the system. I know that we can make changes during the clause-by-clause that will make it even better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. I return to the member for London–Fanshawe for her reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I would like to thank the members from Oakville, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Beaches–East York and Ottawa–Orléans for their contributions to this bill.

One of the things that the minister had said—and I’m going to paraphrase. She talked about relationships having to be rebuilt with this bill, and that’s some of the purpose of why they introduced this. They also talked about fiscal restraints. This bill—to me, it’s very important that we get it right, because when we’re talking about rebuilding relationships and fiscal restraints, we’re talking about very sensitive things. If you can’t make sure that everybody’s on board to make this bill a workable bill so that we have fairness and balanced approaches to collective agreements, when we have these local tables now and these central tables, I can see quite the mess happening if it doesn’t get done right.

I look forward to this bill passing and that the real work on this bill and the contributions made by the experts—we’re going to listen and make sure that it’s going to be thoughtful, it’s going to be progressive and we’re not going to get in a situation in the future where they’re going to divide relationships. We’re going to bring people together and make sure our education system is what it has always been: productive, thoughtful—and, again, I agree it produces our best students here in the province. We have good-quality education, and we want to make sure we continue that.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I really appreciate the opportunity to talk a little bit about Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. To start off, I’d like to put out a question to everybody here in the Legislative Assembly. In my view, we need to ask ourselves, is education essential? I think I know the answer from everybody here. Really, nobody here would hesitate in responding, “Yes, it is.” I suppose my second question is, if education is essential, why is it not an essential service?

There is some confusion out there in our constituencies about some of this, I think partly driven by the fact that, over the years, the profession of teaching has become unionized. I know we’ve had collective agreements for many, many years—not when I attended school; certainly not at the one-room school that I attended. There was no collective agreement. That would be impossible, because there was only one teacher for eight grades. It was hard to be a collective in that particular school.

But the reality is, we’ve seen a profession—and I’m a former member of OSSTF—become more of a union shop. Granted, we operate under collective agreements. That’s fine. That’s legal. That, by and large, can work out well.

Here we are debating what some people have referred to as an education bill, but you look at the title: the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. That’s what it’s all about. It’s not about

students; it's not about pupils. I don't hear people talking about students or pupils that much. Some talk about parents. It's about the teachers.

In fact, I noted that our education minister, when she kicked off her lead speech, used the word "students." She did use the word "student," all of four times. Four times out of, I don't know, 3,000 words—probably well over 3,000 words.

In debating this legislation, I guess we can't go home and say that this is all about the kids, or this is about the students, because it isn't. It's about money, and it's about, as the title indicates, collective bargaining.

For far too long, union leaders within this system on occasion have held parents hostage. They've held a gun to the heads of students. I've read this in my local media on a number of occasions, with either the threat of strike or withdrawal of services.

This didn't happen when I was teaching. Again, I was a member of OSSTF. I never even thought of it as being a union.

Teachers themselves will tell you how essential they are until you put these two words together: "essential" and "service." You're not going to see that. In my view, that just may affect the right to strike, obviously. It may affect collective bargaining. So union leaders aren't going to go for seeing education identified as an essential tool.

Teachers strike. We all know they delay a school year. They result in, so many times, students not finishing their year. It disrupts their plans, disrupts their dreams, disrupts the lives of their families. It disrupts the finances of their families. College, university educations or entry into the world of work are put on hold.

On top of everything else, a strike, even a short one—here's a local example that we hear so often—causes nightmares with respect to daycare, for parents, additional money out of pocket for child care costs. Within that family, within that town, that can result in spending cuts in other areas. It can impact—it does impact—the local economy.

We had an example: Not long ago, in a downtown children's clothing store, the owner had to pay for child care for their student who was out of school. It was an extra month or so, because of a labour disruption in the school. At the same time, the sales that month were down because other parents were doing the same thing. They weren't coming into the store to pick up clothing. So here we are, Bill 122: It's not about education. It's not about students or pupils. It's about unions and collective bargaining.

As I mentioned in the lead, our education minister—I do give credit—did use the word "student" four times, but this isn't an education bill.

So many of the strikes, in my view—I've never been on strike, but they're not about working conditions. I found working conditions were excellent when I taught high school. As member Bailey would say, it's inside work and there's no heavy lifting. Teachers don't go on strike over

safety issues; the guidelines are there. I was in a laboratory. The guidelines are there for my environmental science class and my agriculture class.

I guess, very simply, it boils down to money, and I partly question that. I taught high school a number of years ago. I took a cut in pay because I went from a union job to a profession at the time. But by and large, people have the impression that—and, again, thanks to their union leaders, teachers are among the top paid in North America. We know the ratios. We hear this from the unions themselves: “Join the union; you get more money.” We know, by and large, if you compare public sector jobs to private sector jobs, if you look at total compensation, the public sector is about 30% higher than the private sector.

I don’t blame teachers; I’m talking about union leaders here. They’ve created a climate within the school system, essentially luring their union members into more and more of a focus on compensation, and it concerns me, rather than a focus on the students. I use compensation in the broadest sense of the word—wages, salaries, pensions, early retirement, sick-time benefits—a whole host of things beyond just the salary.

Prep time, for example, has increased over the years, certainly since the time that I taught high school in Simcoe. It’s paid prep time. Most professions don’t have that luxury, coupled with two months off in the summer, paid, Christmas and Easter—

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s not paid.

Mr. Toby Barrett: —an excellent benefit plan. I think we all agree it’s an excellent benefit plan.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It’s not summer paid.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Well, when I taught, I had July and August off and I got compensated for that—

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I wasn’t on unemployment.

Compare this, again, to the private sector. Compare this to the budget that we have. I know one of my staff is here this afternoon. Compare that to the budget that we can allocate to our staff in our offices. I’m saying this because I’m a big advocate of pay equity and I’m always disappointed when people argue against pay equity. I guess in some cases some people are more equal than others.

Often in this House—and oftentimes when we are debating yet another educational bill—I know many of us make reference to our first teacher or our first couple of teachers. We have fond memories. I think of two young women who taught me how to read. I was probably in grade 1 or grade 2; there was no kindergarten at that time when I went to school. These two young women who taught me how to read were definitely not in a union. In fact, they weren’t paid. They volunteered their time. This was in a school run by the students. It was not run by the teacher. It

was a one-room school: one teacher, eight grades. I don't think a union would put up with that now. The two young women who taught me how to read—non-union, non-paid—were in grade 6. People here can be a judge of whether they were successful or not, but I do enjoy reading. I'm not saying I'm good at it, but I do enjoy reading. They were in grade 6, and it was my pleasure a number of years later—probably in grade 7, as I recall, or in grade 8—it was my job, as a student, to teach young kids how to read. That's how we did education in that particular school, Shands public school, a one-room school just down the road from our farm.

A number of years ago, I worked for American Can. I was a card-carrying union member. As a union member, I punched the clock; I was paid by the hour. I had a union steward. I belonged to Can Workers 35, now Steelworkers. It was an excellent job, a well-paying job. You could work on into the night after midnight, all the overtime that you wanted. I walked away from that job, literally walked across the street to Simcoe Composite School, to teach with the Norfolk county board of education. I took a pay cut. I was a member of OSSTF, but I recall being kind of pleased at the time to go from punching a clock to joining a profession.

My father taught high school. My grandmother taught. I do think of teachers as professionals. Maybe this is personal. It just bothers me when I think of the history of my family—we're either teachers or farmers—to see the influence of trade unionism within our education system. It just kind of kind of rubs me the wrong way. It does rub taxpayers the wrong way. We know union jobs pay well. It has a dramatic impact on the taxpayers' ability to pay. We all know the taxpayer, the parent of the student, does not have endless pockets. Given Ontario's economic decline and this government's wasteful spending, the taxpayer can no longer afford to compensate government workers at a level considerably higher than those taxpayers themselves. When I say compensation I mean wages, salaries, benefits, pensions, early retirement, sick time and everything else that goes along with that.

In fact, when I taught high school, I didn't take sick time. I wouldn't let a supply teacher in my class. If you knew the students I had, you wouldn't either. But I recall speaking with my physics teacher—a 27-year career as a science teacher. He was the department head. He was my department head for a while. I ran into him at the Norfolk County Fair. To me, this is a teacher. He taught for 27 years and did not take one day off. No supply teachers for John Manson. In fact, we called him Tex Manson. If you were misbehaving in the class, he'd point at you like this. It was a little scary; he was a big guy from the prairies. Tex Manson didn't take a day off. I don't know what his thoughts would be as he would have seen, over 27 years, the rise in power of the unions in the school system. I should ask him what he thinks about that.

Now, we know this piece of legislation covers more than the teaching profession. It covers secretaries, educational assistants, a myriad of support staff. My staff recently had a call from a school board employee, a person making \$30,000 a year. She was a single mother, and she was finding it very tough—no pay increases in her job category. There's very little room to manoeuvre when you're making \$30,000 a year. So I hope there's a benefit here. I see that within this legislation—support staff unions, we know they do not have a central table, but they will have access to them under this Bill 122. The minister would have the authority to designate what's called a union bargaining council that represents support staff in the schools, like office

staff, early childhood educators, maintenance personnel, as long as this council represents a minimum of 15 bargaining units. I hope that helps that woman who approached our office.

As I see it, in this bill, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, we see an attempt to provide some clarity with respect to the roles of all sides in collective bargaining in the education sector. There were rounds of collective bargaining in 2005 and 2008. There was a voluntary framework established by this Ontario government in discussion with the school boards and the teacher unions.

Back during the Bill 115 process, the government, from my perspective, ignored the previous methods for collective bargaining and instead attempted to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the unions. We know that the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, OECTA, was the first to sign on with this MOU and put pressure on other unions to sign.

We also know, when we think back, that the unions were not only upset about the contents of Bill 115. That bill—I know one of the members in the third party reminded us—was called the Putting Students First Act.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Ha.

Mr. Toby Barrett: There was a little bit of a chuckle on that one—somewhat disingenuous. But we know that the unions were disappointed with the government—maybe I'm downplaying that—that the government would insert itself in negotiations directly. School boards were also upset, as we know, because as the education employers, they were really left out in the dark with this agreement of the government and the unions. The school boards had to implement the outcome that was negotiated, but they had very little leeway. The collective bargaining process coming out of Bill 115 was felt to be dysfunctional, and now here we are today and the government is seeking to make amends with those unions with this latest round of legislation.

Thinking back, what happened with Bill 115? The summer before last, this government was probably told by somebody to get their spending under control. I don't think they were listening to us at the time. Otherwise, it would compromise public education. It compromises kids in the classroom, health care and just about everything else worth funding with taxpayers' dollars. That's when they came forward with this MOU with the English Catholic teachers' association.

As opposition—I know we returned early to this Legislature the summer before last—we supported the need for austerity reflected in that bill, Bill 115. We had concerns with Bill 115. A full, true, broader public sector wage freeze is what we were calling for. Very simply, it means that you freeze wages; you don't allow for grid movement. That's what Bill 115 allowed.

As a result, there was something like \$450 million tacked on to the spending by the province as a result of that grid movement. There were some offsets, and—credit where credit is due—the offsets were agreed to by OECTA. It came in at something like \$150 million. The problem was that there still was that \$300-million gap, \$300 million that would be spent over and above the so-called wage freeze. It really wasn't a wage freeze. This is so important when you're talking

about the fact that we're staring down the barrel of a \$30.2-billion deficit four years from now. So \$300 million is significant; that helps out. It helps out, but the gap remained.

Even more of concern, from what we've seen in the recent fall economic statement—we know from that statement that today Ontario is in trouble. Not only is the provincial economy weaker than expected, but the Ontario government now seems to have given up completely on preventing wasteful spending and any thought of reducing the deficit and the debt.

In contrast, two summers ago with Bill 115, we saw a glimmer of hope that this government, after 10 years of doubling the debt—and I'm tempted to use the expression "Dalton the debt-doubler"; I put most of the blame on him.

Mr. Bill Walker: Kathleen's followed right along.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I guess it goes on. We know that the legacy continues with the present government.

Just to wrap up, Speaker, Bill 115 has spawned Bill 122. I'm sure we'll be up here again a year or two down the road talking about another one.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to make some comments on the member for Haldimand–Norfolk—

Interjection: Be nice.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —and I'll be nice.

He had talked at length about Bill 115. A lot of us are going to mention that bill because I think relationships were frayed, as someone mentioned earlier, in the education system because of the introduction of Bill 115. I know the member from Kitchener–Waterloo is going to speak very shortly. I know she's going to speak very passionately about Bill 115 because that was a very contentious issue in Kitchener–Waterloo.

The good people of Kitchener–Waterloo elected a New Democrat. They sent a very clear message that they wanted to make sure that we fought hard and made sure that we had a voice at the table in this Legislature with regard to Bill 115, that it was a wrong-minded bill. Yet this government still pushed forward with it with the help of the Conservatives.

Now we're here today with Bill 122. It looks like the government wants to repair some of these wrongdoings, and in some ways, yes, stakeholders are supporting this bill. I think they do want to see it go to second reading and I think they want to have their voice at the table and be heard.

The other thing he mentioned, which was kind of interesting, was about how two young girls in grade 6 helped him learn to read. I wonder if those young girls went on to be teachers, because at

that time—and I know now today that teachers just don't go for the money, that they get lured for compensation, like you had mentioned. I think teachers have a calling when they enter that profession. They want to work with children, they want to help children excel in their lives and they want to pass on knowledge. I think that's why teachers enter the workforce of education.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me to speak and comment on the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. I had the chance to speak about this important bill I believe a week before community week, and I highlighted the work that the Ministry of Labour has been able to do, along with the Ministry of Education, in the completion or drafting of this bill.

I think we should collectively be very proud of all the achievements we have made in our education system over the last 10 years. Our education system in Ontario today is recognized around the world in terms of student achievement, in terms of the gaps that we have been able to narrow among students. In fact, now our education system is top five in the English-speaking world, and it is in large part because of the investments this government has made in our education system, but also because of the hard work of our teachers and education workers. It's been a great partnership in making sure that children, their education, their well-being and upbringing are front and centre. The full-day kindergarten program alone is a tremendous success, providing great new opportunities for our four- and five-year-olds as they prepare for grade 1 and beyond.

But part and parcel of making sure that we have a good education system is making sure that our system works well in terms of the people who work within the system. That's what defines our education system. That's why having a model around collective bargaining, as proposed in this legislation, is important. I think we have come to that evolution in this province, especially with the work that has been done over the last 10 years. The work we have done with our education partners through federations and unions has really developed a good agreement and understanding around what the collective bargaining process should be, and I really encourage all members to support what's outlined in this bill.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk, who has served his people for many years in this House and does a great job.

Speaker, what I think I heard him say here that resounded very strongly is that there's really nothing in this bill about students or pupils. There's really no reference to who we should be serving here. I've been out speaking. I was in Ms. Cunningham's grade 10 class a couple of weeks ago at Peninsula Shores District School, my old school. I've been at the Georgian College police foundations. This Friday I'm going to Holland-Chatsworth community school.

At the end of the day, none of those students, none of those discussions ever centre around this type of legislation. What they want to know is the programs they're going to get, the type of

education, the types of things they're going to look forward to as they go through the school system. I think it really strikes to this that we're talking about collective agreements. Although my colleague didn't say this, another colleague of mine, from Leeds–Grenville, I think, called this the “kiss and make up bill.” That's exactly what it is. It's trying to mend fences with those union leadership bosses that they, whether inadvertently or purposely, tried to go to battle with over Bill 115.

Our party did support Bill 115, because what we were suggesting then and we continue to suggest now is that we need an across-the-board wage freeze. We're in dire economic straits here. The consequences, if we don't turn this around, are going to mostly impact our youth and the opportunities that they have for educational opportunities down the road, so we continue to push.

I want to reference Tex Manson, a teacher for 27 years who taught our colleague. He didn't take one sick day off. It's obvious that our colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk, affectionately known as “the duke,” must have learned some lessons there, because I can sincerely say that he never misses a day at work. He's always working for the constituents that put him in this seat. That's why he continues, year after year after year, because they know they've got someone who listens, who brings their message to Queen's Park and who will stand up for their needs and their austerity needs, and wants to turn this province around so that education, at the end of the day, is all about kids and the future that they have and the hope that they'll bring to their schools.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently, as I always do, to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. We have known each other for a long time. Certainly he predates me in this wonderful institution, but I've known him for the last 12 years. Generally I find him to be quite a balanced individual. When he speaks he doesn't get on with all the right-wing rhetoric that I often hear from some of his colleagues, including austerity needs, which I just heard from one of his colleagues. I have no idea what an austerity need is, but I'm hoping I might be edified later on.

But there were a couple of things that did concern me in the member from Haldimand–Norfolk's speech. The first one: He commented on union leaders that are out there trying to seek compensation for their members. Now, I do admit that that's part of their job. I do admit that when you're collective bargaining, you try to get better wages and conditions and health standards and any number of things for your members. It's part of what being in a union is all about. But I do take some umbrage and some concern when he said that the union leaders are not concerned about teaching and about teaching children. That has never been my experience when I talk to them. That job is all about the kids. If you take that job, if you go to teachers' college, you learn to be sympathetic and simpatico with the kids. The union leaders are no different. Those union leaders were all trained teachers before they may have started to do other things within the job profession, but I think they are absolutely committed to the teaching profession.

He said, too, that teachers get two months off with pay in July and August. The only reason they get that, in my understanding—and he may want to comment on that—is that they agree to take less money during the other 10 months so that they get 12 months' pay. But they can take all

their money 10 months and then be on unemployment for two months, but most of them choose not to do that.

I'm hoping the member from Haldimand–Norfolk might comment on those things because they are somewhat disturbing to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time that we have for questions and comments. I now go back to the member for Haldimand–Norfolk for his reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: The member for London–Fanshawe: I agree. Teachers and teaching is a calling. The two grade 6 girls that taught me how to read—Elizabeth Dorner; she lives on the farm next door. I ran into Betty Pursley at our school reunion. The school had been closed for maybe 40 years or 35 years, but I don't think she's a teacher.

I do acknowledge that this bill, in contrast to Bill 115, does seem to stress government's responsibility to consult and negotiate with the teacher union leaders around collective bargaining and compensation. I'm pleased that the Minister of Labour made a few remarks about collective bargaining, as did the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. It suggests to me that this is a labour bill; I don't see this as an education bill. The education minister used the word "students" four times in her opening lead.

The member from Beaches–East York, always diplomatic—has that skill—raised the issue of austerity. Our economy—we are in an austere time right now; we are in a time of austerity. When you're in a time of austerity—so many people are not working in my riding—it is incumbent on government to consider bringing in a budget that recognizes that austerity.

I'll wrap up there. I appreciate the feedback, and I'm looking forward to some more discussion on this.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure for me to stand up and speak to Bill 122, which is called the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. It's interesting for me, because we are here for a number of reasons, and the history and context are actually quite important.

Just on the title of the bill, this could conceivably be called, from the Liberal side of the House to their education partners, "We know our education partners don't trust us anymore, and we know that we can't be trusted, so we're going to bring in this piece of legislation to make sure that all the rules are clear and all the players know their places," so that maybe—maybe—we'll forget about Bill 115. Maybe, but I don't think that's going to happen.

I'm going to talk about why this piece of legislation is important, just in case you don't know, because I know that this side of the House does not know.

So the context: In the mid-1990s, under former Premier Harris, school boards lost their ability to raise taxes—to levy taxes. At the same time, \$2 billion was removed from school boards across

the province, devastating school boards, compromising democracy, undermining local school boards and their responsibilities, forcing the amalgamation of school boards—a very painful process.

Some of you have been here long enough to remember the people outside on the front lawn and lying on the stairs in the main hallway, fighting for local democracy and sustainable funding for public education. I know this time quite well, because that was actually when I sort of woke up to the politics of education in the province of Ontario, and in particular, the cuts to adult education at the time. Certainly, I don't know how you think we're ever going to address child poverty in the province of Ontario in a very responsible way when you sort of disenfranchise and marginalize adults who are seeking to benefit their lives through public education.

But Mr. Harris saw it differently—the PCs at the time saw it differently—and \$2 billion was pulled out of public education. It was well documented through the Rozanski report at the time. I think, and it would be safe to say, that those teachers and those front-line workers who have been disparaged in previous comments will continue to this day to see that systemic operational deficit that was begun under that regime and continued on.

Then 2003 happened, and the Liberals were elected. The promises of a new day were in all the media. Actually, I would say there was a sense of hope and optimism a little bit. I know it well, because I was elected to the Waterloo Region District School Board as a trustee in 2003, and it was a great day. But there were certainly a lot of promises that had been made to rectify and to do damage control from the previous Harris regime, and clearly some of those promises could not be fulfilled, which in turn became the theme of this government's legacy.

Following that, though, we did see increased centralized policy development and the withdrawal of power from local school boards to here at Queen's Park. Quite honestly, school boards, over the years, have seen this diminishment of power and the ability to actually meet their responsibilities. I think a lot of people in this House might not know that school boards have a mandated responsibility not only for academics and the financial component that is associated with that, making sure that students are successful—that's mandated by this government; they also have a mandated responsibility for well-being, which, of course, some people can't measure. It's a hard thing to measure, but there it is. Not only are school boards responsible for test scores and the standardized testing mantra, but they certainly have the responsibility for well-being.

I know that many of you, regardless of where you come from, will understand that what is happening in our schools day in and day out on the mental health piece is shocking. School boards are actually reeling with the effect of having to deal with the social, emotional, nutritional and physical needs of students.

We saw this centralized system of power that the Liberals brought in, a very neo-Liberal agenda that was somewhat patronizing to school boards: "You do a good job. We'll tell you what to do. We're not going to give you the resources to do it, but we're going to give you the mandate to do it, and then we're going to punish you if you don't do it properly, as we see fit." This is not a healthy relationship.

At the same time, the whole negotiations process was playing itself out. In the first round of negotiations, things went pretty well because there was money on the table. The second round, they were a little bit more testy. At the time, the now Premier was the Minister of Education, and everybody sort of calmed down because there was still some money. That actually makes a difference in negotiations. Money does make a difference in negotiations, in collective bargaining, and that made a difference to school boards.

This leaves us with Bill 115 in the summer of 2012, when negotiations were not going so well because there was no money. Zero and zero were on the table. The unions were amenable to the zero and zero, but you would be surprised that they were also fighting about some of that systemic underfunding that was happening at the school boards, like special education, like some of the course restrictions that have been placed on school boards, because, as was promised by the Liberals, the funding formula was supposed to be reviewed in its entirety: not little bits and pieces of it, but in its entirety because, as school boards lose their enrolment because people are having fewer children in particular, the rural boards and the northern boards were even further disenfranchised, because enrolment drives funding.

This became part of those negotiations and that discussion during the Bill 115 round tables. Of course it wasn't going well because the government was not interested in that. "No, no, we don't want to hear about that," they said. "We don't want to hear about those special education issues that are emerging. We don't want to hear about the ongoing transportation issues." Some school boards had, in previous years, found efficiencies. They had done their due diligence. They had found efficiencies and had good working relationships with some of the small bus operators. Then this new transportation model came in and they were flatlined, so they were actually punished for being efficient. It's really quite something. You really can't even make this stuff up; you really can't.

Bill 115 came in for a lot of reasons. I think some of my colleagues have already been very clear about the politics of Bill 115, but I just want to say for the record, as someone who was directly affected during the debates and during the canvassing, knocking on the doors and meeting with concerned constituents over the direction of public education during the by-election, which is why I'm standing here, those concerns rippled out into the entire community because education is a core value of our communities. Whether or not people have children in the system, whether or not they have family or friends who work in the system, it dismantled the trust that existed in previous years. People were, quite honestly, for a lack of a better word, discombobulated by it, because they didn't see how picking a fight with education workers was going to strengthen public education. They didn't understand, because the collective bargaining process had not been allowed to play itself out.

Not even Mike Harris would have gone that far. He would never have imposed a contract, knowing full well that it was in contravention with the Ministry of Labour and with the Ontario Labour Relations Act. He would not have gone that far because, you know what? He would have known that it would cost taxpayers more money at the back end. He would have known that trying to circumvent collective bargaining in that way, in that manner, would not only hurt public education, but it would cost people more money down the line.

Those legal negotiations are still ongoing. Those cases are still before the Labour Relations Board, as they should be, because they were precedent-setting. No other government had ever done that, not even the PCs.

So you can see where there's a need—there's a genuine need—for this legislation to be in front of us today. The Liberals recognize that they have undermined trust within the education sector, and they're very eager to restart that relationship, to change the channel—we hear that sometimes. They want to change the channel on this issue.

But for us over here, we're more concerned that all the players at the table know their roles and responsibilities. Quite honestly, school boards have been fighting to get to that table. They've been fighting for legitimacy at that table, even though they are the employer.

So I think, if I was to be very honest about it, that I'm pleased that the government has finally realized that it's so important for all three parties to be at the table: the board, as the employer, having a valid spot at that table; employees and their bargaining agents, because they need to be part of that negotiation; and the funder, which is the Ministry of Education.

If everybody understands their roles, it should all go fine, right? It should be fine. But I guarantee you that Bill 122 is not going to be the be-all and end-all, because there are some long-standing systemic issues around the funding formula that have not been dealt with, not in 10 years.

While it will be important for everyone to know their roles and responsibilities, there are clearly some outstanding issues, as the legislation is presented to us, and I'm going to give you an example: the provision that allows the employer bargaining agency to be substituted in “if, in the minister's opinion,” the employer bargaining agency “is unable or unwilling to ... perform those duties,” so if the minister doesn't really like how things are going. In my mind, I call this the Laurel Broten clause, because things didn't go so well last time, and then the hammer came out.

I'm concerned about this, as we all are. I guess this is the part where the three wise men come in and take over the entire bargaining process. This is section 22, just for the record. I think we should all have some concerns about this, because if the objective is to build an open and transparent model of collective bargaining, then you can't have a clause that says, “Well, if it's not going our way, we get to bring in new players.” That undermines the entire process.

Also, the process or the provision that the bargaining agents “shall co-operate in good faith with the crown in preparing for and conducting central bargaining”—I guess this all comes down to, what is good faith? If we had faith that the government understood what good-faith bargaining was, then we would all be on the same page. But there isn't.

So these are two major issues that I think need to be addressed.

This whole business about co-operating in good faith with the crown sort of reminds me of Game of Thrones. I guess this is the Game of Thrones clause: If things aren't going so well, then we get to change the rules. That pretty much undermines the entire goal of Bill 122. I hope we can all agree with that.

This piece of legislation, if passed—and I think that we will cautiously be supporting it; as I've said, we have some serious concerns about it—will change the collective bargaining framework in two main ways.

It will formalize a proactive process of central and local bargaining. I think that there's definitely going to be some tension between the central bargaining and the local bargaining because, quite honestly, school boards know their students best. They have this mandate for academic achievement, and they have this mandate for student well-being. They know their students best. I think that if they were quite honestly redefining Bill 115, Putting Students First, then that piece of legislation would have looked really different, because school boards put their students first, and they end up fighting with the Ministry of Education, which is trying to redefine the reality of education for students in the province of Ontario.

We even heard this morning of the Niagara board. This is a long-standing, systemic operational deficit. It's a structural deficit for special education. Bill 122 is not going to fix that unless, somehow, the Ministry of Education actually does what it said it was always going to do, which is to have another look at the funding model and review the funding model to address some of those disparities and inequities that are systemic across the province. Northern boards do not have the enrolment to generate the same sort of programming that you would have in high-growth areas. The rural boards, for sure, with all the forced amalgamations that they've had to adopt, are also struggling for resources on the ground.

The formalization of this proactive process—I'll give you full credit for bringing it in. It's a little late, but at least it's here now.

Providing a central grievance arbitration system: I think that this actually is probably long overdue, and I think that you will see a number of grievances come through, because at the end of the day, it will be about funding. As I've said, without fixing the funding formula, except for bits and pieces, you're going to see some long-standing issues come to the bargaining table. That may take our collective efforts to try to deal with some of that.

The PCs so far have demonstrated, on several levels, that union bashing is the way to go and that it's—I just think it's old. It doesn't help. It doesn't build confidence in the public education system. You've said that peace and stability essentially don't matter. It does matter. It matters because we've seen how Bill 115 disrupted the public education system last year. In fact, there's still a shakiness in there.

You know, having barely survived the \$2-billion removal during the Mike Harris years and having adapted, in many regards, to the neo-liberal agenda of “father knows best” for public education, I think it is time for us to recognize that school boards should be equal partners in the collective bargaining process, and they should actually be respected partners in public education. One of the ways to do that is actually to listen to them and pay attention to some of the issues that they bring to the fore, because they're not just specific issues; these are central issues around transportation, around special ed, around mental health.

Quite honestly, to hear the PCs talk about a lack of economic progress in this province—I mean, there's no doubt that is an issue, but that's because these issues distract us away from the conversation around 21st-century learning skills, and what employers need, and the skills gap and productivity. Education connects all of it.

Every day, parents across this province send their children off into the local school and—you know, you have to be honest about this—a little part of their heart goes with them. It's a huge trust to send your child off to the public education system, and it's a trust that should be honoured not only in this place—so disparaging those education workers is not a good use of your time or of your energy.

For school boards themselves, having now had this weight of increased responsibility around student achievement and around well-being, it's time for them to be honoured at the bargaining table, their voices listened to, because they are on the front lines and they care and have the responsibility for student achievement.

We will be giving a very cautious support to Bill 122. We hope that some of the concerns that we've raised resonate with the government. We hope that, perhaps one day, the Progressive Conservative Party will realize that disparaging the people who work in the education system is not a productive way to strengthen public education, and that peace and stability and having a transparent method for collective bargaining to be negotiated is actually a good use of our time. In fact, it's a proactive way for us to stay focused on the real issues in public education. Certainly, that trust should not be ignored.

Just one final thing: In the Kitchener–Waterloo by-election, education was recognized as a core value of that community. I would argue that it's a core value of every community in the province. I think that if we, collectively, could come together and recognize that the people who work in that system are actually valued members of society and valued members of the workforce, because they are creating the future generations, then we actually could focus on some of the real things that need our attention and are very much connected to the economy.

Just as a final note, I'm glad that there's going to be some clarity around rules and responsibilities during the collective bargaining process. It's long overdue. As I said, we will be giving our cautious support to this bill.

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

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise again to speak in support of Bill 122. I want to respond to some of the comments made by my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo. Those of us who have lived long enough have experienced the Rae days and the Harris days, and she commented about Bill 115. So let me remind the members opposite, having grown up with the Toronto Board of Education back in the 1970s, we went through forced Rae days—forced Rae days—when I was a trustee at that time, when my nieces and nephew were forced to have days off. Now, what kids do you know that don't know about days off? That was a concern. Under the Harris government, we fired teachers, we closed schools; again, that was a concern.

Learning from past experience, we know that this proposed Bill 122 will address some of the central bargaining issues. Like the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, I was a trustee, for the Toronto District School Board. This proposed legislation, if passed, will bring all the parties to the table. This is not anything new. Right now, we have central bargaining for doctors, for nurses and other health professionals across the system—so, by bringing the parties together, one time only, to have those conversations, in particular when it comes to wages and central issues that the member commented on earlier.

The other piece here is that it also respects local issues as well. If this legislation is passed, there will be two-tier bargaining: one centrally, one locally. Some of the local issues are very distinct for the urban school board that I'm from, from downtown Toronto, but also other areas that are very rural and very unique to those communities.

With regard to this bill, there is time sensitivity. I'm urging all members to remind themselves that we need to move this process through, finish second reading, and go to committee as soon as possible.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to provide a couple of minutes of questions and comments to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for her speech. It was quite a speech. In some cases, it almost reminded me of a leadership style speech, very rousing. She took a shot at all the different parties. But, you know, I do respect her knowledge of school boards and her experience as a trustee, as the previous speaker, the member for Scarborough–Agincourt, was also a former trustee. I never served as a trustee before I was elected an MPP, so I don't bring that perspective, so I like to hear from folks in the education sector who were on the front line.

I like to listen to their life experiences. Certainly the member brings to her job as an MPP that experience of when she first became a school trustee in 2003. I listened very carefully to some of her comments, especially about section 22 of Bill 122. I know that I'll be going back and speaking to some of my local people about that particular section and what they feel, whether positive or negative. That section would affect local boards.

I do want to, just in the last few seconds of my speech, address a comment that she made about rhetoric and about going after people in the education sector. I had a 20-minute rotation. I don't take on anyone in the education sector. In fact, I like going into the education sector and listening to people. Whether it's education or health care, I don't mind talking to front-line workers. I may not always agree with them, and sometimes I don't, but I'll tell you, when the people picketed on Bill 115 in front of my office, I gave them hot chocolate. I respected their right to protest my opinion and to not agree with me.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's always a privilege for me to be in the House when the member from Kitchener–Waterloo speaks, particularly to this bill, because when I found out that she was actually going to be a candidate in that by-election and I knew the field that she was coming

from, I wholeheartedly made myself available to her. When I knocked on those doors, I knew that she was connected with the individuals in her communities, because a lot of what I heard on the doorsteps was on that experience that she was bringing in. That new light was going to be a huge, huge benefit to our caucus.

I just wanted to highlight a couple of the points that she brought up. First she talked about the history of what led us to having this discussion in regard to the school boards' role being minimized in the last round of negotiations, and also local democracy being removed from those individuals, minimizing their roles and really ignoring the fact that these boards had come up with discussions in regard to where savings could be found. A lot of those issues were totally disregarded. Again, she used the analogy where, "Big Brother knows best. We're going to do it this way and ignore a lot of the work that you have done." It really undermined the entire process of sitting down and negotiating with employers, the government being the employer in this issue.

The one point that she really brought up that I wanted to highlight was that the local school boards know best. They know what the kids are asking for. They know their needs. They identify with it. I've sat down at many negotiations, and it was such a struggle for me when I was negotiating with individuals who were not from those areas, who were not from those communities and were not from the province. It really caused problems. When you're looking at local autonomy and when you're looking at individualized service and their needs, no one knows better than the actual people who are serving those kids.

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

Mr. Joe Dickson: It's a pleasure to stand and speak in reference to Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. I speak as the member for Ajax–Pickering, not a past Catholic school trustee, where we had a very small area. This, of course, would be prior to regionalization, but the process was always a topic of conversation, no matter what generation you spoke to it in. I can tell you that this started to become a little bit more of a challenge throughout the 1970s, once regionalization was completed.

I was speaking somewhere on Saturday evening, east of Ajax, and I was approached by a teaching professional who was complaining about the process. I said, "There is activity in the Legislature on that, and we'll just have to wait and see how that formalizes itself in its final position." When we formalize, whether it's legislation or a combination of legislation and regulations, we're going to do something that is in fact solving a problem for the long term. We don't want to see the gains made by the teaching profession lost because of arbitrary measures and ill will throughout the process. I can tell you that I believe this bill does that in its entirety. It will solve the problems in the long term and make it more viable for us and for all of the teaching professionals in this province who do such a great job, day in, day out. It just never stops. I congratulate them, and I'll certainly work with anyone on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments. I return to the member for Kitchener–Waterloo for her response.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the members from Scarborough–Agincourt, Leeds–Grenville, Algoma–Manitoulin and Ajax–Pickering for their feedback.

I recognize that we see this issue quite differently. I do want to say that the Minister of Education was the past president of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, as was I. I think that it's a really good step to have someone who has actually had the chance to travel across the province and talk to the education sector, from the north to the east, south and west. I think there's an acknowledgment there that there is some disparity in access to education. Stabilizing and strengthening the process by which we negotiate contracts is a good step.

That said, the concerns that we've had—I've already articulated them. There is a trust issue around what the Ministry of Education feels is important and what school boards feel are important issues. Any measure that we can put in place which actually raises the level of respect for those local voices would go a long way to ensuring that any bargaining in the future has some integrity, has some dignity and is respectful of those local voices. So I just want to put that on the table.

Every government has had their challenges with education, and I definitely think that it's a hill worth dying on. It underpins our democracy as a province. It's worth fighting for, each and every day. If we can get to a respectful place where people in our schools understand that they are part of the broader vision for this province, then that would be a good direction to go in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for further debate, I will announce to the House the following:

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been more than six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or another member of the executive council specifies otherwise.

I recognize the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, we'd like the debate to continue.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: To the minister, thank you for allowing me my 20 minutes on behalf of my constituents in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound. It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, although my colleague from Leeds–Grenville might have had a better title, and that's the kiss-and-make-up bill.

This bill is aimed at correcting the problems with Bill 115, and part of that is because it was poorly executed. I've had a number of people in my riding, most of them actually Liberals and many from the teaching profession, come and say, "Why would they have alienated their biggest allies: union management? Why would they have gone down this path?" Now we're back here talking about it again.

The bill clarifies the government's role, and that is one where they should consult and negotiate. Mr. Speaker, this is yet again a situation where we don't need administrivia. We shouldn't have to have this in legislation and regulation. What this should be is an absolute, expected approach from day one on anything we're talking about. You should always have the courtesy to respect the stakeholders who are going to be impacted the most: those on the front lines—in this case the parents and the students who, in my mind, were totally shut out of how this was rolled out in the first place.

It's unfortunate, but it again focuses the spotlight on how this government, in my tenure here and certainly for many years prior to me getting here, has approached this. They're just steamrolling.

The horse racing industry is one of those. They came out and said, "You shall do this." They didn't consult, and now they're trying to come back and look like the heroes who are going to rejuvenate that whole industry. They've already done the damage. It's going to be tough to bring that back.

The Green Energy Act—again, taking democracy from local communities, locally elected officials, who have no say in whether wind turbines will go in their communities or not.

Physiotherapy programs: They again came in and said, "You shall; we're going to pull these." There was no consultation with the physiotherapists to ensure that this was going to be a good, effective use and a change.

Cataract surgery, insulin strips, all of those types of things: This government continues to go in, they decimate it and then they try to come back and look like the champion and the hero.

It's just not working well for the people of Ontario, and it saddens me that I continually have to rise in my role as government opposition to point out the error of their ways. But that is my job, and on behalf of the residents who are not getting the services because of this mismanagement and the way they're trying to steamroll things in our province, I will continue to do that. I will not apologize for that. We need to ensure that we hold them to account at every step of the way, and I will continue to do that.

It was not lost on me as well—and my colleague from Leeds–Grenville also mentioned in his 20-minute presentation—that they've increased spending in the education sector by \$8.5 billion. There are 250,000—a quarter of a million—fewer students in the system, yet they've increased spending, and I'm not certain that the outcome is better today than it used to be.

This bill ignores two very, very important stakeholders in the education system: the parents of children who are in the system, and the children themselves. My colleague from Haldimand–Norfolk very elaborately and eloquently, in his 20-minute discussion, pointed out that there's almost no reference to children, outcomes, improved education in this bill. This is all about collective bargaining and negotiation.

If this had been done better, we wouldn't be talking about this. It suggests to me that—the people who called me, even when we were debating Bill 115 the first time, were wanting to see things

that were going to help their students, that were going to ensure that their students got the best possible education to be able to fend for themselves and strive and excel in our new economy. They were worried. In fact, they used words like, “They were using them as bargaining chips”—not only the parents but the children were used as bargaining chips. It created strife; it created confusion. All throughout their lifestyle, everyday tasks became a challenge because they didn’t know: Were they going on strike? Weren’t they going on strike? “What’s this going to do to my personal life?” At the end of the day, it was all for nothing.

As the PCs, right at the very outset, we had said to put in an across-the-board wage freeze for all of the public sector, facing the debt and deficit that this government has run up, and we wouldn’t have had that whole strife and concern and confusion that we had. We said we wanted an across-the-board wage freeze, and it still isn’t there. We could have saved \$2 billion.

Bill 122 is just a more benign version of Bill 115 and is very, very technical. It’s talking about a whole bunch of collective agreeing; it’s not talking about kids and education.

When I go out to schools—I go out often. I was out to Mrs. Cunningham’s class a couple of times at the Peninsula Shores District School, my old high school. I really commend her, because she’s allowing us in to have an open discussion with the students. I was just last week at Georgian College police foundations, and then this Friday I’ll be at Holland-Chatsworth community school. Not once in our discussions have we talked about things like collective bargaining and Bill 115 or Bill 122. What we talk about, what those students really want to talk about, is the closure of schools.

We’ve had two accommodation reviews going on in our jurisdiction, and it saddens me again that all of those parents have to come and put their lives on hold to try to save that school, the very fabric of a rural community, to ensure that their children will get the exact same level of education—or better, perhaps—that they were able to receive in those rural schools.

Why aren’t we in here debating why we’re using the same old funding formula? We all know that classroom size and student enrolment are declining, and yet we continue to fund based on that old, archaic model. Why aren’t we disputing that? Why aren’t we debating that and trying to find innovative ways to do those types of things?

They’re talking to me about a lack of programs and a lack of resources in the actual schools they sit in. They’re talking about the school funding formula and what the program services are that they’re going to need, going forward.

Why aren’t we talking about things like how do we strive to have better apprenticeship programs, rather than the very stifling trades tax that the Liberal government has recently imposed and which will do more negative damage to those students who want to come into the trades? We already know it’s a looming crisis out there, but we spend time arguing on these types of things.

This all boils down to common themes. If the Liberals hadn’t allowed our province—not “allowed;” they actually drove the bus. They drove the bus and doubled the debt. The deficit is

out of whack and it continues to go up, even though—in their most recent economic fall statement, they’ve now projected that even by 2017-20, by which they swore they would have a balanced budget—now they’re pushing it out because they know that they’re addicted to spending and they have no ability to pull back from there. What we know is that if they hadn’t gotten us into this mess, if they wouldn’t continue to go down this path, we would actually be in a place where we’d be talking about the good things in education, what new programs, what innovative programs we should be implementing, the types of things we can do remotely and with virtual distance.

We spent two legislative sessions talking and discussing education financing rather than what we should be talking about, and that is the value of education, where education needs to be, so that those young people who are sitting in front of you and at the back, our brand new pages this week here—we should be talking and always focusing on those young children and what their future is going to be, and it scares me where we are.

If we were in a stable financial state, we would be discussing these new initiatives. We’d be discussing the hope and the opportunities that our students are going to hold in the future rather than actually sitting in this House wondering, what’s their future going to be? Are we going to be able to actually have the school system that we all take for granted to some degree? We have a great school system, and we always have, but it can be so much better. We shouldn’t be talking about things that are only finance-driven; we should be talking about what’s really there.

It brings me—and it’s interesting. I sat here and listened intently to my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo, from the NDP. In her statement, she said that the Liberals don’t listen, and she cited a number of specific examples. She actually admitted that there’s no money. That’s a nice thing, that they finally admit it. We’re \$12 billion in debt again this year. I can’t fathom at times how they can say this every day and find all the faults, but when it comes to crucial votes like the budget, they support this Liberal government and give them life. They extend their life. They prop them up.

They’re critical on just about everything that the Liberals do, and yet when it comes to the budget, they either sat on their hands the first time around, or this time they actually stepped up and supported it. They’re accomplices to what this government has done to our great province, and they can’t deny that. They continue to prop them up.

We bring bills, as the official opposition, to try to put a moratorium, for example, on the Green Energy Act, so that we bring back democracy to our communities. And what do they do? They sanctimoniously stand up and prop them up at every opportunity. On every crucial vote that we’ve had in this House, when they’ve had the opportunity to actually stand up for the true people of Ontario, the taxpayers, the people paying the freight, they have voted with the government and allowed them to stay in power. That is something that they will have to look in the mirror every day about and make their own rationale to their constituents of why they can do that.

Again, I’m going to be very specific to the former speaker from Kitchener–Waterloo. She references Mike Harris all the time, and in her closing remarks she made some comments about

old thinking. She made comments about being respectful. Why do we have to keep going back to Mike Harris? If we're really here about collaboration and working together, why can't we work collaboratively to move forward?

Ms. Catherine Fife: He cut \$2 billion out of education. Do you know how hard it is to recover from—

Mr. Bill Walker: She talked about \$2 billion, and she's heckling me right now on the \$2 billion.

It's interesting that the Liberals have wasted \$1.1 billion on two gas plants, and yet I believe they supported the same government who did that. They gave them an extension of life, knowing full well what that was going to be. They continue to stand here in this House every day and talk about how terrible the government is. They talk about how they mismanage funds. They talk about the wasteful spending, and yet when it comes to those critical votes, they stand in unison with their hands together, saying, "We will give you more extended life." They have to stand up and look in the mirror. Every day they have to go back and explain to themselves, first and foremost, how we can prop up that government that apparently is so spiteful.

But I don't want to just lose this. She made a comment that Mike Harris would never have imposed such measures, and yet she and her party continue to vote and support and prop up these Liberals. You can't have it both ways, and it's high time that the media in this province picked up on that as well. There's a free ride being given to some people in this House. They can come up and say all that every time. They can be very sanctimonious about the government across the floor, but they continue to step up and support them at every opportunity.

Again in this bill, all we're doing is rehashing a misstep by that government. They imposed certain things and created a whole lot of bedlam in our province for a lot of people, and at the end of the day, they're still in power. They were abetted by the NDP in their voting procedures, and yet we're not talking about the things that, again, we should be talking about. We're not talking about how we're going to cut back spending so that these students have a chance at a future, so that we have the innovative programs, so that we have those improvisational programs. We should be the leading edge of the world—we are. We have the people. We have the ability. We have the innovative spirit right here in our own backyard in Ontario, but we're the laggards of the province because of the debt that that government has run us into. We spend most of our time in here talking about bills that are just fringe around the edge. They're tweaking around the edge rather than getting down to the fundamental issues.

Ontario's two million students are not getting enough attention from this government when it comes down to what they really need; they're not nearly as much as the public sector unions are. This is, again, one of those ones—"We need to appease them, because, yes, some support went to the NDP in that last by-election." We know that and they know that. They know they had a lot of forces that jumped in their bandwagon for this time around. They're trying to build bridges and make up.

But, you know, at the end of the day, we're all sent here to govern on behalf of the entirety of the Ontario taxpayer. We need to all be working to ensure that the programs and services are the

absolute best at the end of the day for the user, the students in this case, the people that we need to be ensuring and fostering hope and the ability to know that they're going to come out at the other end with a better lifestyle than what we had. That's what I came here to do, to ensure that when I come here every day and give my time and energy, it's so that there's a better future ahead, so we have a better opportunity for the kids in the room, for those out there listening, for the next generation that are going to come along and be our new leaders and our new workers. Right now, Speaker, that's a tough challenge with the way this government has driven us into the debt load that we have.

This morning, I met with CUPE individuals, and I asked them, "Do you know what our third-biggest expenditure in government is?" I asked them that question. You will know that, Mr. Speaker. You will know that health care is our number one expenditure of the Ontario government. You will know that number two is education, as it should be, as both of those should be. But outside of this room, I'm wondering how many people know what the answer to number three is.

Mr. Todd Smith: I know.

Mr. Bill Walker: What is it?

Mr. Todd Smith: Education.

Mr. Bill Walker: No, education was number two. It's interest on the debt payment: \$10 billion. Just think about the innovation that we could have, just think what we could have in our systems, in our health care system, in our educational system, in our social programs. In my new critic responsibility, children and youth, every day I hear concerns about the lack of resources out there for those most in need. It saddens me to say to those people, "You know what? We spend \$10 billion—that government has got us to a point where we're spending \$10 billion just to pay interest on our debt." What could that do for social housing? What could that do for those with disabilities, those with mental challenges?

There are so many people out there who are being left behind because of this government and their inability to manage our fiscal finances, and again, abetted by the NDP, who continue to prop them up and allow them to continue on down this nightmare path they're going on.

It's really very disheartening to be able to hear things that are going to make people get up in the morning and say, "You know what? We are in dire straits. We need to have some significant change." I'm not talking about cutting and slashing, because I know that's where that party is going to go and they're going to try to dredge up the past. What I'm talking about, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to be strategic in every dollar that we spend. We need to be looking at it as an investment that truly is going to be moving us forward. It's truly going to progress us. We need to do that not just in this act, but in all the acts.

I referenced earlier—the Green Energy Act is one of those ones, and I'm really getting more and more of an appreciation the longer I'm here, seeing the absolute critical role that energy plays in our province and in our country. We used to be the leaders. We used to be the leaders in North

America. We had the lowest energy rates, and this province was booming. This province was the leader of the train. We were producing jobs. We were producing innovative opportunities. We had the BlackBerrys coming along. We had all kinds of companies coming out and starting up in Ontario, expanding in Ontario. And now, there's a mass exodus: 800,000 to a million people are out of work today. Our manufacturing industry has been decimated. And why wouldn't it be? When you've doubled and tripled the energy rates over the last eight years—we just had another increase on November 1—who would come to our province? Who's going to come and say, "Yes, I really want to see those"? And you add in the red tape and the bureaucracy and the number of regulations that this government imposes on them, and it just, again, is one of those ones where you start to say, "How much further can we go down?"

We're going to have, I believe, either in 2014 or 2015, the highest energy rates in North America. A big part of that is because they've tried to sell the goods to the public of Ontario that we are going to be the cleanest, greenest environmental economy in the world. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that that's coming back in spades the opposite way. They're losing jobs 4 to 1, not gaining them 4 to 1. It's energy that we can't rely on, so we have to have the backup. We paid the United States and Quebec half a billion dollars—paid them. We didn't give the power away. We paid them half a billion dollars to make them doubly effective against our own manufacturing industries. So there's a lot of these things, and they just steamrolled.

My whole point here—because I'm sure someone is going to say, "Get back to the Education Act," so I'll jump ahead there a little bit. What this is all about is the fundamental premise of this bill, which really says that you should consult the stakeholders. You should be out having discussions and dialogue with those people at the front lines. That's absolutely critical. We should be doing that in every facet of everything we do. The people who are in the trenches are the people who know their business. They can consult us and tell us, "Here's what's needed; here's how you should roll this out," so that we're not always coming back and playing catch-up.

In this case, we've debated Bill 115, and now it's Bill 122. Our critic, Mr. Leone from Cambridge, has been very straight. He has reviewed this, and I think he is supportive, and we are generally supportive. There need to be some amendments, and one of the key amendments in there that I hear from my constituents in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, more so than anything about this bill and the former bill, is reg 274, and that is that the teacher who is the best to teach the job should be given the job, and the principal should have the ability to be able to choose the person who is best qualified, as opposed to how long you've been in a role or how long you've been in a union environment and your seniority comes to play.

Mr. Speaker, for my children—I have two boys: Zach, 19, and Ben, 16—I want them, in everything they do in the education sector, to have absolutely the best teacher that they have access to so that they can become the absolute best persons that they can as they come out and become productive members of our society.

Mr. Speaker, when there's legislation that says that that person has been in line longer so they're going to become the teacher, that just doesn't cut it, and I think the general populace out there would certainly support that that's an absolutely critical piece, that this legislation, in clause-by-

clause, if it's going to go through, has to be amended to reflect the ability of the teacher, not the tenure of the teacher.

Overall, I would say that this talks about process. It talks about collective agreements. It talks about how we're going to fund and who can say and who gets to have the ability—a lot of talk in there. But what I really come back to and what I want to just really reinforce in my closing couple minutes is that every piece of legislation we bring to this House, particularly in education, should be talking about the students. Is it better value for them? Are they going to become better equipped? Are they going to be more knowledgeable at the end of the day? And are we changing the structure so that in a rural place like Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, where we face two school closures of small, community-fabric schools—we should be talking about how we change that funding formula to ensure those schools remain and continue to be a vibrant part of our community, as opposed to just shutting them down and saying sorry about it.

We'll take out all of that mismanagement. Our \$1.1 billion in the gas plants—we'll pull that out of the education sector and those kids are going to suffer at the end of the day.

Interjections.

Mr. Bill Walker: So at the end of the day, they can heckle all they like, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't really matter. They're going—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Actually, it does matter, because if I can't hear you, then there's a problem. So I would ask the government members to please come to order and allow the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound to make his comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do, of course, respect that you do need to hear me, and this is very important for the people at home to be able to hear, because that's our job: to bring critical concerns to the Legislature so we can make sure we have the best legislation at the end of the day.

I will continue to always bring up the mismanagement that they have and the people who are suffering, the people like the kids, at the end of the day; those schools, if they were to have closed—what that would have done to our rural economy and the fabric of our communities. I will talk about the \$1.1 billion wasted on those gas plants and the health care services we're not having—the hip replacements and the cancer assessments that we're not getting. I'll talk about the educational programs that we're not getting; and apprenticeship programs, which we're crying for. Many kids in rural Ontario want to take apprenticeships because they actually can then be part of a viable economy going forward.

I really wish we would be talking about those types of issues rather than something that's about collective bargaining that they mismanaged from the get-go, and now we've got to come back. They'll try to come out looking like heroes. At the end of the day, the people of Ontario are too smart for that.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know, it's so hard to sometimes control your temper in this place, but I'm going to try, because what I've just heard is such revisionism on behalf of education. I only mentioned Mike Harris because he started—the member talks about apprenticeships. Mike Harris removed the industrial sector from our schools—the shops. Today, in some of our schools in this province of Ontario, you cannot even cut a carrot in a school, and yet we have, of course, this healthy food policy.

I understand. I did say, of course, that the Liberals have not been great listeners, but the PCs have not been good readers. They have not read a budget for two years before they said no to it. We like to say on this side of the House that readers are leaders. And it's topical, because we are talking about education. Yet they were very happy, the PCs, to get into bed with the Liberals for the right price. When EllisDon was on the table, they jumped right in.

So I think that the reality in this House is that people need to acknowledge that minority governments are the reality in the province of Ontario, and they don't want to believe that because they don't want to hear that nobody in this province trusts that party to do the right thing. Nobody. There is no trust whatsoever. When you talk about public services and education, nobody believes that if you were even to win—which surely cannot happen—you would do the right thing for health care, you would do the right thing for education, because this province is still reeling from the cuts from 10 years ago. There is no trust in this province for that party.

This piece of legislation needs to come into place because we need to rebuild trust in the education sector. Peace and stability do matter. Collective agreements do matter. Let's get it done.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I listened carefully to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, and I was pleased to try to facilitate his chance to speak. I just listened to the wonderful comments from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. I think she clearly gets it. I appreciate her words.

One of my heroes, Bobby Kennedy, used to say, “Good judgment is based on experience, and experience invariably on bad judgment.” In other words, my mom would say, “Learn from your mistakes.”

As the member from Bruce-Grey talks about how all these folk on the government side want to do is build bridges and relationships and fess up and make up, well, you know what? There's nothing wrong with that. Along the journey, if you trip up, you need to revisit what you're doing and try to come up with a better answer.

You talk about picking on Mike Harris and you lifted him up as an example of being respectful. I want to tell you, maybe you've never studied any history of this place or some of the decisions made, but when I was mayor of the town of Flamborough, you sure as heck weren't respectful when you forced the amalgamation on us or on other places as well. No respect there. You weren't respectful when Mike Harris called nurses over-trained hula hoop workers. You weren't respectful when thousands of teachers were lining up and signing up for early retirement because

you had been so disrespectful. Do you remember the clock ad that was run by the then Tories when they were in government? Disrespectful in the extreme. And you know what? You paid a price for it, and that's why you're on that side of the House. Thank God.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I am pleased to join the discussion this afternoon and pay respect to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and his attempt to bring some sort of accountability to the whole discussion on Bill 122. I think our position is fairly clear, but what isn't clear is much of the understanding of the past here.

I was first elected as a school trustee I think it was in 1980 or 1982. I served a couple of terms. I was on the provincial board. My wife is now a former—retired—teacher and now a school trustee. Members of my family, quite a few of them, are teachers.

The history of this is important. The school boards themselves today were formed by the Sweeney commission. The Sweeney commission—he was a well-respected Liberal—was formed by David Cooke, who was the Minister of Education under the NDP government. All of the changes and reforms in education happened under the NDP; Dave Cooke was the minister. It was called the Royal Commission on Learning—it was called For the Love of Learning, and this is a document with about 130 recommendations, where they created the College of Teachers. They created the new curriculum and the new funding formula, which treated every student equally.

I'm surprised that a former school trustee doesn't know more about this. She doesn't recall. That's the backdrop here.

What did Michael Harris do? Mike Harris implemented almost all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Learning. Most of it was brought in by David Cooke, who was the NDP member. He was put a head of the implementation committee. Michael Prue might remember; some of the other members were here.

I can only say this: Education is important. We will likely support the bill. This discussion—and Ms. Sandals would know, as the minister; she has been around, probably when I was a trustee—about provincial-wide negotiations is older than you and I. It's been talked about since the beginning of time. The consolidation is, we agree with most of that; we would like to see it go to committee.

I'll have more to say. Hopefully, I'll get an hour later on today.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I listened intently—and I thank the Speaker for the honour of letting me sit in the chair again, because it is truly in the chair when you most carefully listen to those who are speaking and to those who are heckling. It is a wonderful opportunity to divorce yourself from your respective caucus, sit out there and try to have a fair mind.

I listened to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound as he spoke. He said a lot of things that I expect, coming from members of the official opposition. He said things that I think were meant to damage, in some way, the government opposite. He said many things that he thought were going to somehow damage the NDP for past rights and past wrongs. But I want to say that I didn't hear anything that distinguished the Conservatives from what we have heard in this House for a very long time.

We all saw in the newspaper two weeks ago a leaked document from the Conservatives on how they were going to run the next election, which they were hoping would come last spring. It was going to be an outright attack on unions, and drinking beer on the bus. Those are the two things I remember: Attack the unions and drink beer on the bus with the guys from the press. Over the course of time and over the course of this speech, there's a defence of Mike Harris and how he dealt with the teachers' unions and others. I remember. Those were very disruptive days. I was a mayor, but I remember going out of the mayor's office and joining the picket line with the teachers around East York Collegiate. They needed our help. They needed help because of the way they were being treated.

I remember the Conservatives saying that Bill 115, as bad as it was, should have been worse, and were very disappointed that it wasn't worse, because then it would have been their bill. I remember them standing here on EllisDon, unrepentant to the end, even after the Liberals learned the lesson and voted the other way. They were still the way they are.

You know, that's what I expected, and that's what I got. Thank you very much, member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We return to the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for his reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: One thing, Mr. Speaker: If nothing else, I sparked some discussion in this House this afternoon, and I'm proud to have done that.

I'll start with my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo. She talks about revisionist history. I just wish she'd come into this century and not go back 20 years. We're here only talking about the future. What can we do from today on? What can we do collaboratively to make this province a better spot?

They've supported this Liberal government. They've supported a government that has doubled the deficit and the debt in their eight years, and they've got to be proud of that. They talk about trust. What I would like to ask the NDP is, what is truly your plan? You're very quick to be controversial about all of us. What are you going to do if you ever, God forbid, have power again?

I'll go on to the Minister of Community and Social Services. He suggested that she gets it. Well, of course she gets it, because she stands up and votes with them every time they turn around. What is he going to say? He's not going to slam her. He did say, though, that his mom told him that you should fess up and make up. I haven't heard much fess up and make up on the colossal

mess they've made of this province in the last eight years. Until they do, we'll continue to do our job as opposition.

I also want to add here that Mike Harris never cut education or health care. In fact, the social services industry, in my short tenure, is telling me that he's the only one who actually put more funds into social services.

The member from Durham talked about the Royal Commission on Learning. He's been here working his butt off for 18 years. He knows what he's talking about.

The member from Beaches–East York: I'm glad you were listening, Michael, and I always listen to yours as well. I wasn't trying to inflict damage; I was merely pointing out facts so the people at home and the people listening know. You made one other comment about the different approach. We will make decisions that will put this province back in prosperity. We'll create jobs, we'll lessen the debt and we'll ensure that those young people sitting in front of you, Mr. Speaker, the seniors at home and those less advantaged actually have money that is going into programs and services, not paying into a debt that those two parties continue to multiply and contribute to. We will not do that, Speaker. We'll bring it back under rein, and we'll make this province thrive again.

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

Mr. Michael Prue: I'm hoping that the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound listens to everything I say and perhaps will be able to comment, if that is allowed in his rotation. He threw down a challenge, and I don't normally rise to the bait like some trout, but I cannot help myself.

He wants to know what the NDP would do if we were in power. It's very simple, and none of it involves spending money. I hope the Conservatives will listen to this. We will bring a sense of social justice to the people of Ontario. We will give opportunity, where opportunity has not existed, to the poor and to those who are recent immigrants. We will concentrate on those who are elderly and those who are young so that they have great opportunities and they are not forgotten, and we will never, ever put our party above the needs of the people of Ontario.

We will do all of that in a fiscal way that actually balances the budget. I am proud to say that as a mayor I balanced five budgets, paid off all the debts and built infrastructure. That's the dream that I have to do. That is why I'm hoping, as the member from Beaches–East York and the NDP's finance critic, to bring that kind of fiscal responsibility into the entire debate. That is what has been missing for the past few years, and that is what needs to be brought back.

The budget needs to be balanced. We cannot, as a society, continue to run deficit after deficit, year after year, and we have to understand that there are difficult choices to be made, but those choices must always be the well-being of all of the people of Ontario, not the select few and not the personal friends of whatever government is in power.

Having risen to the bait, I want to start the debate. This bill is a fairly simple bill. You have heard from speakers on all sides of the House—and I just noticed that I'm down to 10 minutes. Nobody gave me that warning. Oh, well.

In the seven minutes that are remaining—and I thought I had 17—this is a fairly simple bill. It is necessary. It has been brought about because so much tinkering has taken place at school boards over the last many years. When I was first involved in politics, school boards had inordinate power. They had power over setting of budgets.

When I was a mayor, every year there were three parts to the budget: the Metro part, the local municipality or borough part, and the school board part. The increases in the tax rates, more often than not, came from the school boards rather than from either Metro or from the borough of East York. In fact, whenever there were any increases, they were always from the school boards. I did not disparage them. I never said anything against what they were doing. I did say that this was for the benefit of the schools, and that the people had an opportunity, if they didn't like the way the schools were being run, or if they didn't like the programs that were being funded, to tell their school trustees and, every three years, to vote for other ones.

Those school trustees took their jobs very seriously. When the money portion was taken away from them—when they could no longer raise additional revenues—a great many things happened to inner-city schools, particularly in Toronto, with which I'm most familiar, and, I even understand, having heard the questions in question period today, are still happening in the Niagara Falls region, and that is that school boards are being forced to make very difficult choices as the amount of money available to them in many respects dwindles.

I'd like to start first with what the school boards are asking. The school boards are asking for a couple of simple things. They have a couple of simple concerns, and I'd just like to reiterate what they are saying to us. They want to require the school board fees to OPSBA by school boards to support the collective bargaining process—they don't think that, if they are taken out of the mix, they should have to pay for that. I certainly would agree with them. The Ontario Public School Boards' Association "recommends that the government directly support/fund the employer bargaining agents, as they have in the past."

The school boards, in many cases, are having to make very difficult choices. I know in my own riding—and I have asked these questions of the minister several times in the last year—the money available to the Toronto District School Board has been spent. We have inner-city schools in my own riding, around the Crescent Town area, the areas north of Danforth, where the schools are in very bad repair, and there is no money available for that. I think that the school boards, in collective bargaining, if they are forced to pay out money, as this bill says—may cause difficulty to them. So I am asking the government to look at this one particular aspect, because it needs to be remedied.

I also listened intently to what some of the teachers had to say about this bill. They have some concerns, although this is not the kind of concern where they're out there picketing or yelling. They just want to have a sensible conversation, and it's why we, in the New Democratic Party, are willing to sit down and have a sensible conversation about this particular bill. The dynamics

of the collective bargaining process have changed remarkably, and because the dynamics have changed, there need to be some safeguards built into this process.

The government is allowing, through this bill, if I am reading it correctly, its own status as a non-party. It means that the government is not governed by the Ontario Labour Relations Act rules regarding good-faith bargaining, as it is not a formal party, according to the Ontario Labour Relations Act.

If I am wrong, perhaps the minister can tell me. But when you are not a party, when you are a non-party, and then you get to impose your decision between the two parties who are attempting to bargain in good faith, this ensures that there are going to be some difficulties. So I ask, when we're sitting down there, should this bill pass at second reading and go on to committee, that the government take a very good look at what role it is going to have as a non-party.

The second issue that is somewhat troubling to me is that this bill says that the arbitration criteria are very explicit on the ability of the employer to pay out, and what they can pay out, but there is no mention of fair remuneration, decent working conditions or anything else that might concern members of any bargaining unit.

A teacher's job is not a cushy job, as some in this House would say. It is not two months off in the summer and a long period of time off at other times of the year and getting paid throughout. That is not the reality. The reality is that teachers work very hard.

I had the opportunity, in the last two weeks, to go to two high school commencement exercises. I went there and I watched these young men and women who finished school last June come back to their high school and come back to show the whole world what was happening to them. Some went off to college. Some went off to university. Some went into the working world. Unfortunately, all too many of them, because grade 13 has been eliminated, were doing—whatever it's called—grade 12 a second time around because they did not find themselves emotionally prepared, I guess, to go off to college. Some of them, even Ontario scholars with more than 80%, have come back to do a second year in grade 12, because they cannot get into the courses that they want in either the college or the university, because in some of those colleges and universities, as I read in my Maclean's this weekend, you need 90% or 95% to get into the course you want.

I saw them, and I saw the deference, and I saw the respect that they gave to their teachers. When people in the audience were identified—and I was identified, and the member of Parliament was identified, and the school board trustee was identified—the ones who got the loudest cheers from those graduating students were the principals and the teachers. They were the ones who got the applause, because those students recognized the commitment and that they had given their all. I think we need to remember that when we're negotiating.

I think we also need to look in this bill and see whether the government should be given the absolute authority to set the term of the collective agreement that gives the government the ability to define whether it's a two-year, a three-year or a four-year term. I will tell you, in almost every negotiation that takes place in the public or private sector anywhere in this country,

that is defined by the people who sit down to do the bargaining. I don't know how the government determines whether it's two, three, or four years, other than to do it to their own advantage, and I would ask that we look at this as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity of my 10 minutes.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to be able to comment on the comments from the member for Beaches–East York on Bill 122. I'd like to start by actually congratulating him for talking to the bill, which is sort of a novel approach this afternoon, in some cases.

I do have to comment on one of his sidebar comments about dwindling funding. I think we do need to keep funding for the education sector in perspective. When you look at the increase in education funding since 2003, the funding has gone up, on average, 50% per pupil. That's a pretty significant increase, I think, by anybody's measure, when you look at the increase per pupil that's being spent on education.

The member mentioned a number of technical details in the bill, and the member is quite correct that it is a very technical bill. I would just like to assure the member, as we consulted extensively with both the union and the school board representatives prior to tabling the bill, that we continue to consult with both the unions and the school boards' associations post tabling.

I think we all understand that to get to a point where if there's some fine-tuning that needs to be done, that we need to have the second reading vote, get it out of here and into committee, because it's in the committee that we can do any fine tuning of those technical details that's required.

I would also like to assure people that while this is a very extensive bill on school board collective bargaining, the Labour Relations Act remains the underpinning of the collective bargaining, and we worked very closely with the Minister of Labour and his officials to make sure that is the case.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a pleasure to be here. I listened carefully to the member from Beaches–East York and, in fact, I did listen to the comments and response by the Minister of Education.

I want to refer members to the recent Creating Jobs and Growing the Economy, the economic outlook revealed last week, and on page 72 there's a section that does address exactly that question. It's called—be careful of the wording here, because the minister did say we must keep in view that the funding has gone up 50% per student, okay? Here's what she says—treacherous words: “School Board Efficiencies and Modernization.” In 2013, the provincial government announced “an efficiencies and modernization savings strategy that aims to achieve long-term” stability in the school board.

Now they're taking over the highest-cost function of school boards. About 90% of the school board budget is the wages and benefits part. So if they're taking over the pull on that, the question on whether or not school boards—and what do “modernization” and “streamlining” mean? It means significant changes, probably cuts.

Going into the election—I think the member from Leeds–Grenville said it more succinctly earlier, and he used the term “kiss and make up” bill. I think it should be an “attempt to kiss and make up” bill. The reason I say that is I can't trust the current government. They say one thing and do something the opposite.

We're moving towards an election. They're not going to have—it's like Neville Chamberlain—peace at any price. That's why we got into this dilemma, that they've bought their way through all of these collective agreements. Now we're overpriced, and they're going to attack the most fundamental part of education—which is the role of the school boards—the money part. They're taking all of that back. The boards will be left with “Here's the money for the books and a bit of money for transportation.” That's all that's left.

It's a shame, quite honestly, that the member from Beaches–East York, who I think is a remarkably kind-spirited person—I think he meant well. I hope the Minister of Education responds to some of his inquiries.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's always a pleasure for me to respond to the member from Beaches–East York. He has a long-standing history in this House and so, regardless of the attempts at revisionism, he still knows the truth, which is great.

It is interesting, though, to hear some of the responses to what he has said, especially around concerns around reducing funding for education coming from the PC Party, because they supported Bill 115 wholeheartedly, except that they said it didn't go far enough. So for them to stand up in the House today and say, “We're really concerned about public education funding,” and yet they propped this government up with Bill 115, then—you just cannot have it both ways. You really can't.

I understand that there's a level of frustration that the PC Party is experiencing. We've seen it all afternoon. In fact, it's an emerging trend. Having a track record of actually not accomplishing anything is really frustrating, and I can understand that. I think that actually, as the previous member had mentioned, the by-elections pretty much proved that, because they didn't get any seats. I mean, Doug Holyday and Rob Ford got the Etobicoke–Lakeshore seat. It's official—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Ford nation.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's out there. Ford nation is alive and—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: We're cautiously supporting Bill 122 because we feel that there's value in having clarity around the players at the table. We also feel strongly that the school boards who actually represent the main interests of students in this province, who know those needs of those students extremely well, need to have a respectful place at that table so that they can bring the concerns of their constituents to the Ministry of Education. Then we'll go from there.

This will get to second reading. We will address some of the issues that we feel need to be addressed. This is the right direction today.

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

Hon. John Milloy: I simply want to make the case that this is a very important piece of legislation. We've had a good preliminary debate here. Let's send this bill to committee so that it can be looked at in detail.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I now return to the member for Beaches–East York to reply.

Mr. Michael Prue: I thank the Minister of Education, the member from Durham, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo and the government House leader for their comments.

Dealing with each of them in turn, I would acknowledge that the government has increased funding for education generally over the last number of years. But I have to, in my own heart, ask why, in spite of that funding, children in my riding are going to raccoon-infested portables—40 portables around a single school. They are screaming. They are demanding—the parents—that their children have better education. They are demanding, in an inner city, why some of them have to walk up to two and a half kilometres to go to a school after they've been displaced because there are so many kids coming into the system. In my riding we're not seeing the money being spent in a way that we think it ought to be spent.

I know that there are problems elsewhere. I know that there are small rural schools that communities are trying to save, but I also think if you come to Toronto to some of the inner-city schools and see the overcrowding and the poor conditions, then it doesn't matter how much money is being spent if it's not being spent wisely.

To the member from Durham, I thank you for your comments, as always. You're always fairly gentle with me. I wish, though, that you had let your colleague, who was dying to say something—and I think would have been far more fiery—say it for you.

The member from Kitchener–Waterloo, I thank you for your erudite comments; they're always very generous.

To the government House leader, though, here we come back to this same issue again that plagued us a couple of weeks ago. He stands up, and his only comment is that he wants this to be sent off to committee. It will go to committee. He's suggesting that we've had enough debate, but I just stood here again in this House today and watched Minister McMeekin stand in his

place and say that he wanted more debate. The government can't have it both ways. You can't say that you want to have more debate because you have limited actions that you can take, although you do have some. Some of those would include consulting with the House leaders of the other parties. You can't exhaust that, and so we'll have debate.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise with great interest to talk about Bill 122 and its stated purpose, which is to provide better clarity in the collective bargaining process. It's not designed either to improve the outcomes for the students or deliver a better way of delivering education in this province.

The Ontario PCs have highlighted how our schools need deep reform to equip our students for the challenges of the 21st century. For instance, we need to focus on delivering excellent numeracy and literacy, which has been under pressure over the last number of years. We advocate for an enhanced role for our parents, who are only second to the students themselves in their desire for them to succeed. Two per cent of our teachers today, we see, have had a post-secondary course in mathematics, and we wonder why we're falling behind and our scores are actually dropping in the mathematics and science side. Those are issues that need to be addressed.

Bill 122 establishes a national and local bargaining process and includes the crown in the education bargaining framework, which is not the case elsewhere in Ontario's public sector. We cannot know the full effect of this legislation until a full round of negotiations is concluded, which will take years, and that's why the Ontario PC caucus will seek to amend this bill to include a review and a sunset policy so that we can review just what the success rate was or where the pitfalls were with this legislation.

We have seen this government make glaring mistakes in legislation and regulation-making. We wish to guarantee that Ontario students will not suffer from this government's mistakes if this bill turns out to be another one. We cannot forget that this bill comes on the heels of Bill 115, in which the government demonstrated a severe lack of leadership and commitment. It is really, as my colleague from Leeds–Grenville said, a kiss-and-make-up bill, one that is looking to bring back the relationship.

The province is facing severe fiscal pressures in the coming years, and we need to take action today to tackle some of the largest items of public spending. The largest, of course, is public sector compensation. Ever since the beginning of this Parliament, we have advocated consistently and honestly for a comprehensive, direct, legislated two-year public service wage freeze in order to stem the bleeding that is driving our province deeper and deeper into debt. We have been open and honest with our intention to tackle the deficit and debt head-on. When the government submitted Bill 115, we acknowledged that it was not a solution to the deficit. However, we welcomed the beginning of the government's realization that they could not be able to live on borrowed money alone and forever.

Political expedience, however, has taken the place of long-term financial sustainability. The same old Wynne government has sought to endear itself once again to the traditional public sector organized labour base. In education, this has meant shutting the doors to young, driven, passionate, newly qualified teachers by mandating that hiring be based on seniority alone. The government's excuse for this mess is an attempt to take nepotism out of the system.

Our leader submitted an order question on the subject on October 29, and one could only assume that the government would know how many actual complaints about nepotism they received that had led to the harsh regulation 274. It isn't a hard question, and one doesn't require months to research it; it's just a number.

Instead, the government is taking its time to answer. Considering their delinquency in responding to our previous batch of questions, one can only assume that the summer session will be in before we find out. This is the context in which Bill 122 comes into existence. It has been met with prudent skepticism by most stakeholders who wish to evaluate the full effect of the bill as several rounds of negotiation are completed.

What we do not see, however, is any action to bring our education system into the 21st century and to give our students the best chances to succeed in an ever-increasingly globalized and competitive world. This province needs significant reforms to again take its rightful position as the economic leader in Canada. Our teachers deserve clarity on what their job is, as we have advocated with our proposal to include what teachers already do in their job description.

Parents, principals and teachers deserve a greater say in how their schools are administered and how the curriculum is taught. Instead, we have seen an increasing creep towards centralization, and Bill 122 does nothing to reverse this trend. The figurative Ontario education shop needs a capital renovation. Instead, the government is simply rearranging the shelves.

We will watch the effects of this bill closely and keep reminding the members on the other side that we need bold action, not just tinkering with the process. Bill 122 is another look-good bill that is intended to restore the very lucrative relationship of this Liberal Party with the provincial teachers' unions, which are major contributors. There's nothing to do about students' or the parents' concerns, or about improving education outcomes, or to make Ontario's education system the best it could be.

A college teacher at our local coffee club expressed his disappointment with the students that fail to hand in projects and assignments upon reaching college, a practice they learned in elementary and secondary schools today, where a teacher can't penalize students who fail to meet deadlines. Instead, they need to renegotiate new deadlines. They do it over and over again. Folks, this isn't training our young for the real world. It's not the way it's done when they get to college or university, where failing out tends to cost the student, the parent and the government lots of unnecessary money. Students can't make the change to post-secondary requirements that deadlines are deadlines, just like work. Students failing out, wasting their tuition and living expenses because of a lack of training for the real world: a failed practice that has been instituted by this government.

The government has to start listening to parents and employers. To date, this government has meandered through the last 10 years, directing legislation to make their donors happy so that their coffers are full; sadly, putting the Liberal Party's interests ahead of the residents of this province. Our students are graduating with no jobs to go to in this province. Instead of making the bold steps necessary to turn this province around, they continue to pander to their donors. They refuse to listen to the employers in this province that tell them that red tape and regulation is killing them, forcing them to move to regions where governments welcome them with legislation that encourages innovation and growth.

How many times have we seen jobs leave this province in the last 10 years? This past week, we had Heinz. In the past month, it was US Steel. During their reign, this list has grown embarrassingly long—Xstrata in North Bay, and in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, 3,600 jobs by the end of 2006 alone—a sad record for what was once the economic engine of Canada. In my son's engineering class of 2011, more than half his class went out to Alberta to find employment. It's truly a sad state of affairs.

What's the answer? Thirty-six panels and committees travelling the province is just not working. Does this new Premier, after more than 10 years in government, not have any ideas of what businesses, small and large, have been screaming for for years? Get out of the way, and help with competitive legislation, energy rates, WSIB, and the other things that they go on so that they can actually prosper this province.

What have we seen? Back to education: This party is determined to look good at the expense of results. Time and money is spent on passing the student testing—instead of learning the material, pulling students out of the test if the teacher believes they won't pass, and a follow-up to see how they failed to pull out a student if they failed to pass, instead of looking at whether or not they know the material. This is the classic talk about, "Look how the results are going." But we're cooking the books.

A local teacher highlighted to me how they need to change the apprenticeship ratios to allow more students to be successful in the trades. He's tired of encouraging students to move into the trades as part of the high school co-op program, where there are no limits on the apprenticeship ratios, only to have them enter college and be forced to drop out because they fall under the 3-to-1 ratio and they no longer can get the experience they need to finish the program—after they waste thousands of dollars in tuition, living expenses and lost income opportunities. How can this be, when studies show that a critical shortfall of skilled labour will soon be upon us? These are good-paying, highly skilled jobs, and we'll be looking to import new people to fill these jobs, only to have to pay higher taxes to look after the people whom we haven't got jobs for.

Thank you for this, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.