

SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ACT, 2013

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 18, 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 (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Oh, it's just questions and comments—sorry. Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Who was speaking last?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. So now I'm asking for questions and comments in response to his remarks.

Questions and comments? Questions and comments?

Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, when the last Premier took the offensive against teachers and boards of education, we were all in shock in this Legislature, not only because he had billed himself as the education Premier, but because the attacks were so completely unfounded. They were tantamount to a hissy fit by a Premier who found himself with a minority government. They were completely destructive in their nature and implementation.

The forced so-called collective agreements were nothing but impositions; they were not the result of fair collective bargaining. They tore at the root of our hard-fought battles for fair representation and fair collective bargaining.

That isn't all, Speaker. We still operate under a minority government, which should mean that the opposition parties can actually get legislation enacted, that we can have much stronger input into how our province operates, that we can inform the decisions being made by the government.

Unfortunately, the government scandals don't seem to stop. Ontario's confidence in how well their tax dollars are being spent is increasingly shaken. We have spent many hours in the Legislature trying to get all the of the financial facts and figures about the cancelled gas plants. We have had hearings where the former Premier, the current Premier and many top-ranked officials have given their version of the events, but still the dollars rack up and the full story has not yet been told.

It doesn't stop there, Speaker. The current government continues with the farce about the Slots at Racetracks Program. The horse racing industry is faltering, and municipalities are not jumping

onto the casino bandwagon. But rather than work with the industry on how to make the Slots at Racetracks Program even more viable, tracks are closing, horses are being sold out of Ontario and decent, hard-working people are losing their jobs.

My NDP colleagues and I will continue to work with the industry to find the best solution for the Slots at Racetracks Program and get back to the business of horse racing and slots revenue sharing. We will continue to work against the repressive spirits of bills like 122.

This bill alleges to formalize bargaining practice by implementing a proactive process of central and local collective bargaining and providing for central grievance arbitration. A system like this could work and has had some success in places like Greater Vancouver Regional District, which held the GVRD joint negotiations on region-wide issues, with individual bargaining for unit-specific issues. But even that process has had bumps along the road, Speaker.

The process proposed in Bill 122 similarly establishes central bargaining for issues like financial matters and key matters of provincial educational policies. But who establishes what is a key matter of provincial education policy and what can be brought to the table? At this 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-in-good-faith rules under the Labour Relations Act. Therefore, the central table is similar to a tripartite structure but with the inequity of the crown having a slightly different status than the other two parties—so a rather unbalanced process right from the outset. The crown has designated additional matters to the central table, and if these additional items are central or local in cases where the parties do not agree, the Ontario Labour Relations Board will be the body to adjudicate.

There is a two-track arbitration process in which the crown can participate in the arbitration hearing, but it does not have the same status as the other parties at the central table. Shockingly, the employer, the board, is not permitted to settle a local case without the consent of the crown—a further neutering of the roles and responsibilities of the boards and their collective bargaining units. This system seems to enshrine a central award decision on language for parties with the same central collective agreement. It appears to prevail over any local settlements and/or local arbitration decisions. It also establishes that a union can only be designated as a bargaining agent if it represents at least 15 bargaining units.

To be certain that the position of these unions—ETFO, OSSTF, CUPE, OECTA and AEFO—is very clear, I'll read you the OSSTF bargaining bulletin issued on the 7th of November after a meeting by these affiliates with the Minister of Education. These were presented as a common issue to all affiliates that need to be addressed by the government before the bill became law.

“(1) Crown as party to negotiations: OSTTF ... believes the crown should be a full participant in the negotiations. This would mean that, amongst other things, the legislation should clearly specify that:

“—The crown would be bound by the duty to bargain in good faith (which is arguably now the case).

“—The crown is also bound by the other unfair labour practice provisions under the act (namely sections 70, 72, 73, 76 of the OLRA) in order to provide for a potential remedy in response to government interference.

“(2) Central table for support staff: The article should ‘require’ a central table for support staff and the threshold should be lowered to representation of 11 bargaining units.

“(3) Interest arbitration: OSSTF ... believes the five criteria in the act surrounding interest arbitration should be removed to allow unfettered arbitrations. 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.’

“(4) Central grievance process: Once a collective agreement is finalized, the central grievance process should include more than a ‘declaration.’ It also needs to give rise to the ability to issue a ‘direction’ so that local boards have to implement whatever decision is made by the arbitrator. This will avoid unnecessary duplication and re-arbitration of issues to obtain appropriate remedies.

“(5) Term and other powers: We believe the crown should not have the ability to dictate the term of the agreement to be two, three, or four years or to unilaterally decide, based on her (the minister’s) opinion, what matters will be discussed at the central table. All issues, including term, should be bargained freely.”

This is what the five affiliates see as necessary to make the bill workable and a fairer piece of legislation.

To perhaps be a bit clearer, respecting the government’s status as a non-party, it appears that the government is not governed by the Labour Relations Act rules regarding good-faith bargaining because it is not a formal party according to the act. Teacher groups believe it should be a formal party; in other words, there should be clearer provisions ensuring the government’s obligation to bargain in good faith and adhere to fair labour practices. The arbitration criteria is very explicit on the ability of the employer to pay, but there is no mention of fair remuneration, decent working hours and conditions etc. as criteria.

The scope of the ministerial ability to reserve items for the central table is extremely large. This should be restricted. The government has the ability to define two-, three-, or four-year terms for collective agreements. They should be bargained, not dictated, by the government. And the timeline for serving notice to bargain—270 days—is much too long.

The process and implications for central grievance arbitration need to be clearer and ensure a fair process for all employees of all boards.

I agree that the threshold to represent support workers at a central table at 15 bargaining units is much too high; however, I feel that the number should be closer to 10.

The ratification process should be in clear, easily understood language, and, of course, so should all agreements.

Additionally, the school boards have concerns about this process. The provision that the minister may, by regulation, require a school board to pay fees to the Ontario Public School Boards' Association—

Mr. Todd Smith: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order. Just a moment.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm sorry to interrupt the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek in his wonderful remarks that he's making, but there's not a quorum here, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We'll check on a quorum.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is now present.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): A quorum is now present.

The member may continue.

Mr. Paul Miller: It used up 30 of my seconds, but that's okay.

The concern I have expressed before about regulations that are not vetted by committee or the Legislature—raises alarm bells for me on this one. The association objects to the inclusion in the legislation of 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. Should the government insist on its inclusion, the decision must be made only in extraordinary and specific circumstances, based on an objective test of management accountability, not a ministerial opinion.

The hammer-handed provision that an employer bargaining agency—the school board association—“shall co-operate in good faith with the crown in preparing for and conducting central bargaining”—but there's no reciprocal requirement for the crown to co-operate in good faith.

Overall, there are many flaws that require amendments in order for this bill to be acceptable. Until these many amendments are made, the bill will not fulfill those requirements.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to respond to the remarks on the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, Bill 122.

I want to talk a bit about the difference in the legislation between the teachers' unions and other unions. The teachers' unions, historically, have a different status. The teachers' unions are actually already named in legislation with respect to who they represent. So in naming, in this legislation, OSSTF to represent public secondary, AEFO to represent all the francophone teachers, OECTA to represent the English Catholic teachers and ETFO to represent the public elementary teachers—we are actually just picking up clauses that are already in legislation and carrying on that traditional piece.

The question then becomes: What about the other unions? The other unions, the support staff unions, are now and will continue to be elected by the members under the Labour Relations Act. So who represents whom is determined by a member vote and can be any one of a number of unions. That's why the support staff language is a little bit different in this case.

What it does allow is that where there is a union that has at least 15 locals anywhere in the province representing support staff, they would automatically be entitled to their own central table. Just so people understand, that means CUPE is entitled to its own central table; OSSTF support workers and ETFO support workers are all entitled to their own central table under the legislation, the way it is proposed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments? The member for London-Essex—no, Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. You can pick any of those three places in any order. It doesn't really matter to me, as long as the three come out—but not Essex. I am not close to Essex. You have to go through Chatham first before you hit Essex.

I want to just comment on the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek's comments, from his new position in the back row. I'm sorry you're sitting there. I'd rather have you up closer to the front. I enjoyed your comments when you were closer there.

However, just to add a few comments to this bill: We've talked about it on our side. I'd like to see his thoughts, perhaps, on the sunset clause that we're proposing to be added to this bill so that we can relook at how well this bargaining agreement works after the next round of bargaining with our teachers. I'd really love to hear your thoughts on the sunset clause that we're proposing as a party here.

We also would love to see regulation 274 put back onto the table to have a discussion of how our teachers are being hired, and I think that would really add to the discussion on the floor.

My one comment, since we do have the Minister of Education here, Speaker, is I'm quite disappointed in the ministry. Last year, I raised a question regarding two deaf children in my

riding who were technically able for busing to the school in Milton. They said they'd work on it quite quickly, in fact, to ensure these kids got to Milton. Instead, they responded to my office two weeks ago, six weeks after the school year started. However, the parent got upset with waiting, sold her house, quit her job and moved to Milton in order that her kids can have proper education in this province. The Minister of Education was slow at acting on this. She promised she would. She failed my residents of my riding. I just thought I'd bring it up, since she is sitting in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to stand in this House and represent my constituents from Timiskaming–Cochrane and comment on the remarks given by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I listened intently. I've been listening to this debate for a few days, and he has given one of the most in-depth overviews of the bill itself. He has done a good job of—and he raised a concern, as well, of why this bill has actually been brought forward. It has been brought forward because of a lack of trust between the parties, one of the big parties being the government. That lack of trust also spreads to other parts of the government—he brought forward the horse racing issue—but on the education front, it comes mostly from Bill 115.

He really focused on the importance of collective bargaining, how we fought in this province for a long time to have fair, collective bargaining, and how Bill 115 seemed to—not “seemed to.” It did jeopardize that, and this is an attempt by the government to try to become friends again. He did a much better job explaining the different parts of the bill, but basically this could be called the education group-hug bill.

As a party, I think we support this bill with some—and the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek did a good job of saying some of the things that we think could improve this bill, and hopefully he will expand on them again in his two-minute finish.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Scarborough–Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just want to add my comments to the member from Hamilton–Stoney–Creek, who did a very elaborate and technical job of the bill, and I give him credit for actually doing such a good job.

I just want to add a few points, because I think the previous comments indicated that this bill is necessary because of the mess that took place the last time around. But the reality is that this bill is a result of stuff that happened back in 2008. That was when the government actually took away the taxing rights of school boards and amalgamated some of the school boards in chaos. Since then, school boards have had difficulty negotiating collective agreements, because they were not the funder and they did not know what they would receive to fund their collective agreements.

I think our government has tried, over the last two terms, to correct some of these things, and this bill is a result of the learning exercise we have gone through with previous agreements: that the government is the funder and therefore the government should be at the bargaining table. In fact, the government should be there with its partners, which are the school boards.

I think the minister has clearly defined what she wants to do with this piece of legislation. As a result of this particular bill, we all have hopes that the next round of negotiations will take place with a lot of, if I could call it, “collective agreement” around the table of all three parties that are coming to the table for central bargaining. But it’s a piece of legislation that is necessary.

I would say to my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, let the bill go to second reading and down to committee, and at committee we’ll discuss all the recommendations that you put forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I’d like to thank the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, the education minister, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane and the member from Scarborough–Rouge River for their comments.

Starting off with the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London: I certainly appreciate his observance of the seating in the place—that was very good of him to notice. Secondly, I must say that, after seeing the performance by his—he wasn’t here at the time, but Mr. Harris and his group, who single-handedly attacked the education system in this province and made a mess of it. I have to say, that happened; I witnessed that. My wife is a teacher, and she certainly does not have a lot of nice things to say about that era.

In reference to the education minister, we can certainly address some of these things after second reading and deal with it at committee level. In the present context of a minority government, we certainly have some workable areas now on committees, that we can listen to good ideas from all sides of the House. It’s kind of nice under a minority government, because that certainly didn’t happen under a majority government.

The member from Scarborough–Rouge River, my colleague: I appreciate his comments about the content of my submission. I hope that it doesn’t fall on deaf ears and that it will be taken under consideration at committee level.

But one of the biggest problems in the education system in our province is the funding formula. We have been after that for years. The funding formula has to change. I’ll give you an example: We’re losing—probably a third of our high schools are closing in Hamilton. That’s terrible. The funding formula is a big reason for that. They have to change that. I don’t know why it hasn’t been addressed, and it should be very quickly, because it certainly is a major problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise today and to speak to Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

Bill 122 would see the crown legislated as a party at the negotiations table rather than simply school boards and teachers' unions. The crown would be able to participate in central bargaining on matters that impact the entire province, but not in local bargaining.

At the end of the day, what this bill addresses is the politics of labour relations and not simply education.

When looking at any piece of legislation, it's important to note the context and political climate that led to the bill's development. We stand here today debating Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, because of the turmoil that engulfed education last year as the Liberals were unable to settle a deal, and when time was running out, they brought in legislation.

At the time, we realized that money is tight in Ontario and felt that a more equitable solution would be to share the burden with a broader public sector wage freeze across the board. We still feel that this is the right way to go, by the way. It avoids pitting groups against each other, forced to compete for limited resources in an ad hoc manner.

Because of the Liberals' complete and utter mismanagement in the last round of negotiations, drastic measures were required. School boards felt completely out of the loop during negotiations. Relations were so bad that, in an effort to make amends, the Liberals parachuted their hand-picked candidate, former NDP party supporter and union boss Ken Coran, into London West for this summer's by-election, and we all know how popular that move turned out to be for the voters. This is what we must keep in mind when we debate this bill.

That said, Bill 122 does seek to implement a formal negotiation process—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Order.

Would you continue, please?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Red, orange: You blend them together, they all kind of look the same anyway. Who knows for sure?

But that said, Bill 122 does seek to implement a formal negotiation process. This is a welcome initiative. It appears the government is learning from its mistakes. One could say that a

government should get it right the first time instead of allowing an avoidable crisis to develop. But in regard to this bill, I say, “Better late than never.”

While it’s certainly important for government to lay a foundation for collective bargaining, especially given the fact that the provincial government foots the bill for these agreements, its ultimate impact on students is minor.

Every single member of this Legislature surely values the importance of education in Ontario. On this side of the House, we want to ensure a bright future for all students in the province. We want to make sure that resources are there for kids today and tomorrow. As our education critic the member from Cambridge pointed out, we are now investing \$21 billion in education, with an additional \$1.4 billion in capital investment. Additionally, as of 2012-13, the number of students in Ontario was just over two million.

This all adds up to one of government’s most expensive and important responsibilities: the education of current and future generations of our children. Just because we are pumping more money into the issue doesn’t mean education in the province is improving. Quality of education, test scores, and levels of education attainment should be the metrics by which we judge the province’s education system, not simply how much money we spend. Since this government took office in 2003, spending in education is up \$8.5 billion, but at the same time, there are a quarter of a million fewer students in the system. I’ll wrap up this thought by asking the question: Where exactly is the money going?

While I have had experience with bargaining in the past, I don’t by any means possess the expertise of any of the labour relations lawyers, who I assume will have plenty to say about this bill at the committee stage.

Overall, this bill does look good on paper. Nobody knows whether the process outlined in Bill 122 is a good process or whether it will be successful in the real world. Nobody really knows. Our education critic, though, has called for the inclusion of a sunset clause in Bill 122, and I think that that would be a wise addition to this bill. After the next full round of negotiations, we can take a step back and evaluate what has gone on—what worked and didn’t work—and fix the bill, moving it forward. It would ensure that we improve the bill over time and learn from any mistakes that might be made along the way. With that, this government, within—sorry, let me repeat that again. With anything that this government does, there’s bound to be mistakes, just like I blundered that particular statement. We all make mistakes once in a while.

You know, I’ll tell you something: The PCs would like to see this government clear the deck so that we can address meaningful legislation that will turn this province’s economy around. While Bill 122 serves a purpose, it doesn’t address the jobs crisis in Ontario. It’s critical. We have a jobs crisis here. This isn’t addressing this particular situation. We’re struggling through it.

People in my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex expect their government to do more to keep spending in check to protect future generations and provide an environment conducive to keeping and gaining jobs. By ensuring that this government has a seat at the table, we can hopefully do more to provide maximum value for taxpayers’ dollars.

While it indirectly helps students when their teachers, school boards and government have a set of rules for negotiating, it is certainly far down the line of things we can do that benefit our children directly.

This bill will not create any jobs for our young students as they enter the workforce, nor does it address Ontario's rapidly increasing debt. While these students are busy being kids, this government is mortgaging their future on spending initiatives to lure voters ahead of a potential election.

Last year, we watched as our students' extracurricular activities were used as a bargaining chip. At the end of the day, the interests of our students were put—

Interjection: Point of order, Speaker: I don't believe that a quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Can you check to see if a quorum is—

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is not present.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Tonia Grannum): A quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): A quorum is present. We'll return to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. While students are busy being kids, this government is mortgaging their future on spending initiatives to lure voters ahead of a potential election.

Last year, we watched as our students' extracurricular activities were used as a bargaining chip. At the end of the day, the interests of our students were put last.

As a party, one of our priorities is ensuring that this shameful act does not occur again. We listened to outraged parents and heartbroken students who were forced to miss out on their extracurricular activities. We understand how important these teams and clubs and educational trips are to students. That's why we need to protect extracurricular activities for our students.

Bill 122 does not address this concern, nor does this bill answer our calls to amend regulation 274 to ensure that the best-quality teacher is hired to do the job, regardless of seniority.

Last year, we proved what our party has been advocating. If you don't get your fiscal house in order today, you're going to have to pay for it tomorrow. We saw exactly what happens when the Liberal government spends beyond its means. As too many of our young folk are learning first-hand, a quality education is little comfort if you don't have a job to go to.

Speaker, we lost 740 jobs in Leamington just this past week, plus an additional 350 seasonal jobs, plus the economic impact to that community.

Again I say, you know what? We need to have quality education, but if you don't have the jobs, what good is the education? We must guarantee both a high quality of education for our children and a healthy economy with ample job opportunities for our young adults. It's my opinion that anything less is a disservice to our children.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. Grant Crack: It appears that all three parties support moving this to committee. We've had eight hours of debate, so I think, enough talk and some more action. Let's get this bill to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to comment on my caucus colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex. As you know, he was newly elected in 2011, and I think he has brought a lot of additional information and, quite frankly, some important points that he raised about the concerns with the legislation. I hope that at the committee level we have a chance to delve deeper and get into some positive recommendations for improving the legislation as it is proposed, and some of the issues raised by my colleague could go a long way to improve the legislation as it is standing before us.

As you know, part of the frustration with the debates that we have in this place is that so much is left to regulation that we don't actually get an opportunity to discuss and figure out what the implications are of legislation as it is proposed.

So I thought that my colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex raised some excellent points, and I hope they get discussed in further detail at committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My comments will be a prelude to my 10-minute discussion, which I will be beginning, I guess, after this round completes.

What I want to talk about is something that my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo brought up in her 20 minutes: that when it comes down to our education system, we need to start off with the basic belief that a stable and secure education system is, first of all, fundamental in providing a good education system, but that stable education environment requires an environment of trust, and it requires that we have support staff, education staff and teachers who are also treated with respect. Only through a process which is respectful and which is principled can we achieve a climate in our schools that will result in an education system that is the strongest and most beneficial for our students.

In order to achieve that, we need to make sure we don't shy away from the reality that Bill 115 was one of the key factors in disrupting the entire education system here in the province of Ontario. It was the Liberal government that initiated it and the Conservatives that supported it. That bill, in and of itself, eroded the climate of respect by mistreating and abrogating the rights of teachers in terms of the collective bargaining process, and that's one of the hallmarks of our labour system here in Ontario.

But really, it's about the respectful treatment of our teachers. If we don't have that, we won't have an education system that provides good care for our students. That's the fundamental starting point. I'll build on that in my 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I did take the opportunity to listen to the comments from the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. You know, it's really interesting. You talk about respect for teachers. I remember this very well: In 1999, my wife was eight months pregnant with our daughter Shanae. She was feeling terrible, going through a tough time during her pregnancy, and Mike Harris threw her, as a teacher at St. Teresa's school in Peterborough, out on the picket line. She was eight months pregnant; he threw her out on the picket line.

I don't get mad very often in this place, but to hear "respect for teachers"—what my wife and her colleagues went through in 1998 was just awful; just awful. My family and her colleagues in the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association will never forget that experience in 1998-99. I take no lessons from that member when it comes to how to treat teachers.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Chatham–Kent–Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, I want to thank the members from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and Dufferin–Caledon, and, yes, the Minister of Rural Affairs for your comments. I do appreciate that, and I appreciate and respect the passion and the feelings you have. With all due respect, that's the past. Today is today, and we need to look to the future as to what's going on.

What we need to have in this House is proper legislation. What we want to see, as we have talked about, is a sunset clause. When it goes to committee, it will do that.

But do you know what? Let's get the economy moving first. Let's get it moving forward so all of a sudden, then, the government has the funds from which to provide.

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek had mentioned in his dialogue that they were closing a number of high schools in Hamilton. Well, there are reasons for that. It could be declining enrolment; it could also be the fact that there just isn't the funding there as well.

Well, you know what? We, on our side, the PCs, don't believe in spending our way out of debt. If you don't have the money, you've got to come up with creative ways to generate revenue, but not through their resource tools, which are all about increasing taxes and putting a heavy burden on the taxpayers themselves. If they focused more on getting business going in this great province, we wouldn't have companies like Heinz leaving. We wouldn't have other companies in my riding, like Worthington Cylinders, leaving and going to the States because of high energy costs and everything else. So get your house in order, get it together, and maybe we'll get this province growing in the right direction.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Now, if nothing else, we can certainly applaud the member from Chatham-Kent for his passion. I applaud him for his passion.

Madam Speaker, what I started off saying before is that really, at the heart of it, we're talking about our education system. To begin with, we must start off at the point where we accept this premise that to have a good education system in the province of Ontario, we need to make sure that it's built on a strong foundation. Now, what is that foundation? What foundation can we build our education system on? We recognize that the education system is based on the great work of our teachers and other educational support staff, and other support staff in general for our schools, that there is a partnership between the actual front-line providers of the care and the service for the buildings; the board for each community; the community itself; and the funder of this program, which is the province.

In this relationship between these different parties, we have to recognize that those at the ground level have a better perspective in terms of what the community needs when compared with the central government, when compared with the province. While the province must be responsible for and have oversight over the funding that they provide, there also has to be a strong awareness of the reality that at a community level a school board and the teachers have a better sense of what's going on in the communities. That's a starting point.

One of the fundamental components of creating this climate that will be conducive for our students and conducive for our children is that the entire relationship between all these members, between all these parties, has to be based on respect. If respect is not present in the relationship, then the relationship will crumble.

We don't need any other proof of that relationship crumbling due to a lack of respect than Bill 115. When we're talking about Bill 122, we can't speak about Bill 122 without giving some time to Bill 115, so it's important to look at that. Bill 115, for the record, very clearly was an absolutely fabricated crisis, or a fabricated solution to a fabricated crisis. To make that more clear, there was absolutely no crisis in the schools. There was no looming problem in September. There wasn't any spectre of a school shutdown across the province of Ontario, and anyone who says so is not cognizant of the facts. There simply wasn't.

Then this government decided in the summertime, "Let's bring back the House. Let's reconvene the House because there is this fabricated crisis. Then what we're going to do to solve this

crisis—because there’s a by-election going on, let’s look like we’re able to solve it by introducing the legislation.”

Happily—and I’m very proud of the constituents and the members of the community of Kitchener–Waterloo—they saw through this fabricated crisis and they did not support the government. I’m happy that the constituents did that, and I’m proud of them for seeing through this ploy.

But what happened as a result, though the constituents saw through it and though this ploy was put to the side, the problem that arose is that it fundamentally eroded the respect for teachers and their support staff and the other members of the education system. What happened as a result is that we can’t have a strong education system if the main players of the system aren’t treated with respect. We don’t have a starting point. We don’t have a system that we can actually look up to. It can’t be a system that will perform well. It’s not a system that will address the future of our province.

Really, education—and a strong education system—is the key towards creating a more progressive society; a society that’s better off, a society that can move with the new circumstances, the new times.

If we talk about the economies that are doing the best in the world, the economies that are the most successful are those that have fully developed their knowledge industry, that have developed their technology and have fully made use of the most fundamental and precious resource: their people. Some of the countries that have done a great job in terms of innovation, that have worked so hard at developing an economy without very many natural resources, but instead recognizing the power of people, have used their intellectual capital, their entrepreneurship, their technological growth. One of the best examples of that is South Korea. If you look at the population and you look at the natural resources and you look at the infrastructure of Korea, when compared to any other country of a similar size and a similar history, they are outperforming by lengths and by strides, and one of the key reasons is that they’ve realized the importance of developing their technology sector. They’ve actually developed it so well that they have some of the largest and most effective and most successful corporations and innovators coming out of a country that, for its size and population, is quite small in the scheme of the world. They’re punching well above their weight because they’ve taken advantage of their intellectual capital, their people power. That’s something that we can do, and one of the fundamental ways to do that is to make sure you have an education system that rewards and encourages and develops the talents of our youth.

The starting point for creating a strong education system, which will help us move with the times, is having respect. The respect was eroded by Bill 115, and the fundamental way that it was eroded was by undermining a long-held tradition, an important fabric of our charter rights: the ability to organize. One of those rights within the ability to organize is to be able to collectively bargain. By legislating agreements instead of negotiating agreements, the Liberal government fundamentally undermined one of our charter rights and one of our strongly held beliefs.

Bill 122 is a step in the right direction. There are a number of criticisms which I'll get to, but the bill clarifies the different roles that are required for the system to work. The three basic roles in terms of the process required to get the system going, to negotiate agreements—the three components are the funders, who are the government; we have an employer, which is the school boards; and then we have the employees, who are the teachers and the support staff. Those are the three players. In terms of their roles, it wasn't clear. The crown, or the government, didn't have a formalized place in this system, and now they do.

One of the problems, though, is that although the government now has a position in this—they're a part of this formalized process—they are a participant, but their definition isn't as a party. What that really means, in a practical sense, is because they're not deemed a party, they're not subject to the rules under the Ontario Labour Relations Act. Basically, they're not subject to the rules that govern the proper conduct of all the participants. If you're going to be a part of the discussion, if you're going to be a part of the process, you should have the same responsibilities as the other parties, as well. That's one criticism that I think should be addressed.

The other concern with this bill in terms of the process—and it was brought up by some members of the official opposition; rightly so—is that there are a number of areas where there's too much ministerial discretion, and I echo that sentiment. When we have too much ministerial discretion or too many regulations, what happens is, decisions are made outside of this House that members of this Legislature don't have input on. We've seen the ugly side of this reality in the Public Works Protection Act, where the government, this Liberal government, made changes through regulation that increased police powers and resulted in one of the worst civil rights violations in the history of Ontario: the G20 debacle and the treatment of citizens, the unwarranted arrest of 1,000 individuals who were kept in custody—

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Speak to the bill.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: —and they were not treated with the rights they were due. This is the result of ministerial discretion.

The problem with this bill is that it has a great deal of ministerial discretion. As someone had exclaimed, “Speak to the bill,” this is part of the bill: the fact that there is too much ministerial discretion. We need to look at making sure that the discretion doesn't undermine what we do here in the House.

A final point was brought up, and I want to echo it: The funding formula is fundamentally flawed, and this bill doesn't address that. Regions like Peel, which are grossly underfunded, need to have their funding in proportion to their population.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions? The member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): No? I'm not doing very well this afternoon.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Mississauga East–Cooksville.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry. The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I just want to respond to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and say that we've been debating this for a very long time. Every time, certain concerns are expressed, but it's pointless to express these concerns. Instead, why don't we deal with these concerns in committee? If you really want to move forward with this legislation, I urge the House to consider moving this to committee now.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate and bring some comments on the presentation by my friend from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I always enjoy hearing what he has to say about the various issues, and he tends to speak quite often here in the Legislature. It's good to bring some commentary to his remarks here on the bill that we're discussing this afternoon.

One of the comments that he made early on in his presentation was that Bill 115 and what happened last fall here in the Legislature and in our schools across the province was fabricated. That may be correct to a certain point, but he went on to say that there was no looming crisis in education. I would beg to differ that there actually is a looming crisis in education. We can't continue to pay what we're paying for education in this province at the rate that we're seeing the bills rise and the struggling economy that we have here in Ontario at this time.

Just this afternoon, there was more evidence that this government is on the wrong path and that we do need to change direction. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development put out a warning this afternoon saying that the Bank of Canada is probably going to have to more than double the interest rates in the province to 2.25%. We talk about it all the time, the fact that the deficits that this government continues to rack up—the multi-billion-dollar deficits—are someday going to come back and bite us, if we don't address these soon. This type of interest rate hike is going to cost us another \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion on the debt that we're paying for right now. That's going to go a long way in causing a crisis in our education system, in our health care system and in every social program that we provide in this province—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Point of order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, I stand on a point of order. My point of order is: On September 19, 2013, in order paper question 317, I inquired of the Minister of Finance to explain the method in which he plans to address, using generally accepted accounting principles, the \$1-billion gap from the 2012 budget to the 2013 Ministry of Finance documents related to the government's planned divestment of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. The Clerk has informed me that this is now overdue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Minister, I want to remind you that you are required, under standing order 99(d), to file a response within 24 sessional days. Your response is now

overdue, and I would ask that you give the House some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Madam Speaker, I'll be delighted to bring to the attention of the Minister of Finance the intervention this afternoon and determine to have the answer to the question at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you.

Further comments and questions?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to make a comment on the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton's presentation. It was an excellent presentation. He got into the rights in the charter of Canadians to have the ability to bargain collectively. I don't believe that this present government honoured that position, and I don't believe the former government honoured those positions.

My biggest fear is that collective bargaining is now being used as a political tool in our province to pressure groups of people to go one way or the other or not at all. Also in collective bargaining, we found that a lot of the legislation has forced them back to work before they had a chance to have collective bargaining. They've ordered the transit workers back. They ordered, I believe, the professors at York back.

Interjection: Postal workers.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, and the postal workers. They've done this all over our country. I really believe the Charter of Rights has been infringed on more than one occasion by these last governments, and it continues.

Collective bargaining is a basic right of Canadians. The ability to do collective bargaining is their right, and it has been infringed upon by not just the federal government but also the provincial governments, and that's wrong. These governments have no right to be stepping on the feet of collective bargaining units in this province, using it as a political tool to gain support from the other sectors of our population.

It's wrong; it's wrong-headed. It's moving in the wrong direction. It's setting a precedent in this province for future shutdowns, work stoppages and confrontations outside this building. It's a very sad state of affairs where we're headed. It should be stopped now. They've got to honour collective bargaining. They've got to honour the right of unions to exist and to do their bidding, and they're not doing that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Further comments?

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's a pleasure to stand up today to speak about Bill 122. I guess the bottom line is that we need to continue to move forward with education and strengthening it in this province. I know under the Conservative government 10 years ago, when I became a school

board trustee—a decade ago actually this month—I got involved because of what the Conservative government was doing in education.

I support any type of improvement in the collective bargaining process here in the province of Ontario because I know back in 2003 we were really in a tough situation here in Ontario. One out of every three students in the province of Ontario was dropping out of school under the former Harris government. In addition to that, even this building—you couldn't get into this building. There were protests right around the building. You couldn't get in to see anyone who was actually working for the government. People were being locked out.

I think if you actually took the total of lost education days for all the students in the province—

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: It was 23 million strike days.

Hon. Michael Coteau: It was 23 million strike days, lost days for our students here in the province of Ontario.

I'm pretty impressed with the improvement we've made over the last 10 years. Collective bargaining, of course, and working with all stakeholders has placed us in a better situation. We know now that one in five students is not successful in our schools, but it's a huge improvement from one in three dropping out. So we are making major gains. We've been recognized internationally for the work we've done in education here in the province of Ontario. We need to continue to invest. Making sure that we get the current relationship with all stakeholders right in this province is the best thing we can do to move forward, and I think Bill 122 does exactly that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank all the members who added their voice to the debate. Thank you for that.

I want to just wrap up with my last two minutes on some of the lasting problems that we can work on, that this bill doesn't really address and that it should address.

One of the fundamental problems in our province when it comes to the education system is the funding formula. That's really at the heart of many, many problems that are facing a great number of communities. Particularly in the Peel region and in my riding, one of the major factors that's impacting our community is the fact that the formula that's being used right now is a formula that's out of date, that doesn't reflect the population. Communities that are booming, in terms of growth, in terms of population, are not getting an amount of funding proportional to their population. It's just fundamentally unfair. It's resulting in a serious shortage in terms of infrastructure and space. It's creating some severe problems.

One of the other issues that is particularly concerning to me, and this bill doesn't address it, is the fact that in communities with new Canadians who need ESL services and ESL programs, while the funding seems to be there—and the need is certainly there, because we know that our population, in terms of new Canadians, is growing and increasing—there aren't the classrooms;

there aren't the actual services available. That's an area of question for me. I'm concerned about that, and I know my constituents are concerned about that.

At the heart of it, this bill doesn't address those underlying problems. I'm asking this government to look at that funding formula and make sure it's appropriate, make sure it represents the communities and make sure that it's up to date. I urge you to get to work on that.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

As the second largest ministry in terms of expenditures—it is very important that changes to our education system be examined today. When we consider the precarious condition of the province's finances, we need to examine any changes this government proposes to make, with a fine-tooth comb. I'm glad to be able to be part of that process today, Speaker.

Last year the Ministry of Education spent more than \$22 billion, about \$11,000 per student. Taxpayers have been asked to spend \$8.5 billion more than they were asked to spend in 2003. Meanwhile, we have 250,000 fewer students than 10 years ago.

How will this bill help ensure that we realize value for those taxpayers? How will this bill help us improve the outcomes for Ontario students in an increasingly competitive and global marketplace? How does this bill directly impact some of what ails our education system? We should be talking about fixing what ails our education system, but this bill doesn't do that.

This is a process bill. This bill is about teachers and school boards and governments. What parents and constituents are really concerned about, and what they're contacting my office about, is, "What is my child learning? Why is there duplication in the system? Where is the value for the money? Why is this government imposing its values on my child and my school board?" This is what parents and taxpayers are concerned about when it comes to education policy.

Each piece of legislation needs to be evaluated on how it impacts the quality of education for our students. Sometimes we forget who the education is there to serve. It's to serve the students. That is where we measure our performance. What we should be talking about today is students and their parents and the outcomes. But the government has chosen to talk about process, so now I have to participate in that discussion and do some additional talking about process.

Bill 122 is an education process bill that attempts to undo the impact of the last education process bill, which was Bill 115. Speaker, at the time of Bill 115, the PC caucus proposed a process of our own. It was called an across-the-board wage freeze. If it were followed, we wouldn't be in the predicament we find ourselves in today. Our process was not to pit teachers against nurses against police officers against MPPs and against other public servants. Our process was to recognize the fiscal crisis we are in and take action.

The government had a different process. By singling out teachers, the government chose a process that upset the unions and the school boards, and eventually impacted students and their parents. I mention this, Speaker, because it's important to remind ourselves how we got here to make sure that we can find our way back.

And so we get to the meat of Bill 122: to provide greater clarity to the roles of the different parties in collective bargaining in the education sector. It is appropriate that the government's role in the collective bargaining process will be formalized, as it is in this bill. When the government is spending more than \$20 billion on something, they need to have a say on how that money is spent. Granted, this bill does that.

Of course, no one knows the unintended consequences that will arise out of this bill. No one will completely foresee how Bill 122 will impact all of the stakeholders. It will take at least one round of negotiation to give us some idea of the impacts.

We know that unintended consequences are a common feature of legislation emanating from this government, and we need to account for that. We need to learn from history. Indeed, this very bill itself is a result of the unforeseen consequences of Bill 115. So we must be good economists and good legislators and make provisions for the unseen consequences of Bill 122.

That is why we need to include a provision to review the legislation after one cycle of bargaining is complete. To us, Speaker, that's a very, very important component. This is something that would allow the education partners to give feedback as to what worked and what didn't work, what achieved our aims and what was an unseen and perhaps unwelcome consequence. Most importantly, it would allow a review of the unseen impact on students and on their learning outcomes.

Let's learn from Bill 115. Let's learn from the past so that we don't repeat it. I'm not saying how it has to happen, whether it's a legislative committee or whether it's a ministerial consultation, but I am saying it should happen one way or another.

One area of this bill where I think we could see some unforeseen consequences is where this bill perhaps places on the bargaining table matters that are rightly the purview of the Ministry of Education. If we're going to place regulation 274 and everything else in education policy on the table for negotiation, what are we here for?

I think it's important that we recognize that not everything should be open to negotiation, not everything is up for grabs. We have a responsibility to students and to parents to ensure certain outcomes. We have a responsibility to make sure the hands of school boards are not tied so that they cannot achieve those outcomes. We have to be mindful of all of the stakeholders here, not just those around the bargaining table. If the intent of this bill is to ensure that all aspects of education policy will not be subjected to legislation from this Legislature and can actually be totally removed from this Legislature and only subject to the collective bargaining table, then there are issues that we have with that process.

I also want to speak about the parents. Of all the stakeholders in this process except for the students themselves, parents have the greatest interest in what happens in the education system. Parents are most affected by the decision we will make on Bill 122. Yet parents have been seemingly shut out of this process and this discussion. They are partners too. I'm concerned that they seem to have very little role in setting the education policy of the province of Ontario. So we need to consult with parents more. We need to include parents more in the process. As we consider Bill 122, we should think about the role of parents and students in the education system and include them among the list of those who we consider partners in our education system.

Speaker, Bill 115, while very flawed, at least demonstrated that the previous Premier and finance minister, though belatedly, seemed to fleetingly recognize that this province is facing a financial crisis.

The government is hoping that by not focusing on the real problem, we can be distracted. The taxpayers and voters will be distracted. I can tell you the bond market will not be distracted. The bond market will not be fooled by process bills. The bond market does not care how much consultation and conversation takes place. They want the government to get serious about its spending problem and so do taxpayers.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we're spending \$8.5 billion more on education than we were 10 years ago, and we have 250,000 less students. Are the students benefiting? Are parents benefiting? As my colleague the member from Cambridge outlined in his opening comment on all this, it isn't clear that those 250,000 fewer students are indeed benefiting. There's evidence that the concerns of parents and taxpayers that I hear in my office are valid. There is evidence that simply throwing money at a problem is not a solution, that we need to look for other solutions, actual solutions. When we set education policy, we need to focus on the outcomes to students and their parents. These are our ultimate partners in education. These are whom we are here to represent.

As I come to the close of my arguments on this legislation, I would say, let's recognize what's worthwhile in Bill 122, but let's not forget that education and policy are to be set here, not at the bargaining table. We need to talk about putting regulation 274 back on the table. As the government is putting forward Bill 122, let's remember that this is a result of unforeseen consequences of Bill 115, and let's not repeat that mistake. Let's make provision in the legislation to come back and review, to come back and consult with all of our partners in education to make sure we get it right.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to stand in this House and speak on behalf of residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane and respond to the member from Nipissing.

Several times in this House today we've heard that we're wasting our time debating here and this should go to committee. Although on many occasions I don't agree with the member from Nipissing, he did further this debate. I think that's something we have to keep in mind, that this

is a very important job we fulfill, and when we bring issues to the table, which he has done—it's something we should all remember. It's an important thing.

One of the things that we should also add to the table is that although this is a process bill, process by itself—if you ignore process, like we did, like the other two parties did with Bill 115, because we voted against it—Bill 115 ignored process and tried to shove something down the people's throats, and that's why it failed. That's why process is important, but it's a very small part of the whole education spectrum, and you can't look at it in a vacuum. You can't ignore process because when you ignore it totally, then you get what we had with Bill 115, which was mayhem.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: With reference to education and the deep support and commitment that our government has had for the past 10 years on harmonizing the education system, on building children's futures and preparing them for the world of tomorrow, I would simply offer this observation: that a teacher affects eternity. He can never tell where his influence ends.

In distinction to other governments that have preceded us, whose job it was to foster crises—I call that the Snobelen effect, as you will remember—I think we have gone the extra mile in order to build our children's futures. My colleagues of course have detailed many, many of the different initiatives, but I think we need to move ahead and let's get this legislation passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Todd Smith: It's always a pleasure to bring comments following the remarks of our finance critic and our member from Nipissing, Mr. Fedeli, who has his finger on the pulse of what's happening in the economy, as you very clearly heard moments ago when he was speaking for 10 minutes on this bill and the situation that we find ourselves in in the province of Ontario.

The fact that we continue to throw money at these problems—it's very clear to me that during the caucus meeting of the government today they would just like to forget that last fall ever happened, and they're trying to remind everybody who is watching this afternoon or anybody who might be following this debate that they're the reason for the chaos in our education system that occurred last fall. They were the ones who designed Bill 115, which caused chaos in our schools.

The member who just spoke in regard to the comments from our member from Nipissing would have you forget that they were responsible for that. It was their government that brought in Bill 115. It was the first glimmer of recognition that we here in the official opposition, saw from this government in 10 years that they had any kind of an idea that there was actually a problem with the financial situation in the province.

Often, you'll hear about hitting rock bottom. Well, we are at rock bottom now. We're at rock bottom. As I alluded to earlier, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has advised the Bank of Canada that they might have to jack up our interest rates by double,

which would cost us another \$2 billion a year in interest paid on our debt. They have created the situation that we find ourselves in. As you heard from our critic for finance, Mr. Fedeli, we're the party, and we are going to be the government, that's going to bail us out.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's an interesting comment from the last speaker that they are going to be the government; that remains to be seen. I'm not sure about that.

In reference to the member from Nipissing's comments about parent involvement, I'm not quite sure where he's going with that. I don't know if it's politically expedient for him to mention the parents, but the bottom line is, we do have parent councils. We do have school board trustees. We do have school boards that deal with this daily. People in this Legislature do not deal with educational problems daily. We put down the legislation, but the legislation is always advised through teachers' organizations and through school boards. They come and advise us. I don't think the interference of any government should be allowed at that level. That's why we have collective bargaining, that's why we have school boards, that's why we have trustees and that's why we have parent councils. They know best—not the people sitting in this room.

When the member says that more parents should be involved, a lot of parents are involved as we speak, they are all the time, and they certainly bring their concerns forward to our local representatives, whether it be city council, whether it be the trustee or whether it be the board. That's an ongoing process, and it's a good process. It's a healthy process. It's a democratic process that has been around this province from day one.

I'm really not quite sure where he's trying to get more involvement. We couldn't have any more involvement than we've got now. In fact, sometimes we're overloaded with involvement. There are too many so-called experts in education who aren't experts. Leave it to the people who do it every day. A good general does not tell the guys in the trenches or the captains what to do. He sits at headquarters and passes on an order, but he's not the guy doing the fighting; it's the people in the trenches.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to thank the members from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Etobicoke North, Prince Edward–Hastings and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for their commentary.

Our caucus has tried to work with this government to clear the deck so that we can talk about the economy. We've tried to clear the deck so that we can work with this government to meet head-on the crisis they created: a spending addiction so out of control that we have three times the per capita deficit of California; a debt problem so huge that we are the seventh largest non-sovereign consumer of debt on the planet. We are here today talking about an education process bill designed to fix the effects of the last education process bill because this government has absolutely nothing to say on economic issues.

As I stated in my most recent Fedeli Focus on Finance, which you can download at www.fedeli.com—you can now download that. It's the Fedeli Focus on Finance concerning the fall economic statement. It's clearer than ever that the government has no plan to balance the budget. For the first time, the government spoke openly about the possibility of not even meeting its own modest deficit reduction targets. While Bill 115 is very flawed, it at least demonstrated on the fringes, and belatedly and almost fleetingly, that the province has a crisis that we're facing, a financial crisis.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane, in this case in regard to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2013.

As some of the other speakers have stated, this is a bill about process, about wage negotiations within the education system. But you can't speak about that in a vacuum. If you're going to talk about the education system, you have to talk about the system as a whole to put this bill into context.

I think we can all agree, all of us as legislators—I hope we can all agree—that publicly funded education is one of the pillars on which the success of this province is built. I think we can all agree that it's a system under stress. We will disagree as to why and where, but I think we can all agree it's under stress.

I'd like to point out a couple of areas in my northern rural riding where—and who we're talking about here. It's our kids and their education and where the stresses are. A big issue in my riding—it has to do with the funding formula—is the closure of rural schools. It's a constant threat throughout the north and throughout, I think, all rural parts of the province, and probably some urban parts of the province as well, but my riding is all rural. I've had two lately, Charlton-Savard and Cobalt Public, and they've been the latest victims. This has pitted townspeople against the school board trustees, because they blame the school board. In reality, they're both fighting the same enemy. They're fighting because the provincial funding formula does not recognize the role of the small rural school.

The school is the hub of the community, and when it's closed, the fabric of the town starts to fray and sometimes is irreparably damaged. This has happened many times across the north. But the real victims are the students who spend several hours on the bus every day. Parents take a leap of faith every day when they send their kids to school, all parents do. But imagine when your local school is closed and you have to send a six-year-old on an hour or longer bus ride on northern roads at 30 below. That's not conducive to a good education. In some cases, these children pass by a shuttered school.

Some people will say or think, “Well, why do people live there, then? Why are small towns, why are small schools important?” Well, because rural infrastructure is what this province is built upon—in my riding, the farms, the mines, the mills, the people who work there. They need skilled, quality people. People research where they move to based on the services they can get,

based on the hospitals, based on the doctors, based on the education that their young families can get.

If there's no school or if you have to drive or if they have to spend an hour and a half each way on the school bus, it's going to make a determination on whether that plant, that mine or those farms can get the quality, skilled people they need. That's something that the funding formula doesn't recognize. Maybe it's something that the funding formula can't recognize. But somehow in the structure of things it's going to have to be recognized, because it's one of the things that's holding a lot of non-urban businesses back. It's holding a lot of communities back, because there are people who—in my riding, we have jobs. We don't have a jobs shortage. We actually have a shortage of people for some occupations, for skilled occupations. But one of the things holding them back is—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: But they don't pick those communities, because there's no school. It's something we have to get over and understand that.

Another thing: Even in the schools that aren't in trouble or that are still operating and are fairly solid, because of the way the funding formula is structured, there is a severe lack of funding for special-needs kids, people who need special help with language and other special needs. They are not as available in small rural schools as they should be. Once again, when a family is looking for a place to live and the job is there, they're going to look at things like that. That's something that doesn't directly relate to this but it does relate to education, and it does relate to the future of our province and to the prosperity of all parts of our province, because for our province to return to the prosperity that we remember, we are going to have to look at all parts of the province. There is a lot of potential in the rural areas in northern Ontario, but that's one of the things that's holding us back.

Getting back to the bill itself, Speaker, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, it is a bill about process. In itself, that's not a bad thing, because process is one of the things that legislators should discuss, because if you don't get process right, you get big problems; you get mayhem. That's what we got with Bill 115. We got a government bill. I'm not saying that there weren't problems in the payment process or in the school board process, in the negotiations process, but they made it a lot worse by creating a crisis.

Some will say, "Why would they bother creating a crisis? Why would they bother losing the respect of all the players, not just the unions, but the school boards? Why would they do that?" The sad thing is, they did that for one seat. Why would they do that for one seat, for one by-election? They did that to try to get a majority. That's sad, actually, because a minority Parliament can work. But when you make all your decisions—or, in that case, a huge decision—based on just jockeying to get a majority, that's when you get big problems.

And that led to—again, who were the victims? Who were the victims of that jockeying? All the people involved in the education system, but the biggest victims were the kids: the kids who didn't get extracurricular activities; the kids, basically, whose education suffered because of the

lack of—no one knew where they were going at that time. It was a crisis that just—it's hard to explain what happened. My kids were there too, and it was hard to explain. It was hard to tell your constituents what was actually happening, and why it was happening.

This bill, Bill 122—it's funny, if you think about it. Bill 122 has been introduced to fix the problems caused by Bill 115, the problems caused by a bill put forward by the government and proudly supported by—

Interjection: Our friends.

Mr. John Vanthof: —by our friends in the Conservative Party.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Your uncle too.

Mr. John Vanthof: My uncle too—no problem.

So is Bill 122 an improvement over Bill 115? Yes, because I think this one does attempt to respect the collective bargaining process and this one does officially put everyone at the table. Are there problems with the bill? Yes. Should this bill go to committee? Yes. But should this bill be fully discussed in this House by everyone who wants to talk and everyone who feels they can bring something different to the table? Because, Speaker, I have been listening to this, sitting here in the House and also watching in my office, and everyone has brought something different to the table. That's our job, and that's something we should hold very dear. This bill should be brought forward to committee, but it should be fully discussed here so that we can bring the best changes we can in committee to serve the people we should be serving here, the future of our province: the students of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to thank the member for his comments, but I think we do have a bit of revisionist history going on here this afternoon.

This bill addresses the problem that was created when the Conservative government of Mike Harris removed taxation rights from school boards. We have never, ever since then had a proper collective bargaining system in the school board sector.

For the first time since Mike Harris changed the law, we actually now have legislation that provides a role for all the players at the table. The government will be there as the funder of the system, the school boards will be there as the employer, and the unions, of course, will be representing the workers.

I think we need to get on with it. The member was absolutely correct when he said that we need to get the bill into committee, because that's where we can discuss any fine-tuning. So we just need to get this second reading on the road and get it out of here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate again. I've had an opportunity to speak a number of times here this afternoon on this bill and I've neglected a very important bit of news, Madam Speaker. My wife is a high school teacher and a member of the OSSTF at Moira Secondary School in east end Belleville. And for the second straight year, the Moira senior Trojans are going to be playing in the National Capital Bowl. The big game is this Saturday afternoon at noon at Centennial Secondary School, which is their archrival. I'm not exactly sure why they're playing there, but they have a nice turf field, so maybe that's it. They are going for their second straight National Capital Bowl on Saturday. So good luck to the Moira Trojans and coach Dwayne Lambert, and Dave Corbett and all that crew.

Anyway, my wife is a great teacher. She was upset by what the government did back in September of last year. And they seem to forget that they are the government; they are the ones that are responsible for bringing Bill 115 to the floor of this Legislature. They want to talk about stuff that happened 15 years ago, but they're completely forgetting the fact, Madam Speaker, that the Liberal Party of Ontario has been governing this province for the last 10 years and they keep digging that hole deeper and deeper. They've spent \$8.5 billion more on education since they took office, for 250,000 fewer students. And that money isn't going into football programs at Moira. That money isn't going into music programs. That money isn't going into improving the curriculum for the students in our schools. That money is almost 100% going into the pockets of members of the Working Families coalition, Madam Speaker. That's the bottom line. That's why we have this bill today and that's why they're trying to distance themselves from what they did last fall.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I must say that every time I'm in this House I certainly get the odd shock. This was certainly another shock. I do believe Bill 115—who voted for that? Oh, the Liberals and the Conservatives. So your wife must have been mad at you too. We voted against it. I just wanted to clarify that for the viewers today.

Secondly, I can't believe they throw rocks at each other. I do remember the Harris days because my wife's a teacher too. Believe me, you are not high on her list of favourite parties.

I can safely say, though, when I listened to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane talk, he certainly hit on some points that are very important about rural schools. Rural schools are not just schools; they are community centres. They are used for after-hours things: for dances, for basketball, for floor hockey. It's a very important cog in the wheel of rural life. And when we close them, and force our kids to take three- and four-hour bus rides in the morning to school and then back, they spend more time on the bus than they do in the classroom. By the time they get to school, they're half asleep. So I think a little bit of organizational changes, a little bit of common sense, could prevail in rural schools and rural communities, and they don't.

You want to talk about urban centres. Let's talk about Hamilton, one of the largest cities in Ontario. You're closing one third of our high schools, because we can't afford to keep them open on this funding formula. It's brutal. I don't know why the government would be waving the flag of victory. When you take a look at Hamilton schools, our board gets slaughtered with not

enough financing. A lot of it goes to Toronto, but they sometimes forget about the other cities that are large in Ontario that need help too. We have to get a handle on the big picture, folks, because we certainly don't have it.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his remarks. I totally agree: Publicly funded education is our most important responsibility as legislators for our children.

There's a lot of fodder this afternoon to continue on. The fact of the matter is, we've had nine hours of debate—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Not enough.

Mr. John Fraser: Apparently, from that side, that's what I'm hearing.

We've had nine hours of debate. We all agree on this.

So the second point I agree with the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane on is that minority governments can work. Let's just get this bill to committee so minority governments can work.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has two minutes to respond.

Mr. John Vanthof: First of all, I'd like to thank the Minister of Education, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the member from Ottawa Centre—

Mr. Paul Miller: Ottawa South.

Mr. John Vanthof: Ottawa South—my apologies.

First, to the Minister of Education: I agree. A lot of this problem started when the Harris government took away the ability of the school boards to tax and took a lot of the money out—that's where a lot of the problems started. But the temperature of the problem was increased a lot with Bill 115.

To the member from Prince Edward–Hastings: Go, Trojans! But, in a minority Parliament, it takes two parties to pass a bill. For Bill 115, if we voted against and you voted against, Bill 115 wouldn't have happened. So it takes two in a minority Parliament—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: But on Bill 115, you were the proppers of mayhem.

For the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, I'd like to thank him for his remarks. I agreed with everything he said.

The member from Ottawa South, if you really look at the big picture—and to the folks at home, we're talking about billions of dollars—whether it takes nine hours or 15 hours or 20 hours, in the big picture, if we can make one thing better with those extra hours, is that really—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: I think every member here has brought something forward that might not be brought forward in committee, and if you don't believe that, why are you sitting here?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Before I start my debate, I just wanted to make an announcement: My spouse is not a teacher. I think I'm about the only one in this building today whose spouse is not a teacher.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill. I do want to commend my colleague from Cambridge for his work on this education file. I kind of admire him because he is such a critical thinker. He has jumped into this file with both feet and has made some very pertinent comments in this House regarding education in general and, in particular, this bill.

Every time I hear him talk on the subject, it's clear that—as he himself is a former educator—the education of our young people is something he's passionate about. It's refreshing to take on our education system because, at the end of the day, the education of our children is vitally important to our economic competitiveness.

The apparatus by which we deliver education to our children, the body responsible for ensuring every child is able to reach their full potential, is the Ministry of Education. To provide some perspective on the scope and scale of our education system, let's consider a few facts. As of 2012-13, the number of students in Ontario was 2,031,205. That's a lot of children; it's also a lot of families that directly interact with our educational system.

Bill 122 talks a lot about education stakeholders—the teachers, the support workers. But it is as a parent—families with children in our education system comprise one of the largest stakeholder groups, and any piece of legislation must take into account their needs and requirements. The ministry is responsible for delivering something of value to Ontario.

The end resource we expect the ministry to produce is an educated group of young people. The quality of this process is measured by how well our children are educated in relation to the rest of the world. To produce this mass of educated young people, the ministry oversees 3,978 elementary schools and 913 secondary schools. The budget for education is \$21 billion, with a total capital investment of \$1.4 billion, which makes it the second-largest line item in the provincial budget. This is a very big ministry, and it's an important ministry.

Certainly from the PC perspective, we have expressed deep concern over the fiscal mismanagement of this government because we feel it threatens vital services like health and education. By the same token, for a ministry that spends as much money as the Ministry of Education, we want to make sure that we're getting a bang for the buck, a return on our investment.

When I say "a return on our investment," I'm not referring to simple money in and money out. A well-educated and skilled workforce generates many difficult-to-quantify benefits for our economy and society as a whole. Education as an investment is arguably the most important for the future of our province. For us legislators, it's imperative that we demand high performance from our education system, particularly when the investment is so large and there is so much at stake.

I will discuss the notion of return on our education dollars in a few minutes because I think it's important and also speaks to the underwhelming aim of Bill 122, which in essence is nothing more than a process bill.

What I want to do right now is frame the debate around Bill 122 in the way my colleague from Cambridge did when he spoke about the bill a few weeks ago. A few weeks back, our party helped push forward a programming motion to clear the decks on some legislation that we all agreed on. The purpose of this was to allow the government to come forward with substantive legislation and policy to help bolster the strength of our economy.

As I've mentioned previously, education is a key piece to the long-term strength and competitiveness of our economy. It is the foundation on which we built a vibrant and prosperous economy. So a substantial education bill is certainly something that fits into our overall theme and vision for this province.

What metrics should we use to evaluate the substance of an education bill and whether it fits into this overall scheme? Again, I defer to my thoughtful colleague from Cambridge, who has laid out two simple metrics on which to evaluate the quality of an educational bill.

First, we need to judge each piece of legislation based on how it improves test scores and quality of education of our students, as well as how it respects and allows our front-line educators to perform their job of providing quality education.

Second, since we've established that parents are one of the largest stakeholders in our education system, any proposed legislation must defer to them. It's important to consider what the parents are saying about a particular policy issue as they interact with the system every day.

So how does Bill 122 stack up against these evaluation metrics? It's pretty clear that this bill has absolutely nothing to do with the actual front-line education of our children. There's no program or curricular change that really impacts anything on that front. As for the parent input in the case of the collective bargaining process, it's virtually non-existent.

While I'm here, I'd like to talk a little bit more about parental input. During the public fights that occurred over Bill 115, the debate that certainly dominated the headlines was between the province and the teachers' unions. Very simply, when it came to the province-wide agreements, they were the main players on either side of the bargaining table.

However, I'm sure that everyone here, like me, was inundated with many calls from parents in our ridings expressing their frustrations, opinions and ideas during that process. Whatever side of the debate these parents fell on—and there were plenty on both sides, I might add—they spoke solely from the perspective of the quality of their children's education. They speak from this perspective because they have the biggest, most singular stake in the game: to ensure that their children reach their full potential. Yet this collective voice gets relegated to the back burners, partly because they have no formal seat at the table.

Bill 122 defines its education partners narrowly to include the ministry, the teachers' federations and the school boards, yet the parents who sit on their children's school council are not considered a partner. So it is clear that our second metric to evaluate the substance of an education bill is not met.

At this point, let me be clear: I think it's a positive development to formalize the province's role in the collective bargaining process. The taxpayer must ultimately foot the bill for an agreement reached, and therefore it makes sense to have the province as a formal part of the process.

However, because this bill doesn't meet our two key requirements, it's noticeably underwhelming. It doesn't provide any measure that explicitly improves education. It effectively amounts to a change in the negotiation process—which, by the way, is a positive thing. However, considering the challenges our province faces economically, challenges that we intended this government to seriously address after passing that programming motion, this bill does not really measure up.

I'm starting to see a pattern here. Bill 105 is similar to Bill 122 in that it was introduced following the programming motion. It's a ministry bill and is intended as, or at least being sold as, a bill to address the monumental economic challenges Ontario faces. Bill 105, the Ministry of Finance's bill that will raise the health tax exemption for small businesses, is a bill we do support. However, when I spoke to Bill 105, I tried to lay out the disconnect between the bill's stated purpose of kick-starting private sector job creation and the fact that the total tax savings from the bill would only amount to \$975 per year, on average, for every single business. Again, it was a measure we supported, but we feel it is woefully inadequate to actually get the 600,000 people unemployed back to work.

That's what we have with Bill 122. It's a bill that we do think is a positive, albeit small, step. It doesn't enhance the front-line quality of our education and it doesn't bring the biggest stakeholder, the parents, into the fold.

This pattern of minor policy tweaks essentially amounts to the government getting into the boxing ring with the issues facing our province. The only problem is that our government is a lightweight and the issues are major heavyweights. This is a missed opportunity, because with a

more substantial bill we would be debating ideas on how to improve our education system. That's where education debates should be held.

Today, the Ministry of Education is spending \$8.5 billion more a year than in 2003. However, the most recent OECD data shows that Ontario's performance in mathematics has declined and we are now in 12th place. Mathematics education is becoming increasingly more vital in our digital age, and I think the member from Trinity–Spadina made the suggestion of having dedicated math teachers in the classroom to ensure the highest quality of education. I think that's a good idea and an idea worth having a discussion about. However, this bill doesn't afford us the opportunity to talk about ideas like this, ideas that are actually geared to enhancing the quality of education we provide our young people.

This brings me back to my original argument: Education is a vital investment, one for which the taxpayer provides a substantial sum of money and one in which the stakes are incredibly high. Debating the quality of the education relative to the dollars we spend is a worthy debate, a debate that has implications for the future of our education policy and our economy.

Given our shaky performance in various international studies, it is even more important that we focus our precious time here in the Legislature debating ways to increase our test scores and therefore enhance our overall educational process.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions.

Mr. Paul Miller: I appreciate the comments from the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London. However, the bottom line is this: We can stand here and criticize the education system in our province. We can criticize our test scores. We can do all these things, but I would ask the member: What are you going to do to fix it? Are you going to fix it just by legislation, or is it going to cost more money?

He calls it a vital part of our system. Well, the system needs more money. The funding formula is wrong. Too many schools are closing. Now he's questioning our test scores. Is it our teachers? Is it the curriculum? Is it the management? Is it the ministry? He's not narrowing it down to where the actual problems are that we can fix. But when you fix things, it costs money. So I don't know where the official opposition is going to get the money to throw more money into education when we've got, as he said, 600,000 people out of work.

So you can't have your cake and eat it too. You're going to create jobs, you're going to improve the education system, and you want to improve the health system. Well, my friend, it all costs money. So when you come out with a fiscally responsible way to finance all these criticisms that you have, I'll be watching and listening.

I just got a form here; I believe it's called the Fedeli Focus on Finance. Well, let's have a look at Miller Money Management. What I'm saying is, I think that we can all play a role, Speaker, in improving these situations, but everyone seems to forget that no matter what you do, it costs money. When you're born, it costs money, you pay taxes, and when you die, it costs you money. So when they figure that one out, they'll be ahead of the game.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments and questions?

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by taking to task, or, I should say, asking the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane if you understand the process of legislation. You keep saying that if we could just make the bill better—and that somehow arguing this endlessly here in this chamber would help you make the bill better. But the fact of the procedure is, the first chance we're going to get to make amendments is not going to be in the Legislature; it's going to be when that bill gets to committee. We cannot change this bill, even if we wanted to, as long as it's being debated here. So if you are really, really serious and you get the process—

Interjections.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: No, he said that. He said—

Interjections.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: No, no. I know exactly what I'm doing. All right.

It's a lesson for both the Tories and the NDP. How about that?

If you guys are really serious about making this a better bill, you ought to know you can't do this by arguing this. We've already argued it for 10 hours. Arguing it for the 11th hour won't make it better. The first chance we are going to get to fix it is going to be in committee, so if you are serious about it, let's get it to committee.

Otherwise, to all the viewers, all I can say is, they are playing games, they are playing politics, because you cannot make it a better bill here by arguing—

Interjections.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: —you have to get it to committee. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's always so wonderful to be here at the 10-to-6 hour. It tends to get a little more fun around this place, and it's kind of—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You should have been here at 10 to midnight in the old days.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Yes, I'll bet the old days were even more fun.

I want to comment on the member's 10-minute speech. He talked about the fact, and he opened the door to the fact, that our party has cleared the decks to be able to talk about jobs and the

economy. We got rid of the tanning bed legislation—all very important legislation. The tanning bed, the door-to-door salespeople—we got rid of all of these.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: What about Bill 105?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Oh, I'm coming to 105. Don't worry.

We got rid of all of these, albeit important, bills that don't really drive the economy or have anything to do with creating jobs. We did that, and what do we see? The first bill that comes out from this government, after we cleared the decks so that there are no impediments in the way of talking about creating jobs and putting people back to work, was a bill to create a 1-800 number for animals. Again, it's a very important bill; however, not the kind of bill we cleared the decks for to create jobs in the economy—a 1-800 hotline for animals. Following quickly on its heels was the bill about smoking on patios—again, a very, very important bill. There's no question that there is a time and a place for these. But we've cleared the decks, Speaker, for these.

When they did finally bring a bill that may remotely have something to do with jobs and the economy, Bill 105, which we supported, they sent it to the wrong committee. Which committee did they send it to? Well, they did not send it to the finance committee. Instead, they sent it to the wrong committee. There's something wrong over there.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to stand in the House today. I was going to comment on the speech made by the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: However—

Mr. John Vanthof: —However, I would like to respond, through you, Speaker, to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville. I very well understand the process. I was elected by the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane to bring forward their views in this House. I do so at every opportunity.

Although this is a process bill, it's about education. Rural schools are very important in my riding. The fact that we can't get qualified people to come work in my riding because schools are closing is an extremely important issue in my riding. The fact is there are kids in my riding that can't have access to speech therapy. Someone comes and says, "Oh, yes. You need this service, but we can't provide it. We will see you three months from now." Those are things that have to be brought up in this House.

The reason I'm responding to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville and not to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London is because the issues have to be brought up in this House. I will continue to do that as long as I remain elected. I will always speak, at every opportunity, to the people on behalf of the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for London-Middlesex—

Interjection: Elgin–Middlesex–London.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): —Elgin–Middlesex–London has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his comments. I would like to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, even though she didn't really talk to me at all. It's all right; they haven't gotten my riding right all day. It's good. Member from Nipissing, thank you for your fine comments. Member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, you're the famous one that everyone wants to speak to. Maybe my final comments should be to you. However, I do stand with you on the fact of rural schools and the issues they're having.

It's not just a northern Ontario problem. I've got the French immersion school in my city of St. Thomas for the whole county of Elgin. We have one there, and it has been overcrowded because it's getting more popular to go to French immersion. Parents just got a note this week stating that if you live outside of St. Thomas from westward to the edge of Elgin county, next year all those kids that go to that school are now going to be put on an hour-long bus ride to Strathroy, which is out of my riding. It goes to Mr. McNaughton's riding. They're taking them to Strathroy because they have no plans on how to deal with the overcrowding, which they should have been working on years ago. But leadership comes from the top.

Mr. John Vanthof: The issue should be brought up in this House.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: It will be brought up in this House. I just thought it would be a pre-message in this debate today.

However, I do want to make a note that I didn't get to in my speech. I think a sunset clause does need to be added to this legislation so that we can review how well this legislation is going to work after the next round of negotiations. It's no use walking away from this legislation after it's done and then dealing with it five or six years down the road. If it's a failure, let's deal with it after the next round of negotiations. Put that sunset clause in there. It forces the government of the day, which I'm pretty sure is not going to be those across the way over there, to deal with a new form of collective bargaining and ensure that it's properly vetted out for the province of Ontario.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.