

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT
(SENIOR DRIVER'S CONDITIONAL LICENCE), 2009

Mr. Ramal moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 221, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to create an optional conditional driver's licence for seniors

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Ramal, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the chance to introduce a bill. It's important to me and important to many people across the province of Ontario. Normally I like to stand up and speak in support of and comment on many different bills. Today I am privileged and honoured to stand up and speak and debate and listen to many people talking about my bill, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to create an optional conditional driver's licence for seniors. If I had the chance to rename the bill, I would say Michelle Krohn, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to create an optional conditional driver's licence. I say that in the presence of Michelle Krohn, who is with us here today in the gallery with her daughter, Yvonne Racowiz-I guess I said it correctly this time-and also the vice-chair of CARP in London, Dan Procop, who came from London and St. Thomas this afternoon to be present to listen to debate about this important issue.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, all the time all of us, from both sides of the House-different parties, different governments, different people-talk about seniors and what we can do for seniors in Ontario to support them living independently in their homes without any support, and how we can give them the chance to be mobile, to move from point B to point Z without C or D or whatever-without any obstacles.

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Mrs. Krohn came to my office almost a year and a half ago. She was talking to me about the importance of this bill. I listened to her for a long time, explaining the importance of a conditional driver's licence for seniors.

She's an active woman, an active senior, a writer, an author, a publisher. She knows very well the importance of all these elements. She's a great advocate on behalf of seniors, not just in the city of London or the London area, but of seniors across the province. She knows a lot about the importance to seniors of being able to drive, to visit their daughters-in her case, to go to St. Thomas-to go to a shopping mall or a grocery store, or to go see a doctor without calling somebody to drive her wherever she wants to go. She's still fit; she's still able; she still functions very well mentally and physically.

For some reason, as you know, Mr. Speaker, we have one driver's licence across the province of Ontario, one condition for all people, whether they're young, adult or senior. Therefore, the driver's licensing system we apply to all the people in Ontario does not fit all populations, does not fit all ages, does not fit all circumstances, whether health or physical conditions. That's why she came and told me, "It's important to me."

I also heard that she contacted the member from Timmins-James Bay, Mr. Gilles Bisson; she referenced him in her letter. Because she doesn't live in his riding, he referred her to

my riding. She also contacted Mr. Bentley. But as you know, a cabinet minister cannot introduce a private member's bill, plus he's not the minister in charge of that portfolio. She came to my office and we talked. I was convinced. That's why I went to the Minister of Transportation and the minister responsible for the seniors' secretariat to tell about the importance of this bill to allow seniors to be able to drive in certain conditions.

In my bill, I referenced after 65. I got the 65-year mark not because every senior won't be able to drive after 65, or has to go through that exercise and get a special driver's licence. As you know, when we pass 65 years of age, we are called seniors. We become a senior automatically, according to the label, according to the law we use and practise in Ontario. That's why I used the 65 benchmark.

I know that many seniors past 65 still drive and have the normal driver's licence. But many others cannot obtain a driver's licence, maybe because they cannot drive at nighttime or cannot drive on the highways or cannot drive in certain conditions. That's why many other provinces in Canada promoted a conditional driver's licence.

For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador they have driving restrictions custom-designed to meet the driver's needs. Some of the most common restrictions are speed zone, daytime only, geographical region and adaptive equipment restrictions on drivers who have heart conditions. In Manitoba, for instance, restrictions include class or type of vehicle; convex mirrors on fender; daytime driving only; or specific geographic area in which they can drive. In Quebec, they have a special, flexible program that restricts some drivers to driving only in the daytime.

In some other jurisdictions, they have created different measurements. I go back to Manitoba. They have class 5 drivers. We have the G and regular driver's licences in Ontario. They have class 5 for people who have vision of 20/60. It gives them the ability to drive-not at nighttime and not on highways-in the daytime when weather conditions are good. Some provinces authorize people who cannot obtain the normal driver's licence to drive at certain speeds, with a label on the car, to drive at certain times or certain speeds or in certain zones.

As you know, we live in a huge province geographically. We cannot customize all driver's licences or the conditions according to Toronto measurements. We have a lot of people who live in different parts of the province. Only 27% of the people of Ontario live in the Toronto area, but the rest of the 13 million live in small cities like London or St. Thomas, or they live in the north, where the population is very, very small and the traffic is not huge, not big.

I think it's important for us, as elected officials in this House, in this place, to represent the people of Ontario, represent the infants, represent the children, represent the adults and represent the seniors. We have to act that way. We have to be balanced in every way in order to address all the issues concerning our population in the province.

In this case, I hope all the members from the different parties stand up and support this important initiative. As I mentioned earlier, we're not inventing the wheel here in the province of Ontario. Many other provinces already have some kind of conditional driver's licence for seniors and they give them a chance to drive. Well, according to CARP-I looked at the statistics-many people have a normal driver's licence and can drive anywhere, any time, but they choose to drive only in the daytime and do not go on the 400-series in Ontario or on highways such as the Queen Elizabeth Highway or the Don Valley in Toronto. They choose to drive inside the city or in the countryside, where the

traffic is very limited. Why, for some reason, do we want to block that huge population from driving where they are able mentally, and physically to a certain degree, to drive at certain times and in certain conditions? As you know, we talk all the time about the aging-at-home strategy to allow people to live at home when they become seniors. How can we help them out when we have taken all these provisions away from them?

Also, we live in a province where the population is aging on a regular basis, and the statistics are very clear. In the year 2011, we will have one million extra retirees. Our population of seniors in Ontario is almost 1.1 million. We're not talking about one or two or three or four; we're talking about almost a tenth of the population of Ontario as a senior population.

I think it is our obligation and duty as elected officials to deal with this issue in a professional matter. First, people are talking about safety. We're not talking about giving licences left and right without any conditions. But there are still those conditional driver's licences which allow seniors who cannot obtain a normal driver's licence, who cannot drive on the highways, who cannot drive at nighttime, to drive in the daylight, and also drive on the small roads. They'll also be subject to medical evaluation because we are also concerned about the safety of other people who drive on the road.

I hope all my colleagues from our government side and from the opposition side get the chance and the time to read this bill very well because it's important. I know many people watching us today, and especially the seniors, are looking forward to seeing the passage of this bill.

I had the chance last week to attend an event that was put on by Over 55. We have an organization called Over 55. They have chapters across the province. They deal with people who are past the age of 55 to help find a job and to help them fit into their communities. I get all the support from them too. They told me it's important. "When we get old, when we become seniors, it doesn't mean we're not able to do something for our community, or we cannot volunteer, we cannot work, we cannot do this and this and that. Please give us the chance and give us the ability to continue doing what we do on a daily basis, to continue giving back to our communities in our way. Give us the freedom to be able to visit our daughters, our granddaughters, our grandkids. Give us a chance to be able to obtain a job. Give us a chance to go to the grocery stores without any support from a neighbour or a daughter or a son. Please give us a chance to be mobile, to be able to go anytime we want to see a doctor. We want to go to the mall, to spend some time or do shopping."

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So this bill is important for many seniors across Ontario because this bill gives them the chance and ability to continue to connect with their loved ones, to be able to be independent to a certain degree and do something for themselves without any support from any organizations or families.

Thank you for allowing me to speak. I'm willing to hear from all sides of the House about the importance of this bill or the rejection of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Frank Klees: I, at the very outset, risk disappointing my colleague the member from London-Fanshawe. The reason for that is that I will not be supporting his bill—not because I don't agree with the intent, because I absolutely do. The objective is clearly to enable

seniors to be as mobile as possible, to give them the opportunity to drive legally and safely for as long as possible, and I cannot argue with that. I support that wholeheartedly. I approached this as not only the critic for transportation for the official opposition but also as a former Minister of Transportation and as someone who wrestled with this issue on, really, a very personal basis. That was through the eyes of my father, who as a senior citizen was intimidated every time he had to go back for that retesting as a senior. I was then Minister of Transportation, and I can tell you, I was lobbied by my father on a number of occasions on this issue. It actually prompted me to call in my deputy at the time to say, "What can we do here and what is the real problem?" We were on the verge, I believe, of actually resolving this issue when, as luck would have it, we had an election in 2003, and I woke up one day and I was no longer the Minister of Transportation. I ended up on this side of the House, and as happens when there is a transition of government, often these well-intentioned initiatives are sidelined. So I was actually pleased to see the issue come back before the House. But I believe that there is a better solution.

I'll tell you why I don't believe that to issue a seniors' driver's licence is the answer. First of all, I believe that to issue an age-specific conditional licence is, quite frankly, discriminatory, which is one of the reasons why I personally objected to the age of 80 as triggering that annual visitation to retest. I believe that there should be another test, and that is, quite frankly, the ability to drive safely. How do we achieve that? I believe we achieve that by simply putting restrictions on driver's licences, which is what I had proposed to the ministry at the time: that we proceed from a policy standpoint.

The reason I object to a seniors' driver's licence is because you don't have to be age 65 to have a night vision problem. You don't have to be age 65 to have challenges driving under certain conditions. We have a serious problem at the Ministry of Transportation right now, and that is in terms of how we handle medical disabilities and referrals by a physician to the Ministry of Transportation when someone has had a heart attack, a seizure or any particular other issue. Someone is obligated now, as a medical practitioner-if there is an examination that takes place and a medical practitioner has any reason whatsoever to believe that it may affect that person's ability to drive safely, they must refer that to the Ministry of Transportation. Anyone in this province who has been caught in that circumstance knows that overnight they lose their right to drive, and then to try to get that matter rectified through the process that exists now at the Ministry of Transportation is a nightmare experience. We need serious reform of that entire process within the Ministry of Transportation.

I believe that organizations such as CARP, the Ontario Safety League-and I want to welcome the representative from CARP here. We also did our research. I don't know if there's some misunderstanding within the organization, but let me read to you an e-mail that I received from Pam Maher, who's the advocacy and communications coordinator for CARP here in Toronto. I believe it's a national organization.

It reads as follows: "CARP supports a limited licence for competent drivers of any age who have impairments but are otherwise able to drive safely. This limited licence could include restrictions for night driving or on 400-series highways and would provide an alternative to an outright ban on driving. CARP cannot support any bill which has an age determination.

"CARP understands that the Ministry of Transportation is developing a policy on restricted driving and is of the view that this process should be accelerated."

That is from CARP, who, I think, based on the reading, basically agree with me that yes, we should have restrictions that aren't intended to restrict driving; it restricts driving under certain circumstances but actually frees up the individual to drive under circumstances that are safe.

I have a quote here that I'd like to read into the record as well from Brian Patterson, who is the CEO of the Ontario Safety League: "We oppose private member's Bill 221 as it has no administrative value and will bring no benefits to senior drivers. It will make Ontario the first provincial jurisdiction to isolate senior drivers in the way it does."

Again, I don't believe that this communication that I've read into the record in any way opposes the intent of my colleague's bill, but it does object to the means of getting there. And I have to object. I don't believe that we in this province should be issuing a specific conditional driver's licence just because someone is a senior citizen, just because they are age 65. I do believe, and strongly support and will advocate for a system of being licensed in this province that recognizes certain circumstances under which some people cannot drive safely. That can be done very simply, not by creating yet another class of licence, not by creating yet another driver's licence that categorizes people according to their age, but rather that accepts the fact that some people cannot drive in anything but daylight. So you put a restriction.

I have a little note on my driver's licence that gives me the right to drive a motorcycle. It's not a different driver's licence; it just simply indicates that I have some latitude within that driver's licence to do things other people can't do. In the same way, I believe that we can focus the Ministry of Transportation not to create additional administrative burdens. That's what I am concerned about. Every time we create another bill here, we add level upon level of additional administration. Now we have to hire another unit to look after the seniors' licences. Not that I'm against employment, but the leading employers in this province should be the private sector, not government. I believe there's a more efficient way of addressing this issue.

To the member from London-Fanshawe: I totally support your objective, and my father would be proud of me today that he hears me from the floor of the Legislature advocating for something that he wanted me to do while I was the minister. I lost the time to do that. Hopefully now the current minister, my good friend Mr. Bradley, will have the opportunity to consider the debate that's taken place here and to put in place a system that will in fact free up our seniors as well as anyone else, regardless of age, in this province who now has restrictions that keep them from being as mobile as they could be by implementing a system of simple administrative restrictions.

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I encourage the minister, while he's at this, to undertake a comprehensive review of his ministry's ability to process medical restrictions to ensure that people are not unnecessarily kept from mobility because of a laborious system within his ministry that fails to take into consideration current medical information that could free up people to drive on Ontario's highways.

I leave those considerations. I trust my colleague will take my remarks in the spirit in which they're intended. I will not be able to vote for this bill, but I'm happy to work with him on achieving the objective.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm pleased to join this debate. I want to say I will be supporting this bill and I'll give you the reasons why.

But first of all-I'm sorry; I got baited-I do need to respond to one thing that was said by my good friend Mr. Klees, and that is that one of the bases he is opposed to this on is that all of a sudden government becomes too big of an employer, there are too many people working for government. The first point I say is, look upstairs. Who are the people we hire? They're fire chiefs, firefighters, police, nurses, doctors, teachers. They're people who deserve our support and are essential to making sure that our society works. So yes, it takes people to deliver those services, and they work hard for the money that they get. I get a little bit upset when I hear that rhetoric from the Conservative Party that somehow or other it's a bad thing to have people working for the government, because we forget that those people do the very important work that is necessary for this province to function.

The second point I would make is this: We're a \$100-billion business. We have a \$100-billion budget in this province, and it's getting bigger. But if you looked at how many people work for the province of Ontario, if you were a corporation of \$100 billion, we hire far fewer people than the private sector. Because most of our-

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, this is much more efficient; trust me. Look at our health care system and go have this debate in the United States.

I would argue that if you're going to spend \$100 billion in the private sector versus \$100 billion in the public sector, the public sector is quite a bit more transparent. Frankly, we hire fewer employees because most of our money goes to some very basic things, such as making sure we have pensions for seniors, making sure we have, in case of need, unemployment insurance, yes, welfare, pensions for people on disabilities. Those monies go to support people.

I just want to say upfront that as a reason not to vote for this bill I find it a little bit hard to take. But anyway, that's my social democratic view. I respect Mr. Klees and his conservative view, but I've got to say I disagree.

I want to then talk about some of the reasons why I think this is a good idea and what we probably need to do at committee in order to make this even better, because I think we should allow this thing to go to committee.

I would ask Mr. Klees to think about that because one of the arguments you make-I understand-is the age discrimination issue. There are those within CARP and others who will argue that 65 years old-if you make it an age-based licence, it's age discrimination. I don't buy that to the same degree, but I understand the argument. Is a person who turns 65 who gets a pension being discriminated against? I don't think so. A child who turns-what is it, 18 or 19 to drink in a bar these days?

Interjection: Eighteen.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Eighteen years old. A child becomes a young adult at 18 years old. Are we discriminating because we don't allow them to drink before 18? No. These are arbitrary numbers that we've picked for reasons within our society. So if the issue is that, I again say that there are all kinds of other precedents out there where we use age for certain triggers in our society to make things happen. But I do understand that maybe what we need to do is-and I think this is what the member is trying to do-provide a

mechanism for a driver who says, "You know what? I ain't going to drive on the Highway 400 series any more. I don't want to drive at night. God, I don't even want to drive in downtown Timmins. All I want to do is get in my truck at the cottage and go pick up some wood, or I want to be able to drive to the grocery store, maybe the liquor store," and do the things that are necessary so that you can enjoy a reasonable life, living independently.

The question becomes, should the legislation say, "Well, this is available for you at 65 and, therefore, you can apply for a licence that has fewer conditions on it"-or it has more restrictions, I guess is the way I would put it. That's one approach. Or do we say to all drivers-you know, there may be drivers out there who say, "Listen, I don't feel safe driving on the Highway 400 series. I don't feel safe driving at night," because they may have a vision problem or whatever it might be, and maybe we should have a system for all drivers to be able to opt for a licence that has more restrictions.

I think that's a fair debate, but we should allow that debate to happen in committee and allow the bill to get out of this House so that at least we can have that debate. I think it's an interesting one, and I'll give Mr. Klees-he has thought out his argument well. I understand where he's coming from. I don't totally agree, but I understand the argument. I want to put this to some practical measure, and we all have seen the examples in our own homes and within our circle of friends and acquaintances in our communities. My mother, 78 years old, passed away last year. The thing that drove her over the top was that one of the problems she had for the last maybe seven or eight years of her life was a problem with her vision. So she had to go through a test to make sure that she had the vision to be able to drive, but they would also send her out on the driving test. Man, that would work up Mom. Mom would get worked up for two or three weeks, and her blood pressure would go about up here. She was just livid about having to go for that test-for a whole bunch of different reasons.

One reason is, "Well, first of all, why should I have to worry about some of the stuff that they're worried about testing? I don't do it. I don't parallel park. I never parallel parked in all of my life. I've got a big driveway. I have a house that allows me to do that." "I don't want to parallel park," my mother would say; "I don't drive at night. I don't see well enough." She herself understood her limitations, and she, like most of us, sees driving and getting a licence not as a right but a responsibility and understood that when she got behind the wheel, it wasn't just about her safety and possibly the safety of other passengers; it's also others who happened to be in contact with these cars as we're out on the streets-pedestrians, bikes, motorcycles and cars. So she understood, as a responsible adult, that she had certain responsibilities.

But the other reason she used to get really upset about it was: "Who are they, telling me, at 76 years old, that I don't know how to drive? Who are these people?" I'll tell you, we've seen that argument in our families, and we've seen that argument with our friends. It is a bit of a blow because we, unfortunately-or fortunately, as some of us will live long enough to see our elder years, our golden years. There's a certain loss of independence that a person goes through as they get older. You get to a point where your kids don't-well, kids sometimes don't listen to you when you're younger, but that's a whole other issue. But you get a little bit older and all of a sudden you're not needed as much. You play a very different role within the family. Your kids are much more independent. The grandkids don't drop in as much. People in society-you used to be in the centre of it; you

were the decision-maker, you were in business, you were in the labour movement, you were in politics or you did whatever. All of a sudden, you find yourself somewhat less valued because of what's happening in the circumstance of your life at that particular point.

That was the point my mother was at. It was one of the things that just drove her crazy, this, "Who are they to tell me I can't drive?" I understand that my mother had to go through that because she had a vision problem, but certainly we could have made that process easier for her. That's why I want to thank the member for bringing this forward, because I see this as a good compromise. Mom would have been able to have some dignity as she went through this and said, "Listen, I opt for a lesser licence. I don't need all of this other stuff; I need this. I can survive with that type of licence. If I have to do those other things, I've got my sons to do that, and I've got family and friends who can do that for me as well." That's fine.

I think of Camelo Bourdignon, who is a long-time supporter of mine and a good family friend of the Alberton family and the Daminiat family. At 80 years old, in perfect health, he decided to give up his driver's licence-Camelo, a strong, hard-working man who emigrated from Italy, who made his life here, like a lot of people who came as new Canadians; a very proud man, worked hard, raised his family and they all did well. But I've got to tell you, I remember talking to him as he was getting close to his 80th birthday. I said, "Mr. Bourdignon, you're turning 80 soon. How do you feel?" He said, "Mad as hell." I said, "Why?" He said, "They want me to go for a test, and I'm not going. I'm giving up my driving. I'm going to give up my licence."

It was the only mechanism that he and his wife had to be able to move from point A to point B. In many communities-and luckily for us in Timmins, we have transit, but that's not what he wanted to do.

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The only reason he used his car was to go from his house, which is to the side of the golf course, to the grocery store, which is down the road; yes, to the beer store or the wine store to get a case of beer or a bottle of rye-he made his own wine so he never had to worry about that. He used his car-actually his pickup truck-very infrequently.

Camelo made the point that he felt it was an attack on his pride and it was an attack on him to have to go through a test to prove that he can drive, even though, for all of those years that he's been in Canada, he had a safe driving record. For all of those years in Canada, he did what he was supposed to do, did it within the confines of the law and never got charged. He says, "Who are they to come all of a sudden and say that I'm too old and I can't drive?" Can you blame Camelo? I think he represents the views of many people who find themselves in that situation.

So I want to congratulate my friend who brought this idea forward. I think you did the right thing by going through your local member. We have very selected ability to do private members' bills, and I want to thank my good friend the member from London-Fanshawe for bringing this thing forward.

I think there will need to be a little bit of thinking at committee, and this is what this is all about. I'm sure that when we all draft bills-and I've done it myself-something is going to scream out at us and we say, "Ah, I should have done this," and that's what the committee process is about.

But the basic principle is the right one, and that is to give people an option about the type of licence they're going to have, that you don't have to be measured to a test that you don't want to be measured to because you know you might not be able to meet it because of circumstance, and allow people to say, "I'm going to be happy driving during the day, I'll be happy driving in my neighbourhood, and I'll be happy having certain restrictions, knowing that that's the limit of my ability to drive, but that's all I want." We want to give people the dignity that they need, especially in our golden years, to be able to have the pride of saying, "I've been a good driver, I've done a responsible job as a driver, and I'm not going to have to go through the many insults that having to go through that particular type of test would be."

So it's going to take some amendments, but at the end of the day, I think it is a step in the right direction, and I want to say we will be supporting this bill at this point and look forward to seeing it in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate?

Mr. Tony Ruprecht: Let me say at the outset that I will be supporting Mr. Ramal's Bill 221, to create an optional conditional driver's licence for seniors.

A driver's licence is really a ticket to independence; it is a ticket to freedom. I want to echo the words of my friend from Timmins-James Bay.

Before my mother passed away, it was almost a similar story. She could not drive at night, but she could certainly drive in the daytime. When they took her driver's licence away, she not only took that as an affront, but she really decided that from that moment on she became fairly useless, and I'm pretty sure that added quickly to her years.

Let's have a quick look at what other provinces are doing. Look at, for instance, Alberta: a special driver's licence for daylight driving only. Manitoba: a class of vehicle of type and, as the member from London-Fanshawe indicated, a class 5 driver's licence. Look at Newfoundland and Labrador: Driving restrictions are custom-designed to meet drivers' needs.

Prince Edward Island: Restrictions include daytime only. Quebec: Of course it's a whole different combination of restrictions here, but the program places an emphasis on what? On flexibility. Yukon—we wouldn't be the only ones.

So I'm really surprised, and I want to echo your words in a way. I'm really surprised at the member from Newmarket-Aurora. I know he tries to do the decent and the right thing. He tries. But he should also know the process around here. This is not cast in stone. This has the ability to be changed. We need you on the committee. We need you to come forward and say to the committee exactly what you said today, because it makes sense. You can make a big contribution as a former Minister of Transportation.

So we ask the member to change his mind. Stand up and be counted by saying yes, because you know the only way anything will get done around here is not by passing that "hot potato" on to the minister and saying, "Here, you'll fix it." No. Get into committee, please. We beg you, do the right thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ernie Hardeman): Further debate?

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde: Merci, monsieur le Président. C'est avec grand plaisir que je participe à ce débat du projet de loi 221, présenté par mon collègue de London-Fanshawe. Cela démontre aujourd'hui que notre député de London-Fanshawe est à l'écoute. Il est à l'écoute lorsqu'une commettante s'est approchée de lui pour lui parler de l'importance, pour nos aînés avec des faiblesses, vraiment, de temps à autre, de pouvoir continuer à

conduire leur automobile. On nous dit qu'il est très important puisque de plus en plus les personnes à la retraite rendent un grand service dans une communauté. Lorsque je dis « rendent un grand service »: ce sont des personnes qui se déplacent pour aller faire du bénévolat. Ce sont des personnes qui se déplacent de plus en plus pour se rendre dans des endroits comme la YMCA pour faire des exercices. Puis aussi, on dépend beaucoup de ces personnes-là pour participer à des activités sociales. Je pourrais dire que dans mon cas moi-même, mon épouse a plus de 65 ans et, même si elle pèse seulement 95 livres, elle est au gym à tous les jours de la semaine. Si elle ne pouvait pas avoir son permis, elle ne pourrait plus se rendre au gymnase à tous les jours pour participer avec les équipes de dames qui y participent.

Mais il faut dire qu'en Ontario, 65 % de nos aînés ont un permis de conduire. Lorsqu'on dit 65 %, ça veut dire que 35% ne détiennent pas un permis de conduire. Mais il faut toujours prendre en considération que dans ce 35 %-là, beaucoup de gens demeurent dans les secteurs urbains, où les transports en commun existent. Il faut se rappeler que dans le secteur rural, les transports en commun n'existent pas.

Je regardais : sur les 1 200 000 personnes en Ontario qui détiennent un permis de conduire, je dirais que lorsqu'on va procéder à l'acceptation de ce projet de loi-là, on pourrait dire que beaucoup d'autres personnes pourront bénéficier d'un permis de conduire.

Mais je vais vous apporter un exemple de deux personnes. Lorsque j'écoutais le député de Newmarket-Aurora, je dois dire qu'on devrait appuyer ce projet de loi-là. Si nous voulons revenir plus tard avec des points qui ont été soulevés, je suis d'accord avec lui. Je dois dire que dans ma circonscription-je vais vous donner l'exemple de Sylvain Dubois de St-Bernardin, en Ontario : la personne avait une faiblesse de sa vision, donc il voyageait en ATV. La police l'a arrêté parce qu'il prenait les routes de côté et ce n'était pas permis. La personne travaillait chez GM Ménard à St-Isidore. Il a fallu trouver un moyen de transport. Mais l'autre chose qui est survenu : son frère qui travaillait à Rockland, à 45 kilomètres de chez lui, n'avait pas le droit non plus, puis il avait 65 ans, de voyager avec un ATV. Donc, savez-vous de quelle façon il a poursuivi pour aller à son travail? Il voyageait avec un tracteur de ferme, 90 kilomètres par jour. Vous savez que nous avons le droit de conduire un tracteur sur les routes en Ontario. Mais on n'a pas le droit de voyager avec un ATV. Et puis là je dois dire à cette personne-là qu'elle mérite des félicitations, parce qu'ils devaient répondre.

Mais aujourd'hui on dit que lorsque ce projet de loi-là aura passé, on pourrait demander davantage, et puis la qualité de vie de ces personnes-là va augmenter. On dit toujours que si une personne se tient occupée, elle passera moins de temps dans les bureaux de médecin. C'est bel et bien vrai, cette position-là que beaucoup de gens prennent. Donc, on pourrait bénéficier de ces personnes-là qui sont à la retraite, et puis continuer à travailler vraiment et à faire du bénévolat dans les communautés lorsque ces personnes sont à l'extérieur.

Je vais soulever un autre point. Cette dame qui travaillait à une garderie à Casselman a eu une faiblesse. Elle travaillait alors comme aide seulement et puis, tout d'un coup, elle a eu un avertissement du médecin qu'elle ne pouvait plus conduire. J'ai rappelé le ministère puis je leur ai dit : « Bien, il faudrait regarder le médecin. On dit que le médecin a fait une erreur, et puis là on demande qu'on réinstalle ces permis de conduire ». Lorsque j'ai appelé au ministère, j'ai pris ça pour une farce, parce qu'on m'a dit : « Dans le transport

rural, est-ce que vous avez encore des chevaux pour conduire, pour aller travailler?»
Donc, je l'ai pris pour une farce.

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C'est pour vous démontrer qu'avec un permis spécial, cette personne-là aurait pu continuer à rendre un grand service dans la communauté, en se rendant au travail tous les matins. Donc, de plus en plus je dis que ce projet de loi-là, il y a vraiment un crédit à donner à notre député de London-Fanshawe pour en avoir eu l'initiative.

Je dois dire aussi qu'il faut se rappeler que nos aînés sont les bâtisseurs de notre pays et de notre province, et ils ont dû faire beaucoup, beaucoup de sacrifices dans leur vie afin de nous donner la qualité de vie que nous vivons aujourd'hui. Donc, on doit faire de tout notre pouvoir afin de leur donner des droits dont ils peuvent vraiment bénéficier afin de rendre service à leur communauté, et leur dire : « Merci pour le bon travail que vous nous avez fait, et pour les sacrifices. Aujourd'hui, nous reconnaissons le travail que vous apportez à la communauté ».

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Mario Sergio: I rise in support of the bill and compliment the member from London-Fanshawe.

In listening to the debate, I can sympathize with the member from Newmarket-Aurora. He brings a lot of experience to the table. But I have to say this: Unless we initiate something in this House, nothing is ever going to happen. So in whatever way this is going to be done, it is something where a lot of seniors in my area would be delighted to say, "Yes, I have no problem. I don't want to drive on highways, but I have my church five blocks down the street, and I can't walk, but I can drive. I would love to do that"-or take the wife to the doctor just around the corner, or to the dentist, or to do some local shopping. I have a lot of seniors in my area for whom this is the only thing they want to do-especially since a lot of seniors nowadays no longer have anyone to take them around. They have to look after themselves. I think it would be a wonderful thing if we could advance this proposal in the House and let the government know that it is required, that there is a need out there. We don't have to change the entire Ontario traffic act. The wonderful thing is, if the government and the minister want to do it, they can do it very quickly by a simple regulation. They don't have to create anything special or new. They just have to recognize the need and the will to do it; recognize that we have a lot of seniors out there who are still very lucid, very mobile-but 27% of seniors 65 and over have some mental or physical disability. What is wrong with saying, "If you qualify, if you pass the test, then yes, you can do some local driving"? They know their local area, their community, and I think we should afford them that possibility. We are not saying that we should rewrite the act and do something completely brand new.

I think it's important that the House send a message today to the government and the ministry and say that it's something that is needed, that we should be doing. On a regular basis, I have people who come into my office and say, "I am 82 years old. I've been driving for the last 45 years. I've never had an accident. I've never had any problems. But I have to go for a written test." These are people who never attained proficiency in English, and they are very emotional when it comes to that. So I hope we can push this through the House today.

I thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Ramal, you have up to two minutes for your response.

Mr. Khalil Ramal: I want to thank the members who spoke on this bill: Newmarket-Aurora, Timmins-James Bay, Davenport, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell and York West. I listened to all the debate. I respect what the member from Newmarket-Aurora mentioned, as he has a lot of expertise in this field.

Mrs. Krohn and the seniors in the province have a problem: We wouldn't extend, to all the people of various ages, conditions on when to drive and how to drive, in daytime or nighttime. I don't think so. That's why we opened the debate in this place.

In debate, we learn from each other. Hopefully, if this bill passes today, we can go to the committee and the committee will enhance it, as the member from James Bay mentioned many, many different times. It's important.

When I talk about 65, it's just because technically, when we talk about seniority-the people who want to go on a pension, they start at 65. That's why we have to have a benchmark, as the member from James Bay mentioned.

I believe strongly that all the people, all the members, all the seniors, all the total population of Ontario, want to have a chance to be mobile. Specifically we're talking today about seniors, because this segment of our society works very hard-comme mon ami le député de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell dit tout le temps-contributions by the seniors in this province, to make this province for us and to enjoy today. To give them the chance to live in dignity and independence, I think, is part of the small obligation we have to pay them in order to give them that chance.

With that, I want to thank all the members, whether they were speaking in support or against. Hopefully, the members who spoke against can change their minds, and hopefully this bill can go to committee and will be enhanced to serve all the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): The time for this ballot item has expired. We'll vote on the member for London-Fanshawe's item in about 50 minutes.