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Monday 25 October 1999

Lundi 25 octobre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 25 October 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 25 octobre 1999

The House met at 1830.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INTERIM SUPPLY

CRÉDITS PROVISOIRES

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I move that the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of the civil servants and other necessary payments pending the voting of supply for the period commencing November 1, 1999, and ending April 30, 2000. Such payments to be charged to the proper appropriation following the voting of supply.

Mr Speaker, I would like to advise you that the time for the government members will be split between Mr Skarica from Wentworth-Burlington, Mr Dunlop from Simcoe North and Mr Gill from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: I'm so used to being called the member for Cochrane South. It's going to take some adjustment.

I would ask that we split the time equally among the three caucuses in the debate that we have tonight.

The Acting Speaker: You're asking for unanimous consent. Do we have unanimous consent to split the time evenly between the caucuses? Agreed.

Mr Toni Skarica (Wentworth-Burlington): Interim supply is one of the most important motions that is passed in the Legislature. It is the motion that gives authority for the government to continue its programs and operate the daily business of government: to send money to municipalities and hospitals, to pay social assistance benefits to those in need and to appropriate the payment of salaries to the dedicated members of Ontario's civil service.

The motion for interim supply does not specify a dollar amount but provides spending authority for a specified period of time. The proposed motion for interim supply would cover the six-month period from November 1, 1999, to April 30, 2000. Currently, a special warrant is in effect to provide global and individual ministry spending authority to continue the job we have been elected to

do, and you heard that vision last week in the speech from the throne.

What is that vision? Our vision is that the people of Ontario have asked us to implement a plan that builds on the achievements of the last four years and takes us further down the road to a better Ontario. It is a plan to cut taxes and to cut taxes again and again, another 30 times this year, for a total of 99 times in the last five years. It is a plan to spend 20% more on health care by the year 2004. It is a plan that guarantees education funding. It is a plan to get more welfare recipients off the sidelines and into employment. As you know, since this government was elected in 1995, over 400,000 people have come off welfare. It is a plan to make our streets, our homes and our schools safer.

We are fortunate to be starting from a very healthy position, unlike four years ago. After four years of hard work on everyone's part, Ontario is back on track. Ontarians lead Canada in job creation. We lead the industrialized world in growth. Here are some facts: Our projected economic growth this year is expected to be 3.7%. In fact, the private sector estimates it to be much higher. Jobs are up 560,000 since September 1995. The unemployment rate is down to 7%. Consumer confidence has rocketed by 43% since the end of 1995. Housing starts are up 19% so far in 1999 compared to the same period in 1998. In fact, there will be more housing starts this year and next year, the most starts in a 10-year period.

All this good news did not happen by accident, and it certainly won't continue by accident. The foundation of our success in protecting the priority programs we and our loved ones rely on is a strong and growing economy. There can be no advances in health care and no education standards for our children without the tax dollars to pay for them.

Tax cuts have helped us to cement the new economic foundation. The debate is over. Tax cuts create jobs. That's why we've cut taxes 69 times in the last four years and another 30 times this year. We estimate we will create 825,000 more jobs with these new tax cuts. You should have seen the first cut already in your final property tax bill. In our last budget we cut the provincial share of the education property tax by 10%. We will cut this tax by 20% in total. On July 1, Ontario's personal income tax rate was cut by 5%, from 40.5% to 38.5% of the basic federal tax. This is the first instalment of a new 20% cut in personal income tax to be phased in over five years.

The last four years have dramatically shown the positive effect of cutting personal income tax and the subsequent positive effect this has had on our economy, which has resulted in more tax revenue to the government and not less, and that's an issue I would like to address.

During the last campaign, and in fact in this House over the last four years, we heard time and time again from the opposition: "Your tax cuts are going to the rich. You're cutting programs to pay for tax cuts for the rich." That was said in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999. It was said but it had no basis in fact. That is why we were re-elected and the opposition continues to sit on the other side of the House.

As I indicated, in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999, we heard the same mantra from the opposition, "You have to cut programs to pay for your tax cut." But the truth of the matter is that nothing had to pay for the tax cut. The actual facts—and I am referring to the 1999 Ontario budget papers—

Interjections.

Mr Skarica: Traditionally, in the last four years when I've been in the House, when the real facts start to come out, the heckling starts on the other side because they just don't want to face up to the facts. The facts are simply that our tax cuts were self-funding and provided extra revenues to the government. For example, in 1995-96—and unlike the government we took over from, this is audited, this is accurate, there are no two sets of books. This is the only set of books that are kept.

What are the actual totals of taxation revenue in Ontario since the tax cuts? When we took over in 1995-96 there was \$36 billion in revenue. The tax cuts started to be implemented. The next year, \$38.5 billion in revenue, a virtual \$2 billion increase in revenue. Not a single program had to be cut, nothing had to be cut. In fact, we made \$2 billion on the first phase of the tax cut.

In 1997-98, the budget papers show that the same thing happened the next year: \$38.5 billion in revenue went up to \$41.2 billion. I think it's a good thing to be kept in mind, as I look over at the other side—the last time I didn't, actually, I sat on the other side in the rump and had the good fortune to look at all my fellow colleagues over here, but I don't this time around.

Each and every one of those tax cuts was opposed on the basis that, yes, you're doing tax cuts—they were surprised we did it because in the past the government said one thing and did another, but we did do the tax cuts. After they overcame that surprise, they opposed the tax cuts, saying, "You're cutting education, you're cutting health care, you're cutting virtually everything in government to pay for a tax cut to the most wealthy." But lo and behold, nothing had to pay for the tax cut and we were making money on it, which wasn't a surprise to us because we did research in other jurisdictions and found that the same thing happened there. The more you cut taxes, the more economic growth there was in your economy.

So \$41 billion in 1997-98. Our reaction to that almost \$5 billion in increased revenue was, "Maybe we should

keep cutting taxes more," and so we did. In 1998-99, we got almost another \$1.5 billion in revenue, to \$42.5 billion. The bottom line is that when we went into the election, we had an extra \$6 billion in revenue because of the 30% cut in taxes. How did that happen? Was that an accident? Was it a fluke? Was it good luck? No, it wasn't. It was very simple: We cut taxes, people invested in Ontario and that created jobs, 570,000 at this point. Those people paid taxes, and those taxes went to the Ontario and federal governments. As a result, we got more revenue, people got more jobs and 400,000 people came off welfare.

Interjection.

Mr Skarica: The only response you have—and I heard it just now, and I heard it during the election—is, "You increased the debt." Yes, we increased the debt, but we started off with an \$11-billion or \$12-billion deficit. We couldn't cut it overnight, nobody could. It's instructive to go back—

Interjections.

Mr Skarica: Why did we increase the debt?

Interjections.

Mr Skarica: It is a good question. There were two reasons. You can't cut \$11 billion out of a budget without affecting education and health care.

Let's take a look at health care and education spending. Again, I go back to the budget papers. Remember, that was the mantra: "You're cutting health care to pay for the tax cut to the rich." That was said in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and the real facts of the matter were irrelevant.

1840

Looking at the actual facts, again audited—I'm not making it up—the fact of the matter is that in health care we spent—

Interjections.

Mr Skarica: I know you don't want to hear the facts, but the public does.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr Skarica: In health care we spent \$17.6 billion in 1995, \$17.7 billion in 1996, \$18.2 billion in 1997-98 and almost \$19 billion in 1998-99. So we increased health care spending by \$1.5 billion. We did the same thing in education. So now your only defence is, "You've increased the debt." Yes, we did. We had a situation we had to deal with, an \$11-billion deficit.

Let's see how the prior government dealt with the deficit. When the NDP government sat there—and you can see what happened to them. If you look over there, there's no one there. Even if they're all there, there's almost no one there. I remember one time when there was no one in the House from a party, we brought a motion for consent that they not be allowed any questions in question period, but since they narrowly escaped that bullet, I won't bring that motion now.

When the NDP took over in 1990-91, they had a deficit of \$3 billion, which, by the way, is higher than what we've got now. They had a problem: The economy was

slowing down a bit. If they had looked at other jurisdictions, when that happens what you do is you cut taxes and you control spending, and what happens is that you can bring the economy back. That happened in other jurisdictions, so that the impact of the recession was virtually minimal. In fact, some jurisdictions during the 1990-95 period made money.

But what did the NDP do? They raised taxes and increased government spending to the point where it was \$10 billion in their second year, \$12 billion in 1992-93, \$11 billion in 1993-94 and \$10 billion when we took over in 1994-95. Every year since then we've decreased that deficit, to the point where we're going to have a balanced budget. We did that, and at the same time we were cutting taxes, increasing government revenues and spending more money on education and health care. That was the responsible thing to do.

I can tell already that the opposition mantra this time around is that we're arrogant. That's what you're going to hear. We heard in 1995, without any basis in fact, "You're going to cut government programs to pay for the tax cut." The real facts were irrelevant. Now the mantra is: "You guys are now arrogant." That's going to be said time and time again. Again, that's not going to bear any relation to the facts.

You want some examples? One of the other reasons we had such tremendous and dramatic growth in our economy is that we got rid of red tape, thousands and thousands of regulations. The person involved with that was my very good friend and former seat mate—kept me entertained for four years—Frank Sheehan, who was the chairman of the red tape regulations. After the election—he was not re-elected—what was Frank's reaction? It's pretty reflective of the dedication and commitment of the government members who took over in 1995, and virtually all of them came back in 1999. He basically said: "I want to continue on. I'll do it for a dollar a year." And that's a Canadian dollar he's taking. A dollar a year he's doing it for. That shows the level of commitment of our members.

My 20 minutes are up. I want to conclude and summarize in this way: In 1995, the members of this House took over a government that was bankrupt, that had massive deficits. We embarked on a bold, bold program of tax cuts, which stimulated the economy. We got people off welfare; we got them working. We increased government revenues. That created a very strong economy that has allowed us to spend more money on vital programs such as health care and education.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It is an honour and a privilege to rise today to speak for the first time in this magnificent building.

I stand here to support the motion for interim supply. Interim supply is one of the most important motions that is passed in this Legislature. It is the motion that gives authority for the government to continue its programs, operate the daily business of government and to appropriate the payment of the salaries to the dedicated members of Ontario's civil service.

I stand here as one of seven new members who have joined the Mike Harris team, a team that has restored confidence in the Ontario economy, a team that has made difficult but necessary decisions, a team that has put Ontario back on track, a team that made promises and kept those promises, a team whose work has only just begun and a team that will continue to lead Ontario as the economic engine that will drive the Canadian economy into the new millennium.

Mr Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your recent election to such an honourable position. Your constituents in the riding of Oakville should be very proud of your accomplishments. You have a challenge facing you over the next five years in that you must assure the citizens of Ontario that order and fairness will prevail in this great assembly.

A special thank you to Mr Tilson for also allowing his name to stand.

I am humbled to be included in a region of Ontario with such high-profile and competent members as Finance Minister Eves to the north, Management Board Chair Hodgson to the east, Energy, Science and Technology Minister Wilson to the west and consumer watchdog chair Joe Tascona to the south. I am honoured to have you as neighbours.

I would like to congratulate all others who were elected to this great assembly in June. It is a privilege to be able to serve the people of this great province.

The new riding of Simcoe North includes large portions of two former ridings. I want to thank our former colleagues for their service to our province.

Mr Allan McLean served as the member for Simcoe East for 18 years and served the township of Oro and the county of Simcoe another 17 years: a total contribution of 35 years in the political arena.

Mr Bill Grimmett served as the member for Muskoka-Georgian Bay in the Harris government until June 1999. His contributions were invaluable. Mr Grimmett is continuing his law practice and is residing with his family and practising law in Muskoka, at Port Carling.

I would like to spend a few moments and briefly describe my riding. Simcoe North is made up of the municipal governments of the city of Orillia, the towns of Midland and Penetanguishene, the townships of Tiny, Tay, Severn, Ramara, Oro-Medonte and a portion of Springwater, and two First Nation settlements, Beausoleil First Nation on Christian Island and the Chippewas of Mingikining at Rama.

Included in my riding is the only French-Canadian community in central Ontario. It is centrally located in the Lafontaine-Penetanguishene area of my riding. We are all proud that the French heritage has survived and is alive and well in schools, the media and in the business community.

The permanent population of Simcoe North is approximately 115,000 people.

My family resides in the Coldwater area and has done so for many generations.

The riding is very diverse. Employment is concentrated in tourism, agriculture, small manufacturing and the service industry.

Our hospitals include the Huronia District Hospital in Midland, the Penetanguishene General Hospital and the Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital. We are proud that Soldiers' Memorial in Orillia is the lead dialysis centre for the region, as well as having a level 2 perinatal program, often accommodating unhealthy babies both regionally and from across the province.

We are fortunate to have the presence of Georgian College, with campuses in both Midland and Orillia.

We are home to the Ontario Provincial Police headquarters in Orillia.

The new superjail is under construction in Penetanguishene, and we expect to see it in operation in the fall of 2000. The jail is located adjacent to the Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre. The riding of Simcoe North is also home to the only youth correction camp in Ontario. The success of Project Turnaround will be a reason to expand the service in the future.

My riding is home to Casino Rama, the largest tourist attraction in central Ontario. The casino has created thousands of jobs for citizens throughout our region. The future of the casino will see it marketed as a regional destination, as there are currently plans to add a major hotel and entertainment complex to the main structure.

I, for one, was very pleased to see that the Premier had set aside the week of November 8 as a constituency week. I have nine Legions and 12 Remembrance Day and Memorial Day services that I am represented at over a three-week period. I am pleased that our government has not forgotten the significance of Canadians who sacrificed their lives so that we can live in a democratic society.

1850

The riding of Simcoe North is geographically one of the more beautiful ridings in Ontario. Lake Simcoe, Lake Couchiching, Georgian Bay and the Severn River, along with numerous smaller lakes, account for almost 500 kilometres of shoreline in Simcoe North. A number of Canada's largest marinas are located on this shoreline, particularly in the harbours of Midland, Penetanguishene and Victoria Harbour. The shoreline is also home to magnificent resorts, campgrounds, four provincial parks and thousands of seasonal residents. Some of our 16 beautiful golf courses also abut the shoreline.

The scenic hills of Oro-Medonte are home to two of the most popular ski resorts in Ontario, Mt St Louis-Moonstone and Horseshoe Valley resort, both under expansion at the current time. As well, the hills of Oro-Medonte contain some of the richest sand and gravel deposits in our province.

While mentioning aggregate, the eastern end of our riding contains thousands of acres of deposits of limestone in the Severn and Ramara township areas. Without question, there will be extreme pressure to further develop these aggregate resources as our province grows to prosperity.

I am proud to say that my family has resided in what is now Simcoe North since the early 1800s. They have been a family known for their work ethic. My parents, Glen and Marie Dunlop, were married shortly after the Second World War. They built a successful construction business, raised six children and never asked for or received any government assistance in their lives. They believed then, and still believe today, that hard work and common sense will reward you with the lifestyle that you expect. In fact, in the early 1960s they purchased a farm so that we would have chores to do after school and on the weekend and not be hanging around the streets. I thank my parents for the gift of educating me to be a decent person.

As a teenager and young adult growing up, I never imagined that I would even dream about running for a municipal position, let alone seek a provincial seat. In 1980, friends and neighbours convinced me to run for a seat on the village of Coldwater council. I enjoyed the community element of municipal politics and stayed on council until June 3 of this year, while at the same time managing our family business.

During my years on council I became increasingly frustrated with the political system. Year after year we would see school boards issue tax levies with double-digit inflation while our enrolment would increase 2% or 3%. We would see bureaucracy balloon, red tape increase dramatically and legislation delivered that always cost the taxpayers more in the end.

The very same frustrations occurred in the business community. By 1992, our province had reached an annual deficit of \$9 billion. The construction industry was all but dead, and Ontario was no longer the engine that drove the Canadian economy. We had reached a point where business was leaving our province to jurisdictions that would encourage investment.

In 1993, I had the opportunity to listen to Mike Harris speak about something he called the Common Sense Revolution. I was very impressed. Everything he talked about made common sense to me. The idea of actually cutting taxes to stimulate the economy was such an innovative idea for the province that I became sceptical. He promised change, but almost all governments had promised change in the past and only partially delivered.

Mike Harris formed a majority government and was elected Premier in June 1995. The next four years are now history, and there's one thing for sure that we will always remember: Never in the history of any government in Canada has a government been elected that made as many promises and kept them.

In February 1999, I was offered an opportunity to seek the nomination to run as a candidate for the Harris team. It was one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made. It does mean a complete adjustment to your lifestyle. At exactly the same time we were trying to decide my future in politics, our daughter, Jill, and her husband, Derek, were blessed with a baby daughter, Rachel. For those of you here who have children, I hope that you will get the same satisfaction and fulfilment from having a

grandchild as Jane and I have had, although you could put off being grandparents until your 50s or 60s.

After the birth of our grandchild, we decided that if I could help Mike Harris make a difference in making Ontario a better place to live, then I would work hard to win the nomination and the election, and therefore become a member of this Legislature.

I was able to win the election, and I am proud to serve the constituents of Simcoe North. The people of Simcoe North are warm, friendly and very active in their communities. We are only five months into the mandate, but I want to assure my constituents that I love the job.

Our government campaigned on Blueprint: Mike Harris' Plan to Keep Ontario on the Right Track. During the election, we made a number of further commitments to the citizens of Ontario. As I listened to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario deliver the throne speech last Thursday, I was pleased to see that as a government we are not about to become stagnant, arrogant or complacent. Rather, we are informing the citizens of Ontario that the work has only just begun. Yes, there is more to do. As indicated in the throne speech, although our economy is strong, Ontario must keep attracting investment, Ontario must keep cutting taxes, Ontario must continue to promote consumer confidence and Ontario must become more competitive. These factors will build an even stronger economy, and only with a strong economy can we afford the health and education spending that the citizens of this great province deserve and expect.

Attracting investment. There can be no argument that we live in a world economy. Investors around the world have information on business opportunities at the tips of their fingers. Government, like business, must be more efficient and streamlined if we are to succeed in the 21st century.

Cutting taxes. As we have repeated many times over the past few months, the argument is over; cutting taxes does create jobs. As promised in our platform Blueprint, I am pleased to see that we have already initiated the first stage of a further 20% reduction in provincial personal income tax and a 20% reduction to the provincial portion of residential property taxes.

Our Premier is a strong leader, and that is a major reason why we are leading the nation in economic growth. He continues to battle our federal government for income tax cuts and employment insurance premium cuts. In my opinion, it is morally wrong for the federal government to budget for a surplus at the expense of Canadian taxpayers and the Canadian economy. I applaud our Premier for his stand-alone efforts and for his vision to build a competitive tax rate that will help protect the Ontario economy in the event of an economic downturn.

In the riding of Simcoe North, many of our business operators are associated with tourism. I was pleased to see the throne speech acknowledge Ontario as a natural tourist destination. The fact that our government will enhance marketing and tourist infrastructure will help our tourism operators market our area of the province as a destination.

Tourism operators throughout the province are pleased to see that the Premier has set up a separate ministry for tourism for the first time in history. I thank the Minister of Tourism for the keen interest he has developed in our riding. The minister, for example, visited the King's Wharf Theatre in Penetanguishene twice this past summer. The provincially owned facility has an operating agreement with the Drayton Festival Theatre. In a very short initial season, the Drayton Festival sold over 20,000 theatre tickets—a resounding public-private success story.

Fluctuating gas prices were certainly an issue in my riding these past few months. Our government has continually acknowledged this issue to be a federal responsibility. The Ottawa commitment to act by September 2000 is a welcome gesture, and I am pleased that our government will conduct our own review of gasoline pricing and share the results with the federal government. My neighbouring colleague from Simcoe-Brampton has worked very hard on this issue, and I thank him for his efforts.

I was pleased to see the throne speech acknowledge the important role agriculture plays in our provincial economy as well as the role it plays in my own riding. Historically, the farming community has been faced with a fluctuating and unreliable marketplace. Any attempt to keep Ontario farms and agribusinesses strong will be welcome.

I thank the Premier and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for drawing attention to the agriculture community by organizing caucus members to attend the International Plowing Match at Exeter and Foodland Ontario Week here at the Legislature.

In a riding with three hospitals and a high percentage of seniors, I was encouraged to see the statement: "Making sure that every person ... has access to top-quality health care is your government's most urgent concern." Although health care spending increased to an all-time high of \$18.9 billion in this province in 1999, and despite the \$2.8 billion in cuts by the federal government, the citizens of our province still expect the best efforts in maintaining high-quality health care.

As I mentioned earlier, my riding is the home of the OPP headquarters. I often have the opportunity to discuss policing with employees of the OPP. Our government leadership, in acknowledging the importance of public safety in our communities, is unprecedented in the history of government police services activity. I note that we have already placed 534 new front-line officers in the communities of Ontario and expect to have a total of 1,000 by the year 2000.

There are numerous topics covered in the throne speech that I would like to comment on, but we are on a time allocation.

I would like to close with one true story that best describes what our government is about. In my riding of Simcoe North, we have a manufacturing plant in Midland called Huronia Precision Plastics. They build plastic automotive parts using robotics. In 1994, they had four

employees. Today, in 1999, they have 100 high-tech employees, are selling their products worldwide and are in the process of doubling the size of their operations. Recently, they spent over \$3.5 million on new equipment purchased from a manufacturer in Guelph. The owners of this company are 32 and 36 years old.

The motion for interim supply does not specify a dollar amount but provides spending authority for a specified period of time. The proposed motion for interim supply would cover the six-month period from November 1, 1999, to April 30, 2000. By authorizing special warrants earlier this year, the government took the responsible action to ensure there is sufficient spending authority to cover general and necessary government expenditures, including social assistance payments and civil servants' salaries.

To ensure that all scheduled payment obligations are met and our vision for a renewed Ontario for the next century moves forward, the motion for interim supply must be passed. I appreciate the opportunity to stand before this assembly today, and I support the motion for interim supply.

1900

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I am proud to stand in this assembly and join in the debate on the interim supply motion—proud, humble and at the same time very conscious of the great responsibility the voters of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale entrusted to me on June 3.

It has taken sustained exertion to get me to this chair, to this chamber and to this day. I can say with certainty that I intend to work just as hard to keep the trust of the people of Brampton and Malton. I am confident that my colleagues here on this side of the House share my commitment and determination to building a better Ontario.

I would like to begin, Mr Speaker, by offering you my personal congratulations on your election to the Legislative Assembly's highest office. You, sir, have the challenge of keeping this sometimes unruly House in order, a challenge which we all expect you will meet with great dexterity.

In addition, I would like to congratulate all members of the Legislature on their personal victories last June. I pledge to work with them to ensure that Ontario remains one of the world's best places to live, work and raise our families.

The people of Ontario made a courageous choice in 1995 when they elected Premier Mike Harris and endorsed our party's Common Sense Revolution. Last June the people of Ontario, in re-electing our party with a strong majority, reaffirmed their support for the decisions made by Premier Harris and his caucus and resoundingly endorsed the path Ontario was taking on the road to prosperity. It is no small wonder that the Common Sense Revolution has not only succeeded, but indeed its message is spreading.

Not only am I proud to serve as a member of the Conservative Party of Ontario, I am even more proud to serve under the strong and able leadership of Mike Harris. He

has shown admirable courage and dignity as our party's leader and as our Premier during the turbulent periods of change in Ontario.

Like the leadership of Lady Thatcher in Great Britain, our Premier chose not to turn from his set course. His strength and conviction have enabled him to guide this province back to prosperity despite constant doubting and derision from those opposing change.

I take it as a personal honour that Premier Harris has seen fit to appoint me as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour, the Honourable Chris Stockwell. I wish the House to know that Mr Stockwell has been very supportive of me in my new role not only as a parliamentary assistant but also as a rookie member. I am grateful to him and to the other members of this chamber for their advice and support.

As the first member of South Asian decent elected to serve in the Ontario Legislature, I can state with pride that this is a great province and a great country. It is a splendid example of our inclusive democracy that any individual, irrespective of categorizations, can stand in this chamber and contribute to the making of laws which will benefit all Ontarians. In many countries around the world such a democratic privilege and honour is not permitted. It speaks well not only for the voters of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale but for all Ontarians and Canadians that we do not merely speak of being an open and multicultural society; rather, we live it every day.

I would like to thank the voters in Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale for their support, both for myself as the member and through me their support of the government. I will endeavour over the life of the 37th Parliament to live up to the legitimate demands and concerns of all my constituents and have planned to meet and exceed their expectations.

Let me say, as a member of the government, we will keep our promises as outlined in the Blueprint during the election. We intend to follow through by creating more new jobs, improving our children's education, strengthening the health care system, and rest assured we will continue on our journey to restore hope and opportunity for both Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and Ontario.

Permit me to pay tribute to my riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and to the city of Brampton. My riding is a wonderful representation of this province. As one travels the riding from Derry Road in the south to Mayfield in the north, you can see and feel the new optimism that is today's Ontario. New business development, new home construction and new neighbourhoods all indicate a brighter future for my riding.

Recently the city of Brampton celebrated its 25th anniversary, and our mayor, Peter Robertson, unveiled a plaque commemorating our city's population milestone of 307,000. Brampton continues to flourish both in population and in terms of attracting new businesses. Today Brampton stands as one of the fastest-growing cities in the GTA and in all of Canada.

Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale is a new riding, representing part of Mississauga, which is Malton, and in

the north Bramalea, which is part of Brampton. At the same time, new areas of residential growth, such as Springdale and Gore, are further redefining my riding.

Less than five years ago Brampton elected two members of the Progressive Conservative Party to this chamber: the member from Brampton West-Mississauga, the Honourable Tony Clement; and the member from Brampton Centre, Mr Joe Spina. Today, as a clear indication of Brampton's rapid population growth and its support for Premier Harris, Bramptonians have three members in the provincial Legislature on the government side, speaking with a strong and unified voice. This is good news for the people of Brampton and for my riding.

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I would like to note that my riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale is a very special place to me. My desire to run for office and to serve the people of Brampton can be traced back to my long involvement in the community and my personal desire to give back to the community and the province which has given so much to my family and me. Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale is the riding in which my father, Harpal Singh Gill, bought our first home when I was a teenager and where he and my mother, Pritam Kaur, raised our family and where they continue to reside in the same house.

I say with much pride that some 19 years ago at the Bramalea Lions Hall, situated within my riding, I was married to my wife, Dr Pam Gill, a family doctor in practice at Credit Valley Hospital and the mother of our two daughters, Natasha and Sonja. It is with the strength of my family and my conviction in God that I am endeavouring to fulfill my duties as best as I can.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the interim supply motion. As we all know, it is one of the most important motions that we pass in the House. This motion will allow the government to send funds to local municipalities such as Peel, to all our provincial hospitals and to local school boards across this province. In addition to paying for routine provincial expenditures, this motion will allow for the paying of salaries to our dedicated civil servants.

I approach the interim supply motion from the vantage point of one who has been educated in Ontario and is a small business owner who has had to meet weekly payrolls at my private business. Much like any entrepreneur, I recognize the double dangers of high taxes and bad management. Let me say to the members opposite, I've seen at close sight the danger when your governments mismanaged the resources entrusted to you by the people, and I've seen the damage Liberal and NDP governments have done to Ontario.

The voters in my riding voted against Liberal and NDP mismanagement in 1995, and they did it again in 1999. They voted for the strong, steady hand of a party and a Premier who, like them, understood that at the end of the day every household and every business must balance its books or face the prospect of real personal and financial hardships. Voters in my riding voted to

continue this government's record of job creation and tax cuts.

During the last election campaign, as I went from door to door, people kept telling me again and again that this government was on the right track. The facts are self-evident. More members of our families are finding meaningful work, more students are being challenged to do better in our classrooms, more communities are becoming safer from crime, and yes, more businesses are expanding and creating more jobs for ordinary Ontarians.

We have come a long way since the lost decade. I didn't mean last decade, I meant the lost decade. I'm sure we can all remember the days when the Liberals and the NDP held the reins of government. I know that many Ontarians would like to forget those dark, gloomy days. But try as we may, we're still haunted by the damage the members opposite inflicted on our provincial economy. I know that my colleagues opposite hate to face the truth, but face it they must.

I know that they remember the state of this province when they held the seat of power. Ontario, once the magnet of job creation, was in the grip of recession. Interest rates were in the double digits. Taxes were being levied recklessly on the hard-working men and women of this province, and Ontarians were rapidly losing faith in our province's future.

Between 1985 and 1995, Ontario became a drag on the nation. This great province, one of the four founders of Confederation, was in dire straits. Our finances were mismanaged, our businesses, the job-creating engine of our economy, were being over regulated by the socializing arm of government planners and regulators, and the resulting unemployment, family stress and economic hardships became far too familiar to many Ontarians. The average Ontario family soon found itself suffocating from the onerous burdens placed upon them by the government of the day.

Shockingly, in less than 10 years the Liberals and the NDP forced upon the hard-working families of this province 56 tax increases. We all know what happens when you strangle businesses and taxpayers: Job creation goes down the drain. During those dark days, too many people were looking for work; one in seven Ontarians was on welfare. Far too many people were worried about keeping their jobs, and at the same time many mothers and fathers were worried about their children's future. Those were the dark days to which we as a province must never return.

Over 550,000 net new jobs have been created since June 1995. Our provincial unemployment is among the lowest in Canada, and Ontario is not only leading the nation in net new jobs created; we are a leading choice in all of North America for new investments and new start-up businesses. Just ask Mayor Hazel McCallion of Mississauga or Mayor Peter Robertson of Brampton. Ontario is stronger today than it was five years ago.

My riding is a great example of Ontario's booming economy. Where once office space was sitting vacant, today rental space is harder than ever to find. Major

employers in my riding such as Chrysler and Canadian Tire are expanding, welfare rates are dropping, and at the same time new home construction is on the rise throughout Gore and Springdale.

A strong economy—and I don't have to explain to you, Mr Speaker; you know—means that more Ontario families will prosper. Ontarians will once again have hope, and individuals will again find new opportunities in the marketplace. This means financial security for families, stability in households, and yes, it also means a chance for everyone to take advantage of Ontario's booming economy. I'm confident that even the members opposite can identify friends and family members who are benefiting from the positive changes brought in by our government.

In order to continue the work of this government and our goal of returning hope and opportunity to every part of this province, I would urge all members to join with me in supporting this interim supply motion.

Mr Skarica: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: For the last hour, as I've pointed out, the NDP hasn't had anybody listening to the debate. Probably that's because they created the mess we were in in 1995. I wonder if we could have—

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order. Under what standing order is your point of order? You don't have one.

Further debate?

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Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): Mr Speaker, I want to inform you that I'll be sharing my time with Mr Curling, Mr Bradley and Mr Crozier. I understand that's something you would like us to point out at the start.

I want to begin discussion on the supply motion by reminding ourselves of what has really been driving the Ontario economy. The reason I mention this is because if we don't understand it is exports that are driving the Ontario economy, we run the risk of making some significant mistakes. I found that perhaps the most interesting statement in the budget was on page 13, where it says, "The province's export orientation has increased sharply, rising from 27.5% of our gross domestic product in 1989 to 48.9% in 1998." In other words, it has gone up from roughly 27% 10 years ago to where almost half of Ontario's gross domestic product is now exports.

Make no mistake about it, it has been exports that have driven Ontario's economy. And why is that? In my opinion, it's because many of our auto companies have chosen to locate in Ontario. One of the key reasons for that is that we have a world-class health care system, heavily funded by our taxpayers. And what is Mike Harris doing? The percentage of health expenditures funded by all of us is dropping and we are moving more and more to a two-tiered health care system. I predict that will begin to impact on the companies that want to locate here in Ontario.

The second reason our exports have gone up is that we have a terrific workforce. Why is that? It is because we

have invested, over the history of this province, in education. Again, what is Mike Harris doing? Cutting support for post-secondary education. Tuition has now gone from where students used to pay 20% of their cost to where they're now paying 35%, and Mike Harris says: "I love that. I'm proud of that." But we are changing the fundamental reason we have had a terrific workforce. It is because it is a well-educated workforce.

So I say let's not forget what has driven the Ontario economy. Frankly, it's not the income tax cut. You may not agree with that, but that is the case: It is not the income tax cut; it is exports. I say to all of us, if we don't first and fundamentally appreciate that, we are going to lose our most valued economic asset, and that's our exports. In fact, I don't think there's a place in the world now that relies as heavily on exports as Ontario does, and I might add that 90% of it goes to one country, the United States. That's fine, but our Ontario economy now is totally dependent on exports primarily to the US. I make that point because if we say we can continue to cut support for the things that have gotten us there, we run the risk of undermining the very basis of our Ontario economy.

Because some of the members talked about the election campaign, I wanted to say that one of the key financial promises in the Conservatives' election campaign was that they will cut one cent of every dollar we're spending in each of the next two years. It doesn't sound like much, but in my opinion what it means is that because health care spending is going up by \$1.2 billion, to cut 1% of spending you've got to cut \$900 million. You take the two of them, and what Mike Harris has said is that he's going to cut \$2.1 billion. I go through this math because it means that on the rest of the budget, exclusive of health care, we're looking at a cut in expenditures over the next two years of roughly 9%. I say to the people of Ontario that that may sound simple on the surface, but I'm anxious to see where Mike Harris is going to cut 10% from our universities, our colleges, our education system, our policing organizations, our roads. Where is he going to find that? He's says, "I'm going to cut 1% in each of the next two years," but it is about a 10% cut in overall expenditures.

I want to point out the promise on education spending, because I think it also is important. Mike Harris has said, "I'm going to freeze spending per pupil for four years," and at the same time Mike Harris says inflation is going to go up at 2%. Again I say to the people of Ontario, if you have been in our classrooms recently you'll realize that we are beginning to be under significant stress, particularly for many of our special-needs students. But Mike Harris has said, "I'm going to freeze per student spending for the next four years." With inflation going up at 2%, that is a significant decrease in support for education.

Finally, on health care, the promise there is that over the next four years health spending will go up, they say 20%, but actually it's about 15% over the next five years. That's slightly in excess of inflation over the next five

years. I am going to be interested in how we are going to fix our health care system with spending going up just slightly in excess of the rate of inflation.

I want to talk also about what's called the SuperBuild fund. What Premier Harris has said here is that over the next five years it is his intention to spend about \$10 billion of taxpayer money on our infrastructure for the province of Ontario and to get the private sector to provide about another \$10 billion for infrastructure, for a total of \$20 billion over the next five years. It's important to remember this: Historically in the province of Ontario, we have spent on our infrastructure each and every year about \$4 billion. Premier Harris has decided he can cut that to \$2 billion from \$4 billion and he'll get another \$2 billion a year from the private sector.

I want to raise a cautionary note on this, because the first example of the Harris private-sector/public-sector partnership was the 407. I say to the users of the 407, you have been sold down the road. What Premier Harris did before the election was to sell that road, and the reason he was able to sell it at the price he sold it at, which by the way was double what it cost to build it, was that he guaranteed the buyer 99 years. The buyer bought that road—for the member for Bramalea, the 407 runs right through his riding; he will be interested in knowing this. Here's how he did it. He sold it for 99 years. It would be like selling the 401 for 99 years. He said to the buyer, "We will guarantee that you can take tolls up every year for 15 years at inflation plus 2%." It is a terrific buy for the purchaser of that road, by the way, if any of you out there don't pay your tolls, Mike Harris will collect the money for the toll road people by not renewing your licence; you can't renew your licence. For Premier Harris, it was great because he had a pre-election goody of an extra \$1.6 billion. For the purchaser of the road, it is a fabulous deal. For the 99 years they own this road, which, as any of us who live in this area know, is getting busier every day, it is a guaranteed moneymaker of the first order: inflation plus 2% every single year for tolls.

I say to the members, we are going to embrace this private-public sector partnership. If the 407 is an example of what you regard as good public-private sector partnership, we've got a problem.

The second area on the SuperBuild is that we are, I gather, going to from now on fund the construction of schools by providing school boards grants over 25 years to pay for the cost of leasing a school. Well, that is a debt trap. If we think we can continue to spend \$400 million a year on capital and only expense one twenty-fifth of it, believe me, in about five years we've got a huge debt trap.

My background is business. I ran three companies. I had 300 employees. I know exactly what it is to, as they say, make a payroll, but I also know that businesses are in the business of making a return on their investment, and that's completely, totally understandable. So there is no free lunch from the private sector. They will certainly build and lease a school, but it's not a way that you sub-

stantially reduce your cost; it's another way of funding your debt.

I say to Premier Harris that we will be watching this SuperBuild fund very closely. In our opinion, you got off totally on the wrong foot on the 407, and it's only now, by the way, that the 407 users are beginning to realize it. The owner of the road said, "We're going to extend the rush hours." What does that mean? It means they can charge higher tolls earlier in the day and later in the day, and they can take the tolls up every single year at inflation plus 2%, no questions asked. After that, there is no real restriction on the potential increase of tolls.

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I want to alert all of us as we look at this SuperBuild fund, that we recognize, as I say, that for the private sector there is no free lunch. They will want a return on their investment. If all we do is sell off—what's called a stream of revenue—if all we do is say to the users of these services, "We're going to cut you loose; you have to deal with the private sector on this and pay your money directly to them," and there's no real benefit to our taxpayers, then it's just a shell game.

I didn't say this earlier, but I welcome all the new members to the Legislature on both sides of the House. I hope they enjoy this responsibility and honour as much as all of us do who have been here. While I didn't necessarily agree with everything that was said earlier by the new members, I certainly thought they put a lot of thought into their speeches and I welcome them.

They were talking a little about, "You must balance your books and you must make sure you keep your fiscal house in order." Well, the report card came out. The public accounts came out about a week ago, the final audited statements from the Provincial Auditor, and these are the numbers: When Mike Harris took over as Premier, the debt of the province was \$88 billion; four years later, the debt of the province is \$109 billion. It's up \$21 billion. It's up enormously. The debt is up by almost 25% in just four years under Mike Harris. The measurement here is that the debt to GDP is now actually higher than when Mike Harris became Premier. I just say to the great financial guy, Mike Harris, that he hasn't come even close to balancing a budget yet. The debt of the province is now up \$21 billion.

Interjections.

Mr Phillips: I know the members don't like to hear this, but it is important to remind ourselves. I know that the tax cut is politically popular. As a matter of fact, you won and we lost. I just say to the people of Ontario that we've had to borrow every penny for that tax cut.

The last thing I'd like to say, because my colleagues want to get on, is that I challenge the member for Bramalea to go back and look at the record. The unemployment rate when the Liberals left office was lower than it is today. We had just finished a balanced budget. The last time a Conservative government balanced a budget was 1969.

Interjections.

Mr Phillips: Check the numbers. It's in your own budget. The debt-to-GDP ratio was 15%; today it's 30%. I just say to the member—the member for Bramalea is, I suspect, a thoughtful individual—go away and check that. He will find the unemployment rate was lower when the Liberals left office. They had just finished a balanced budget—the first time in 20 years. The last time a Conservative government balanced a budget was 1969. I challenge him to look at that.

I know this is very upsetting to the members, and I'd like you to try and calm down a bit. I know you don't like to hear this because it's quite upsetting. It's not what Mike Harris told you. But you are independent thinkers. Go back and look at the record: Lower unemployment, just finished a balanced budget and the debt to GDP was 15%. The older members here, for the audience, are very unhappy. They don't like to hear this. I just ask the newer members to go and look at the facts. I know Mike Harris sends you these things every day, but look at the real facts.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): What an eloquent individual. My colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt has delivered an unusually—as soon as he put the facts before these Conservative members, they all get itchy and scratchy over there. They don't like to hear the facts about how we balanced the budget on many occasions. I know how they feel.

We are so blessed with such wonderful members from our caucus here and many of the new members who have come. I want to congratulate all of the new members who have come to join us in this arena. I know they will come with rather fresh ideas and will not be coerced and pushed around in any way by their leader, especially over there in the Tory caucus, and I commend them and welcome them to the House.

I have dealt with my colleagues here, and what a wonderful bunch of people we have in our caucus, tremendous people who bring such intelligence here to the arena in Parliament. Let me just say, "Congratulations to you all."

But here we are. We are back in the House again with a government in its demonstration of arrogance. When the people of Scarborough-Rouge River elected me for the fifth time, they said to me that I must come back to the House and remind this government that they cannot continue with their bully tactics and arrogance. I said I was confident they wouldn't. I was so confident because I thought that in the last couple of years they had learned their lesson.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): You were wrong.

Mr Curling: As my colleague says, I was wrong. It didn't take a couple of hours for me to assess the things they have done, and you know that too. As you know, we have been reduced from 130 members to 103 members. He was saying this is fiscal restraint. We've got to be leaner and meaner. We can deliver to the people with fewer people and do better.

But what have they done? They have increased their cabinet fourfold. They have more cabinet ministers over

there than before. I know some of the new members got up and were so proud to be parliamentary assistants. Of course, they get a little additional money too. But the fact is that they have more parliamentary assistants than they have to.

Interjection.

Mr Curling: I know the minister doesn't get a chance to speak on her own because she's been told what to say most of the time.

For the last 10 months many of us have waited very patiently to debate the things that are of great concern to our constituents in and around the province. We only met, as you recall, for seven days, I think it was. Can you imagine if this were happening in any other country in the world. This same government here, this arrogant government, stands up and talks about dictatorship and arrogance.

We don't have to go too far. We just have to cross a couple of steps over there. There is arrogance in its glory. They have met for only seven days in the entire time. Then they come here today and say: "We want interim supply. It's urgent. We need that money right away to pay civil servants. We need that money right away."

But where were they all this time? They were there, in their arrogance, sitting there. They couldn't even introduce a proper bill today. They were sneakily bringing it around without any debate. Furthermore, they asked us to sit a little late tonight to make sure this happened.

But they had 10 months for us to debate some of the issues of the day. No way. We only met for seven days. Such arrogance. I think they know that. I have to remind them once more, lest they forget—and the member for Scarborough-Agincourt reminded them—about the balanced budgets we had many times when the Liberal Party was the government of the day.

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Then they come and talk about the reduction of the deficit. They think they can continue to fool the people of the province. As you sit around the cabinet table on Wednesday mornings, remind your leader and your finance minister that they have increased the debt to \$109 billion. Who's going to pay for that? Your children and my children will be paying for that. It will be on their backs to pay off the \$109-billion debt.

Then you brag that you are going to bring in a law that will penalize any member of Parliament or any government that runs a deficit. You guys should go to jail for bringing the debt so high. Forget about deficits. Let's talk about debt. Let's talk about the debt you have done and left this legacy to the people of Ontario. Sooner or later they talk about cutting taxes. I ask them where they're going to get the money for that debt. Of course they're going to pay them, and they're riding on this surf, saying: "What a wonderful economy we have, that the government of Ontario has introduced. We are the ones responsible for this economy in North America. As a matter of fact, the only reason America is surviving so well today is because of Mike Harris. He has done it all."

Let's take a step back and find out—

Applause.

Mr Curling: As you applaud, the fact is that if we go on the streets today, we have more homeless people than ever before. Remember, it's a province that talks about the great management of its money. More homeless people are on the streets.

Ask about affordable housing that people want, to get accommodation in order to live decent lives. There is far less available affordable housing for people to live in.

Remember, we have a government here that talks about the fact that they are so fiscally responsible. We have a minister who will brag about kicking people off welfare. Many of their corporate people are—let's look at one, let's look at Eaton's. Can you imagine: They were allowed to get a reprieve from the courts so they could sell off their assets. Many of the people on welfare were kicked off so fast that the assets they had—now they're on the street and they're homeless, and they won't take responsibility for it.

They think we are fooled. They think the opposition here is fooled when they direct our interest to squeegee kids. We know that is a red herring to drag us somewhere. Of course those people need to be looked at and assessed. But you feel that we'll attack you on squeegee kids. We want to attack you on the arrogance you have displayed here in this House. We'll make sure you don't get away with it. We'll make sure that when this government comes forward with their arrogance and closures on bills, and does all the things they do that are so undemocratic, we'll be right on their backs. We will be telling the people, "This is the real Conservative arrogance that we see around this place."

The Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs hasn't even appeared in the House one day for us to ask the important questions about affordable housing. He's gone. They said, "He has seen the light, and that's why he quit." Our leader, Dalton McGuinty, put it so adequately. He said, "When the heat was pushed to him, of course he ran."

The Premier, in apologetic terms, talks about, "He has done nothing wrong." Sure it's an allegation. What is an allegation? I was the Minister of Housing, and I understand the role we play. We have to be fair and balanced about both the people who are producing the homes and those who live in those homes. We don't want to contract those powers out to some friend. It's wrong. It's totally wrong. You cannot go about running a government like that. You must be responsible for your actions. You must be responsible and accountable, for the people put you there to represent their needs. It's a democratic society. You're coming at us in a very arrogant, very dictatorial way. If you repeat it one more time here in this House, we the Liberals will make sure you are accountable for the things you are doing.

Let me talk about some of the things they've done here. I notice that this government attacks immigrants, very much so. Have you ever noticed that? Everything that this government says is negative about immigrants.

I'm going to give you a suggestion. If you want to do something positive about immigrants—the immigrants that you are and the new immigrants who are here—it's access to trades and professions. There are people who have come here qualified, ready to work, prepared to do the job and to build their country, Canada, and their province, Ontario. Why don't you try to assist them so they can have access to training in the profession they have been trained in? Oh, no, you're not working together.

Hon Mrs Ecker: On a point of order: The honourable member has made some allegations about the motivations of all the members on the government side. I think he should withdraw those.

Our comments about Ottawa not living up to its obligations in terms of supporting immigrants and families who come here should not be construed as an attack on those wonderful individuals who have contributed to our Ontario society. He should withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Scarborough-Rouge River.

Mr Curling: I'll tell you about the arrogance. When the truth is revealed about the negative way you stereotype immigrants around here, you don't like it. I understand how you feel, because you can get away with it, the same way they beat up on people who are on welfare.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: There's no such thing as a point of personal privilege.

Hon Mrs Ecker: We find his comments quite distasteful and very inaccurate and very unparliamentary, sir.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Scarborough-Rouge River.

Mr Curling: This government should know better, should understand that government is there to protect the most vulnerable in our society, to help our citizens to have access to trades and professions, not to be calling them names in a way that will stereotype them, that they are not competent in our society.

We all are immigrants, and some of us who have been here longer seem to have that licence to tell other people that they're not individuals who are worthwhile in society. I tell you, my friends, that this province and the people of this province will not stand for that. They see through all of this arrogance that you put forward. We know we have a party that stands up for the rights of those individuals. We know we have a bully government and a very dictatorial government. We know they feel confident in the fact that we will stand up for their rights, and we will do so.

I know certain bills they are introducing now about some of the most vulnerable in society are coming limping through. When that legislation comes through, we'll speak very emotionally about it and make sure of the right thing and be passionate about it all. We know at that time that democracy will prevail, because we have seen the action of this government. We have seen the action of Mike Harris. We have seen the action of the Tories. We

have seen what a bully sort of government they could be. We will stand up for the rights of those who are the most vulnerable in society. I'm very proud to know that we are here to do that.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I couldn't help but be impressed by a glaring and blaring headline I saw in Conrad Black's flagship newspaper, the National Post, the official apologist for the Harris government and, of course, the federal Reform Party, which are one and the same. The headline talked about the arrogant Liberals' delay of the return of Parliament. It was a story by Robert Fife, I think it was. Completely ignored was the fact that these people who talk about wanting to work all the time had this Legislature in session only seven days this whole year. How did they do that? They didn't bring the House back from mid-December of last year until a few days in the spring of this year, and they did not sit. Then, of course, when it came to the fall session of the Ontario Legislature, they delayed it once again. These are the people who talk about how people should put in a full day's work, and they're always after people they think are deadbeats. Yet this is a government under the leadership of Mike Harris who had the House sitting only seven days until it was reconvened this time.

I can tell you that, yes, there were some complaints from the member who was objecting about others previously who is now barracking from her seat, the minister of all education, who is now talking about some instance a few years ago. Yes, you were critical of the NDP at that time because you said they sat only 20 days in a year, but, surely, seven days up to this point in time is a much worse record.

I'm going to, in a different speech, get into the issue of the relevance of this House, particularly for the new members of this House who are elected this time, and how irrelevant this Legislature has become.

There's a good book just out by Duff Roblin, who is the former Conservative Premier of Manitoba and a leadership contender federally for the Progressive Conservative Party, a highly respected individual, talking about the role of individually elected members and how he believes that elected members should individually have much more power than they have now. I think the newer members will recognize soon how little power they have, that the power rests in the Premier's office, that Guy Giorno, who just got his big raise and the other staffers for the senior echelon of this government—so they make more money than you people do now, who sit in the back benches—are really the people who control this government. They are the people who will continue to control this government, because there's a tendency to concentrate that power in one area.

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I may disagree with my friend the member from what used to be Ottawa-Rideau—it's a new Ottawa seat now—on certain issues, but I would want him, as an individual member, as I would want myself as an individual member, to have some power and influence in this House, since we are elected members, and not have that

power given to Guy Giorno and the group of whiz kids who surround the Premier of this province. And it happens, I must tell you, in other provinces as well.

I heard people mention the debt. I used to go to the chamber of commerce meetings and I'd say, "What is it we have to do in Ontario?" They'd say: "We've got to get after that debt. The NDP left a big debt. We've got to get after the debt." Now the cat has their tongue. After the speech from the throne, I was listening carefully to hear anybody talking about the debt. They've abandoned the debt. The debt apparently is OK, because we've got to rush headlong into yet another set of tax cuts.

I remember my friend from Wellington, Mr Ted Arnott, and his stance originally when they wanted to have these tax cuts before they balanced the budget. He and a small cabal—is that the word you use?—of people within the Tory caucus said to Mike Harris and the whiz kids: "No. What we've got to do is balance the budget; then we give the tax cut because then we don't have to borrow money." What did this government do, the paragons of virtue when it comes to fiscal responsibility? They added \$21 billion to the provincial debt, an almost 25% increase. There was an obsession with it; that obsession is gone.

Let me tell you who else is now involved in the deficit and the debt. That's our local hospitals.

Interjections.

Mr Bradley: The members can barrack all they want over there, but their local hospitals now, in many cases, are forced to incur deficits because of underfunding by this government. Now they are forced to do this: They're forced to cut back services.

Hon Mrs Ecker: What about the hospital deficits when you were there, Jim?

Mr Bradley: I've obviously provoked the minister of all education because she is barracking at me once again.

I remember the days when there were excellent services available in our hospitals, where you had all kinds of nurses there and doctors and other non-medical personnel making the hospital a reasonable place to visit. Now when you talk to somebody in this province and say, "You were in the hospital 10 years ago, and you were in the hospital this year; what's the difference?" they say, "You know, those nurses and other staff personnel are working so hard, but there are so few of them." They remember that Mike Harris said, "They're just going to have to learn to cope, because they're like Hula Hoop makers." The Hula Hoop makers had to find another job, and Mike Harris said that was going to happen with the nurses as well. You just ask any independent observer what it's like to visit a hospital today compared to 10 or a dozen years ago, and they will tell you it's a substantial difference. Is it because the hospitals want to provide a lesser service? No. It's because this government had an obsession with giving tax cuts at the expense of health care in this province.

All political parties—Conservative, Liberal and NDP—could take pride in the health care system that we developed and maintained in Ontario, but you people

have decided that's not so important. You seem to be on a path to a two-tier health care system, where you are with so many things. If you're rich, if you're privileged, you're fine—you can pay the user fees or you can get some other services somewhere else—but for the average person in this province, you can't have it.

I listened to an interesting instance. I'm not trying to be nasty, but I want to point out a difference. I heard in the speech from the throne—

Mr Wayne Wettkaufer (Kitchener Centre): You lost the election on those arguments, remember?

Mr Bradley: That's the arrogance over there. The member for Kitchener wants to tell us, for everybody who's watching tonight, that we lost the election. Isn't he great? He won, we lost, and we're supposed to bow down to him. Put that aside. That's the arrogance that has taken only a few days to infiltrate this government.

I listened to the speech from the throne, and I'm not being nasty; I just want to show you how you people have one set of rules for some people and not for others. I heard in the speech from the throne that if somebody were to defraud OHIP and be charged with that—not OHIP in this case; it would be, I think, OSAP—that person would not be eligible for OSAP any more. Fair enough, you might say. If a person were to be charged in court and convicted of perhaps welfare fraud, well, that person was to be ineligible from getting another government cheque. But you know something? If you're convicted of income tax evasion, that doesn't apply.

That's where the inconsistency is. You have to be fair to everybody. Either it's one rule for everybody and everybody applauds or you have different rules. What I see is a different set of rules that this government applies. As I say, I'm not trying to be nasty. Members who know me in this House know that I'm not that kind of person. I'm simply pointing out to you the difference, that you people have one rule for the rich and the privileged and the people you like, the people who surround you, the people who hover in the Albany Club to celebrate the speech from the throne and the budget, and other people of this province.

I hope you will ensure that you're going to cover the costs that hospitals are incurring at this time, trying to provide good services for people in this province.

I hope you will watch carefully the unrestricted, almost untrammeled, development that I see taking place. In my own city tonight they're talking about expanding the urban boundaries on to some of the best fruitland in the province of Ontario, excellent agricultural land that, if a decision were to be made to expand those boundaries, we would see gobbled up.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: I don't make this a partisan issue, because I think it's an issue that each one of us in this House should be concerned about, and that is the preservation of agricultural land. I know the member for Rexdale is going to have his opinion and his interjections, and I understand that. But I think of some of the agricultural members here and some of the urban people

and how important it is to have that agricultural land available to us. I hope that all of us, as members of this House, will be very careful in analyzing the use of land, especially precious agricultural land, because there isn't that much of it in the province of Ontario.

I've agreed to share my time with others, so I certainly, as I get into my last few seconds, would want to mention the Ministry of the Environment.

Many of the people who supported you people were happy to see you around because you said, "We're going to get the Ministry of the Environment out of your face," and you know something? You sure as heck did. You've got my good friend Frank Sheehan, the chair of the Red Tape Commission, who was writing letters to people and saying how these environmental regulations were bothersome, and others within the government. You changed legislation to weaken environmental legislation and regulations in this province. But most of all, you cut the staff, the human resources in the ministry, by some one third and the budget by over 42%. You cannot protect the environment adequately while you are dismantling the Ministry of the Environment. I hope I will have an opportunity at some future time to deal with that particular issue.

I do want to ensure that my good friend from Essex is able to talk about some of the challenges in his riding, so I want to yield the floor to him at this time.

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Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): It's a pleasure for me as well this evening to stand to speak to the interim supply debate. It's unfortunate, though, that since this government has been so lax in bringing the Legislature back we have to sit in the evening. That's not bad. I'm from out of town. I enjoy sitting and debating issues in the evening too. The thing is I like to truly debate issues and have the time to debate them. It's unfortunate that they've limited the debate on the interim supply bill. Over the weeks to come I'm going to want to speak to the Legislature and to my constituents and particularly to the governor—"governor": That's a Freudian slip, because it's more like New Jersey all the time, isn't it? So "governor" is right.

I'm going to want to speak to the government about things like safety on the 401 and the gridlock that we have on the 401 in the southwestern part of the province, basically between the cities of London and Windsor. I'm going to want to speak to the issue of how this government has totally abandoned agriculture. I'm going to want to speak to the issue that my colleague mentioned about how our hospitals are forced into deficit positions because they don't want to reduce the services to the people in their communities.

I'm going to have to speak to the fact that boards of education have to incur deficits now because they can't provide the special education that they could provide before. The government says, "We'll tell you how to define those who need special assistance; we just won't help you pay for it, that's all."

But tonight I want to pick up on something the member for Wentworth-Burlington said. He said they have

been able to do all of these great things without reducing services. Well, let me tell you something: You try to get a driver's licence in this province today in a reasonable length of time—

Mr Bradley: Impossible.

Mr Crozier: —and it's impossible.

One thing governments are here for is to serve the public that they represent. Governments are here to provide those services to the public when in fact they demand that certain criteria be fulfilled, ie, that you have to have a driver's licence to drive a car. The problem is, once you're qualified for it, you can't get an appointment to get one for six or eight months. Once you want to increase your skills, your licence degree, if you like, the degree of licensing you have, and better employ yourself, you know what the problem is? You can't get an examination for it for six months.

What did the Minister of Transportation do to try to rectify this?

Mr Bradley: He made an announcement.

Mr Crozier: He made a big announcement, exactly, as my colleague from St Catharines says, on October 15. This is a little confusing, and I wish he'd go back to it. For more information we can contact the minister's office and the communications branch.

Let me quote from it. It says: "The graduated licensing system is working. However, current waiting times for tests are also unacceptable." He says, "The graduated licensing system is working," but then in the next sentence he says, "But I'm going to tell you something: That's also unacceptable." I think that's probably just a typo, but it is rather confusing when you say on one hand it's working and then in the next sentence you say it's unacceptable.

But the government is taking steps to reduce the backlog. What are they doing to reduce that backlog? I've been after the Minister of Transportation, both the current one and his predecessor, to reopen an examination centre in Essex county. One was closed in Leamington a couple of years ago, and since that time students, the elderly and everybody else has had to go either to Chatham or Windsor to get a driver's examination. As I said before, the problem is that you can't get it for six or nine months.

Mr Bradley: But they got their tax cuts.

Mr Crozier: Oh, of course they did.

What are we going to have? We're going to increase the number of full-time driving examiners in Windsor by five. That might mean that rather than waiting nine months, you only have to wait four and a half. Big deal. In Chatham they're going to increase the three full-time examiners by two. That might help it in Chatham as well, so you may only have to wait three or four months.

Let me tell you something—and this should make economic sense to any of you over there—there was an ad in the Windsor Star this past weekend for driver examiners. They're going to pay them \$633 a week. As part of this ad it says, "the ability to climb in and out of automobiles, buses or trucks at least 20 times a day." It doesn't say that you have to do any good work while

you're doing it; it just says you have to be able to climb in and out of them. Do you know what it costs somebody getting an examination for the examiner to climb in and out of that vehicle? Seventy-five bucks.

What we're saying is, if an examiner—and let's give them the benefit of the doubt—can do 15 examinations a day, times \$75, do you know what that's going to amount to in a week? About \$5,600 in income. They're going to pay that examiner \$633. Let's throw in 40% for benefits, 40% for overhead. Minister, you can go out and hire a lot more examiners. You can go out there and serve the public like you should serve the public, and you can keep this money grab going at the same time. I get a lot of complaints in my riding that it's simply a money grab: \$75, and 50% of them fail. With a failure rate of 50%, there's that much more income. It's simply a money grab.

My point is this: It's a big deal when he says he's going to increase the number of examiners by 186, I think it is, in the province. But he can even double that figure, reduce those lineups and still make money as well.

We're going to watch the minister very closely. We're going to continue to ask the minister to open up an examination centre in Essex county. Therefore, students who want to get their first licence won't have to take a day off school. It will be closer to home, better for them. Seniors who need to be re-examined will be able to take their examination closer to home. So, that isn't all you're going to here from us down our way when it comes to driver's licence examinations.

Let me tell you something else we're going to talk about down our way, and that's gasoline prices. It was mentioned in the budget that the provincial government will investigate high gas prices but plans to do little about them. Instead, it will hand the results of its probe on to the federal government.

Let me tell you something. I've looked at this a lot more closely than the minister who's yapping over there.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): I thought maybe we needed a little time out. It was getting too rowdy in here. I'd like to be able to count on your company for the rest of the evening, so I'd like you to pay attention to the speaker, and the speaker is the member for Essex.

Mr Crozier: Thank you, Speaker. That helps me get my ministers straightened out, because nowadays with ministers resigning, some are carrying two portfolios, I really don't know who is in charge over there.

Let's get back to gasoline prices for a moment, Speaker. Sir, with respect to you, I should speak more to you, so then I'll know when you are standing and some of the members over there won't have to remind me. Thank you.

Let's talk about gasoline prices. The federal government certainly has the responsibility to determine that there is no collusion. I am one who is going to join you and everybody else if you can strengthen those laws, and

if we can encourage the federal government to strengthen those laws, let's do it. But when this provincial government stands up and says that the federal government is the only one that controls gas prices, they don't know what they're talking about, because provinces can in fact control gasoline prices.

Let me give you an example. A few weeks ago, I visited PEI and I met with the regulatory commission in PEI. Part of the information they gave me was the weekly pump price survey as of September 28, 1999. For example, in Windsor gasoline prices were 63.8 cents per litre; Toronto, 63.1 cents per litre; Sault Ste Marie, 66.9 cents per litre. You know what the price was in Charlottetown, PEI? It was 56.8.

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We have heard that it's all the federal government's fault, but quite frankly, the only one who can control gasoline prices is a provincial government. This government tells us they're going to continue to have their watchdog, which does absolutely nothing; we can all do that. In fact, just a year or so ago there was a government of the crown, and I think the Premier as well, who said, "We're going to bring those oil companies to heel." They brought them to heel, all right. It was probably prior to the election, and they said: "Come on in here. We need a contribution for our campaign." That's the way they brought them to heel.

Provinces have the authority—they're the only ones that have the authority—to control gasoline prices, so to shift this blame off to anybody else isn't fair and it isn't true. All I would ask this government to do is to have your Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations contact the government—the Tory government, by the way—in the province of Prince Edward Island and ask them how successful their controlling of gasoline prices has been. Through a formula that takes a myriad of costs and expenses into consideration, they determine the lowest price that can be charged and the highest price that can be charged. As long as the retailers and the wholesalers charge between those guidelines, everybody is happy. To say that it's simply in the hands of the federal government, I repeat—

Mr Bradley: It's nonsense.

Mr Crozier: It's nonsense, it's unfair and it's untrue.

You'll be hearing a lot more in the days to come about gasoline prices, and you're just not going to be able to foist it onto the federal government. I'll be right with you when it comes to making sure that competition is fair and to strengthen the competition laws—no problem with that. But you have to do your part, and it's more than just standing up and saying, "We're going to bring somebody to heel." You've got the authority to do something about it; you should do something about it.

The Minister of Transportation is here this evening. It might be well if he got together with the Minister of Finance and said: "Look, Ontario has one of the highest provincial sales taxes on gasoline in the country. I think we should do either one of two things or both. We should either reduce those taxes or we should designate that

those taxes be used on our highways." Then maybe widening the shoulders and putting barriers in and improving the 401 in the London-to-Windsor corridor won't be such a difficult job.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member for—it's not Cochrane.

Mr Bisson: Timmins-James Bay.

The Deputy Speaker: Timmins-James Bay. My apologies.

Mr Bisson: I don't blame you for getting a bit confused with the names because, quite frankly, you can get lost in the riding of Timmins-James Bay; it is quite large.

Mr Bradley: Tell us how you get around, Gilles.

Mr Bisson: I get around by plane. That's how I get around in my riding, quite easily. Being a pilot, it's a bit easier.

J'aimerais prendre cette occasion, premièrement, pour parler un peu du comté de Timmins-Baie James, le nouveau comté dans notre région. Comme vous le savez, toute la province a vu une grosse redistribution dans le dernier parlement où on est allé de 130 députés à 103. Ça veut dire pour certaines régions de la province un gros changement quant ça vient à la représentation dans ces comtés.

Je peux vous dire, monsieur le Président, comme vous le savez bien—you avez fait allusion tout à l'heure en vous mêlant un petit peu avec le nom—que dans le passé, j'étais le député de Cochrane-Sud, et notre bon ami M. Len Wood était le député de Cochrane-Nord, deux députés pour servir deux comtés de la grandeur, environ, de la France, un gros pays en Europe qu'on connaît très bien. Mais comme on le sait, c'est changé à un député.

Je veux vous donner une petite idée de la grandeur. Imaginez-vous si vous partiez de la partie la plus au sud de mon comté pour aller à la partie la plus au nord. Premièrement, il n'y a pas d'autoroutes. Il n'y a pas de 400, 401. Il n'y a pas de trains ; il n'y a rien. Il y a des chemins pour moins qu'un tiers du comté. On voit le comté qui part de Timmins aller tout à fait à la baie d'Hudson dans le bout de Peawanuck un peu au nord de là, dans le bout de Fort Severn. La distance est un peu comme si vous partiez d'ici, de Toronto, pour aller aux États-Unis—on parle d'aller bien proche de la ville d'Atlanta—donc c'est un comté qui n'est pas mal gros mais divers.

La partie nord du comté est la baie James, où qu'on a les résidents—les autochtones, les Cris dans leurs communautés d'Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Moose Factory, Ogoki, Peawanuck et d'autres communautés, des réserves très fières avec beaucoup d'ouvrage et beaucoup à faire dans le développement économique et social dans ces coins. On s'en va un peu plus loin à 200 milles, 300 milles de rien, et on arrive à Hearst après Moosonee, où on trouve une communauté très dynamique qui a ça à cœur, qui sait comment s'organiser, qui sait que, quand on se tient ensemble, on est capable d'avancer avec n'importe quoi et tout est possible. C'est la communauté de Hearst. On voit aussi des communau-

tés comme Constance Lake et Calstock, et on descend sur la route 11 vers Opasatika, Mattice, Val Côté, Fauquier, Moonbeam, Kapuskasing, Smooth Rock Falls, et j'en passe. Finalement on arrive à Timmins.

Mr Bradley: Iroquois Falls.

Mr Bisson: Iroquois Falls no longer. Iroquois Falls is now in the riding of the member of Timiskaming-Cochrane. I do miss Iroquois Falls, I must say. Iroquois Falls is a great community to represent. I had the distinction of representing it for nine years, and I do miss the people.

Le point que je veux faire : c'est un comté qui est très grand, très divers, et qui prend beaucoup d'attention. J'espère que je pourrai livrer aussi bien les services dans ce nouveau comté que j'ai donnés dans mon vieux comté.

I just want to take the chance very quickly to remind members of the House, as we all very well know, that our ridings are much changed over the last few months. The riding I represent now is the second-largest riding in Ontario, a riding that spans from the community of Timmins at the very south all the way to Hudson Bay to a community called Peawanuck and north of that almost to a community called Fort Severn.

The distance between the most northerly part of this riding and the most southerly is about the distance of travelling from Toronto to Atlanta. If you want a sense of geography, please come and visit the riding of Timmins-James Bay. I'd be glad to carry you around in the back of my plane as we travel from one community to another trying to figure as best we can how to get there when the weather goes rough, as we've had for the last couple of weeks.

It is a very diverse riding, a riding made up really of about three or four very distinctive parts. The northern part of the riding is really on James Bay, very much not connected by road. There is basically one rail line going into Moosonee. The rest is only accessible by aircraft. First Nations communities such as Peawanuck, Attawapiskat, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Moose Factory, Moosonee, Ogoki and a few others have very, very severe problems to deal with. Many of them lie with the federal government and we've been doing some work on the federal side because, as we well know, most of the responsibility for native communities lies with the federal government, but not without a certain responsibility on the part of the provincial government. We've been working with them on a number of different issues. In fact, we have a couple of items before various ministries at this point in trying to deal with some of the issues on the James Bay communities.

Moving further south, there are a lot of woods running from Moosonee to the next community. You've basically got no roads there. If you try to go across country, it would be by way of the Polar Bear Express, if you're able to take it, or basically by air is the only way to get there. You eventually end up in the community of Hearst.

I've got to say that Hearst is a very special place. Of all the places in my riding that I've had the pleasure of serving, Hearst is probably one of my favourites, even

though electorally I did the worst there. It is the only part of my riding where I didn't win the majority of polls. I won pretty well every poll in my riding except for the community of Hearst, but I've got to say I'm working hard on Hearst. I'm hoping we do better next time. But Hearst is a very different community. It's 99% French, very proud people, people who take themselves together and work on things concertededly. They understand the meaning of the word "community," because Hearst never does anything alone. If you ever go to Hearst, you'll notice it's like everybody's on side or everybody's not on side. There seems to almost be a secret meeting that I don't know about sometimes where everybody comes together and agrees on what the community is going to do over the next little while, and then they go out and do it. They come to their federal or their provincial member, their mayor or various other individuals, to help him get there. I have to say it's been quite interesting. We've worked on a couple of projects together, with quite a bit of success, I might add, and I'm looking forward to the work with the community.

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Moving down Highway 11, many communities—Mattice, Val Côté, Moonbeam, Opasatika, Fauquier, Kapuskasing, Strickland, Smooth Rock Falls, and the list goes on. I know I'm going to miss a whole bunch in between and I'll probably get a phone call tomorrow.

But I just want to make the point: There are a lot of different communities and, as you know as members, it's not just the number of people you have in your riding that keeps you busy; it's how many municipalities you have, how many school boards you have and how many agencies you have.

I am not a fan of amalgamation, and I want to put that on the record now. If you move towards trying to amalgamate these communities, I think it's a mistake. I want to put it on the record. But it does take a lot of time, and I hope I am able to rise to the challenge.

Last but not least is the community of Timmins, a community of 50,000 people, basically a regional jumping-off spot for northeastern Ontario. It includes the mining industry, pulp and paper, sawmills, and is a regional centre when it comes to the local government area, so it's quite a diverse riding.

I want to take this opportunity also to thank my colleague Len Wood, who served the riding of Cochrane North for nine years. Len, as you know, was a very tireless worker in his community. He was very instrumental in the Kapuskasing deal with regard to the Spruce Falls deal, where we negotiated employee ownership in that community.

One of the reasons I was able to win the northern part of the riding in Cochrane North fairly well, much of it had to do with the work Len did. Len was the type of guy who was not very big on fanfare. He was not very big on going out and always trying to take credit for everything. He was the type of guy who just went out and did the work and didn't worry about who got the credit for it. What was important for him was his community.

One thing about Len I've got to say: Len always remembered where he came from. He's a solid individual, and I tell you, this Legislature will miss him. Len always knew where he came from, he knew who he was, he knew who he represented and he knew at the end of the day who the boss was, and that's the people back in his constituency, I think something a lot of us in this House know. On behalf of myself and others, I'd like to thank Len for his nine years of service, and I look forward to working with him on many other projects.

I want to take this opportunity, because in interim supply we get the opportunity to be able to comment on a number of issues having to do with the government. I want to split my comments among a couple of different things. I'd like to make a few comments with regard to the throne speech. There are a couple of items in there having to do with the economic side of the agenda that I want to make some comments on. Then I'd like to come back to something that's starting to trouble me more and more. That is where I think we are going as a middle class in the province of Ontario.

Let's first start with the throne speech. A couple of points: Every government has an opportunity—my government from 1990 to 1995, the Liberals prior to that and certainly the Tories for many years—to put forward the throne speech. It is an ability for the government to showcase what it wants to do over the next little while. Contained in every throne speech there are some good announcements and some bad. Somewhere in between is really where most throne speeches lie.

I was interested in looking at this particular throne speech because it seemed to me, in observing as I watched the accounts from television—because I wasn't here that particular day; I was at some things I had to do up in Orillia and North Bay with regard to the ONTC and a few other things—I remarked that it was really not very much different from what we saw last spring as the government introduced its throne speech in the last Parliament.

The one general comment I would make is there are some initiatives in the throne speech that I could live with. There are some positive measures. I'm not going to sit here and try to paint everything this government does as black. I disagree fundamentally with most of what you've done, but some of the initiatives that you announced in the throne speech, if you deliver on them, I think are positive things.

But I want to take you to task on a few of them. One of them is that in your throne speech you announced that you were going to put forward \$10 million in order to help with the attraction and the retention of physicians in northeastern and northwestern Ontario. As everybody knows, there is a crisis in some communities, such as Kapuskasing, and various communities across the north. It's not a new issue. It's not one that was solely created by the Conservative government. It's an issue that's been around for a long time. Successive governments have tried to deal with it with varying measures of success.

But in this particular throne speech, you announced the same \$10 million that you've announced twice already. I remember this announcement last fall, made by your then Minister of Health, I watched it as it was re-announced in the throne speech of last spring and I see it again this time.

I've got to ask myself, is there really a Santa Claus? Is it really going to happen? I'm normally an optimist, but I'm really beginning to wonder if there is a Santa Claus at the other side of the bench, because it's three times that you announced this money, twice that you haven't delivered it.

I will just speak as a northerner first and as a member of the party second. First of all, we've heard this announcement before. If you're going to make those kinds of announcements, at least have the decency to go out and carry through on them, because it brings people up only to bring them back down again. In Kapuskasing we have gone through a whole bunch of problems with regard to trying to keep the physicians we have, and we're having problems trying to attract new doctors into the community, and specialists as well.

People hear these kinds of announcements and they say: "Finally there's some news coming. We're going to get something. We're getting somewhere." Everybody goes out, including myself three times now, and says this is a good announcement on the part of the government. Three times the mayor of Kapuskasing, J.C. Caron, has gone out and made those comments. Three times the chief of staff of the Sensenbrenner Hospital has gone out and said, "This is good stuff." The municipality, the community, various people have said, "Finally, something's going to happen."

Well, can you please deliver. We want to not only see you make the announcement, we want to see in your deeds the actual spending of the money and putting the program in place. I think there are some positive things that we can do, first of all, to try to keep the doctors we've got, and then to work on trying to attract new ones. I just implore you, please actually go out and do it this time. We can say maybe the first announcement was a mistake; the second announcement, you can say maybe the election got in the way. But there's no reason now that you can't go forward with what you've announced. That would be the first thing.

The second one—and I take offence to this one—was the whole issue of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. I remember, I was in this Legislature from 1990 to 1995, when the then third party leader, Mike Harris, day after day came into this House and tried to force our government in the last days of our government to move an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Unfortunately, the time-frame didn't allow us to bring forward a bill. The Tories campaigned in 1995 on being able to deliver on that bill. Four years in this Legislature and nothing happened. Four years critics in the opposition got up, and members of the back bench, including some of your backbenchers in the Tory caucus, and asked when the government was

going to finally deliver on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

What did we get? We got a bill that was delivered in this House, I believe in the spring of last year. I stand to be corrected. It was a page-and-a-half bill with a title that talked about an Ontarians with Disabilities Act that had absolutely nothing in it. It had the community in an uproar. People were insulted.

People said: "Listen, we've waited for you to deliver on something for four years. You promised you were going to do something. You said you were different." You said you weren't like the Liberals and the NDP, who supposedly said one thing and did something different. This whole mantra—I can't say the word "lie," it's unparliamentary, so the big "blank." The reality is that you guys went out and campaigned on this and then you had the audacity to come in this House and deliver a bill that was basically blank. It had a title on the front, it had explanations on the inside cover and had basically one clause in it. The disabilities community basically said, "Listen, what goes on here?"

Now we see in the throne speech of last week the government come back and say that you're going to move on an Ontarians with Disabilities Act. I certainly hope you're serious, because it's time that we do. I will support that bill if you bring it forward in a measure that's able to deal with some of the many real issues that have to do with accessibility and other issues that we need to deal with. But I'm telling you, don't make these kinds of announcements and then come back and do what you did the last time, because you're going to have an entire group of people who are not only going to be upset but, quite frankly, you're playing with their dreams, their aspirations. They think that finally something's going to happen.

You know as well as I do—you're members of the Legislature as I am—that you have people that you deal with in your community who are disabled and come to you and call you, or you go and visit them, whatever way you're able to do it, to deal with these issues. I think of people like Howard Kyle in my community, who's called me and I've gone to visit on a number of occasions, and I've run across him at a couple of events. He says, "Gilles, when is something going to happen on this?"

Now he hears again, by way of the throne speech, that you're going to deliver. Howard's been there before. How many times are you going to bring him to the well? Poor Howard. The reality is these people don't have a lot in their lives at times and are looking forward to getting a little bit of good news, because it's difficult for them. Not only do they have to overcome their physical disabilities, but they're having to deal with trying to compete in a society that is geared towards dealing with people who are mobile. How do you compete for a job when you're not able to get around on your own from area to area? Most places are inaccessible. There are all kinds of issues that prevent people from getting full employment. Your government is the one that cancelled employment equity that tried to deal with this back in the early 1990s. So I

say to you, if you're going to make those kinds of comments within your throne speech, I would at least ask you to deliver on them.

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I also want to make another comment with regard to the throne speech. My good friend Mr Bradley—I think his riding is still St Catharines—made comments with regard to the issue of the debt and deficit.

I remember, je me souviens, as we say, this government on the other side, once they were a third party, along with the Liberals, sitting there and chastising the NDP government on the issue of debt and deficit. Day in, day out, they came into this House and they just harped on it, wouldn't let it go. The province was going to go to hell in a handbasket if we did not only deal with the issue of deficit but with the issue of debt. That was the big issue; that was the mantra.

We know what happened. The reality is there was a recession in the 1990s. The Liberals said they were going to balance the budget. We ended up with an \$8.5-billion deficit once we opened the books. Yes, we added \$1.2 billion to that ourselves. We put in place an anti-recession program, and we put in place the wage protection program. That was the NDP addition to the debt and deficit.

We made a conscious decision as a government that we were not going to fight the deficit on the backs of the working people and the middle class of this province. To take that kind of money out of the provincial coffers in the middle of a recession would have been pretty difficult to do, as you well understand, in supposedly a boom time.

But how come I hear absolutely nothing now? After four years of a Tory government, we have an increased debt over what it was when the NDP left power. There's no attempt to deal with it in a real way, because whatever savings you're getting when it comes to cutting programs, you're offsetting by a loss of revenue by your stupid tax cut. You're now saying in this throne speech that you're going to deliver on more tax cuts.

I've got to ask myself, why is it that you're so insistent on giving tax cuts? All politicians of all stripes—NDP, Liberal or Conservative—would like to be able to say to people: "Here's a tax cut. Have another one. They're good to have. They're great for breakfast, lunch and supper. If I can give you one for dessert, I'll give you one as well."

Most politicians would love to do it. But we also have a responsibility as politicians and members of this assembly to make sure the provincial government has got the money in the coffers, to make sure we have the dollars to pay for the important programs that working men and women need in this province.

How do we pay for a health care budget that's some \$19 billion in size? How do we pay for an education budget, between colleges, universities and primary schools, of about the same magnitude? How do you pay for programs like that if you don't have tax revenue coming in?

This government says: "We can have it both ways. We can give a tax cut on the one side, we can cut programs on the other, and somehow it's all going to work out in the end." You guys have still got a deficit, and you still have a higher debt than you had when we left power, for God's sake, because you've been insistent on being able to deliver on the tax cut. I think that inherently is wrong, and I think in the long run the NDP will be proven right on that point.

God forbid, if we end up in another recession, we are going to be in the worst possible part of both worlds. We are not going to have the revenue to be able to respond to the issues of the economy, and we will not have the programs to be able to help people out when they most need it. What's going to happen is our deficit will increase 10-fold from what we had under the NDP if we end up in another recession because of the policies this government is following.

I say to you, it's OK to give a tax cut when you've got a surplus. No argument on that one. But giving a tax cut at a time when you've still got a deficit is not very prudent fiscal management.

The first thing that you guys should have done from 1995 on was try to work on and follow what we were trying to do, which was to manage down the cost of programs, make some hard decisions about what it is the provincial government can fund. Once you've got your balanced budget and you've got some extra revenue, at that point you then start looking at a tax cut. People understand that.

You understand, Mr Hardeman, very well. You're a very reasonable member. I've known you for four years. You're a practical guy. You come from the Oxford area. People back in Oxford understand that you don't go out and cut your neck to spite your face. They understand you have to make sure that you've got enough revenue coming in your till to pay your bills before you give your customers another break. You've got to make sure that you're there for the longer term, able to pay your bills.

But this government has gone forward with that, and I think it's a policy, in the long run, that's not going to serve us well. Why? Because the government is having to cut that much faster, that much harder. Programs are starting to really feel it. We see in the ODP program and we see in a whole bunch of other programs what's happening because of that.

I just say to the government, it's not a very good policy to be following, trying to give a tax cut at the same time that you're trying to balance the budget. I think it's not the way that you should go.

Now to the second part of my comments that I wanted to get into. My fear is that what's happened over probably the last 10 to 15 years—there used to be a time, not only in Ontario but in Canada generally, when most Canadians felt optimistic about our place in the world and about how Canada was a very different country from most other places. We were the envy of the world when it came to very good social programs. We had a certain confidence as Canadians that was unmatched by most

other countries. We travelled around as Canadians from one country to another and Canadians were respected because we were seen as being very different.

As I watch what's happened in the economy over the last 10 to 15 years, and it's been accelerating even more than that over the last couple of years, I worry now about how our nation is starting to become very much controlled by large multinationals, about how our policies are no longer really dictated by the Legislature or the House of Commons or by municipal councils, for that matter, that we're starting to become more and more captive to the multinational agendas.

The Conservatives on the other side will say, "What is he talking about?" The reality, and you know as well as I do, is that we're entering into a time when policies are very much influenced by the large multinationals of this world. They come in and they have the clout, because the big are getting bigger, with more power to demand a whole bunch of things from provincial governments in terms of changes of policies that favour them, to the detriment of the middle class. I really worry about that as I watch what's happening, and I just want to speak on that for a few minutes.

I look at the popular debate we have these days, not only in Ontario but across the province, where we see that it's getting more and more difficult for the individuals within our economy to really find a niche for themselves. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons I wasn't here a little bit earlier as the Conservatives were speaking is that I was on the telephone speaking to a couple of constituents who had a couple of problems they wanted me to deal with. I want to tell you about just one, because it's probably something you've heard in your own ridings.

One particular individual—I forget his name right now—was basically a laid-off worker. He was working for a mining company—not Royal Oak that closed down; I'll talk about that a little later—up around the Matheson area, and this gentleman lost his job, as he explains it, because he was starting to have some physical problems, torn rotator cuff injuries inside his shoulders. Eventually the employer let him go. It's non-unionized. There was not a lot he could do about it, he says. He can't prove decisively that that's why the employer let him go, but nonetheless he's no longer there and somebody else is, so you figure that out however you want. He says that as far as he knows he had no problems of absenteeism or any kind of discipline problem with the work. It was just an issue where he was not able to compete, as an older worker, at the same level as a younger worker who has an able body full of health, and he found himself unemployed.

So he said to himself: "Maybe I'll try to start up a business of some kind. I'm in my fifties; I've got a few dollars I can put into a business. I can try to do something for myself." So here's this individual who's got \$20,000 to invest. He wants to go into the logging business to do work having to do with a slasher. For those of you who know anything about logging, it's a piece of equipment

you use in the bush to take the branches off the trees once they bring the trees out to the skidway. This particular guy said: "I can go out and I can buy myself a slasher. It's about \$60,000. I've got \$20,000 to go into it. I've got a contract with a logging contractor to have enough wood to keep this thing going." So he's got guaranteed revenue. This guy went from bank to bank with \$20,000 cash and could not get a loan to buy this particular piece of equipment. How many times have you heard that inside your constituencies?

I'm finding it's become more and more of an issue as I go around speaking to people who are trying to get businesses off the ground, not only in my riding but all across this province as we speak to people. The banks are becoming increasingly difficult to deal with when it comes to securing loans. The only time you seem to be able to get anything from the banks is if you walk in and almost have 100% security on whatever it is you're trying to borrow, if you're trying to get a business off the ground.

This poor guy ended up having to go to a leasing company to buy the equipment—gave \$20,000 to the leasing company—and then was put in the position of having to rent his own piece of equipment, because that's the only way he can finance it so he can make himself a living. So he calls me up and he says: "Gilles, I'm just appalled. I did it because I didn't think there was anything else available, but I really want to complain. What do I do about this?" The problem, I believe, is that more and more we find ourselves under the control of the larger and larger corporations. When it comes to the logging industry, the wood side, the supply side of the picture, is controlled by larger and larger logging corporations which basically make the decisions. It's very difficult for the little guy to get in.

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The second part is that the banks are becoming more and more difficult to deal with. They are increasingly conservative when it comes to loaning money out to individuals who are trying to start businesses. Basically the little guys, you and I who are out there trying to invest our \$20,000, \$30,000, \$40,000 or \$50,000 into a business, are finding it increasingly difficult to find a place to invest. We are finding that the larger corporations are more and more starting to take up bigger and bigger pieces of the pie when it comes to the economy. There's very little that we can go into now as individual middle-class people investing in businesses, and when we do there are pretty substantial investments, as you well know, within your own riding.

This individual I spoke to was not the first time I've had that kind of discussion with people. I look at the member from Sudbury—I'm sure you've had those kinds of discussions with constituents in your riding—and I look at members around the area, and I think we need to start to do something. We need to do it at the federal level, yes, because banking is primarily federal, but at the provincial level we need to start dealing with how we're able to develop programs and policies that give the middle class the opportunity to get into the economy and to

find a niche for themselves, to develop their own businesses. I find it very disconcerting to see what's happening in the local economy and what's happening in the provincial economy when it comes to the inability on the part of people to invest.

I'm certainly not going to get into names and even industries on this particular example, because people will understand what I'm talking about and I don't want them to because of what I've been told by other people, but the other day a contractor came to see me and said: "We're about 10 subcontractors. The company that we are dealing with, the major company that we work for, has told us that if we don't get together within the next 12 to 14 months and merge ourselves into one company, they're basically going to get rid of us all and they're going to go and hire one general contractor to do everything." Here are poor individuals who have investments of \$1 million to \$1.5 million worth of equipment who are being told by a large multinational: "If you guys don't merge together and form one corporation, we ain't dealing with you no more. We're going to go to one other contractor to do everything."

Go check around your neighbourhood. I'll talk to the member from Sudbury because I think this one affects you as well; there are some interboundary things here. I asked the individual contractor: "What's going on? What's in it for this large corporation?" He says, "The way I figure it, they're going to save probably \$100,000 overall in being able to basically deal with one contractor rather than dealing with 10."

This particular bean counter, as I call them, in this corporation, some guy with suspenders who went to university somewhere who thinks he knows it all, who probably has never had to work a day in his life, has decided he wants to make himself look good on the way to the corporate top. So he's gone out and developed a policy that he is quite proud of; I've talked to him about it. He's quite proud of his policy as being a way to save the corporation some dollars. You know, the corporation is everything. What about those 10 or 12 individuals who have investments of over \$1 million and are being squeezed out of business because these large multinationals are squeezing them to death?

I don't know about you, but I look at some members around this assembly and you are nodding your heads up and down and saying, "Yeah, I've seen that too." I really get worried, because those investments are ours. Those are the kinds of businesses that we get into as a middle class. Ernie Hardeman over there, like Gilles Bisson, can't go out and buy Heinz or Falconbridge. We haven't got the money to get into that kind of business. But if Ernie Hardeman or Gilles Bisson at the end of this Parliament decides that he is not going to run or, God forbid, our constituents kick us out and we decide to go into business, it's our \$30,000, \$40,000 or \$50,000 investments that are going to try to set us up in business. I'm getting more and more worried as I look out there at the difficulty the middle class is having trying to invest back into this economy.

The big myth is that we are in this big, robust economy. The economy is doing well, but for whom? For the large corporations, for the people like my good friend Buzz Hargrove and the automotive industry. "Good friend" is a bit of a stretch, but I know him well.

It's the large corporations—the GMs, the Falconbridges, the Incos, Heinz, the Westons—that are increasingly doing better. What they've managed to do by way of design over the last 10 or 15 years is to influence policies at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, and even at the international level when you look at the GATT and a whole bunch of other issues, where they're able to carve up a bigger piece of the economic pie for themselves.

Most of us in this Legislature aren't rich by any stretch of the imagination, even on the government bench, except for a few of my good friends over there. Most of us are middle class. We started out in life much the same, working-class families, went out and got an education, maybe invested in a business or went into a profession, and we did well for ourselves. What we're seeing now is that it's becoming more and more difficult for our class to eke out an existence within this current economy.

I say to the government across the way and to all members, we need to start turning our attention to dealing with ways to eliminate this expansion of the growing gap, as I see it, between the larger, richer corporations and us, the middle class. I think it's a huge problem that we're going to have to start dealing with.

They are now at the point of being able to dictate policies to governments. We're seeing your government and we're seeing other governments across the country deregulate the environment regulations, deregulate labour legislation, deregulate almost everything under the sun; privatize whatever you can because the larger corporations will win and somehow that will be better.

I want to give you another example. The Minister of Transportation is here, so he's going to like this. I talked to him a little earlier. I certainly hope he doesn't go this way, but here's the latest one.

Let me ask you, is the chamber of commerce normally friends with Conservatives? Big time, right? Normally we associate chambers of commerce as being fairly good friends with Conservatives. The Conservatives are supposedly the business party, and many times you find more Tories in the chamber of commerce than New Democrats, I can tell you, even in my community. There are a few New Democrats but, by and large, mostly Conservatives.

Do you know what the latest bid is? The government of Ontario, through the Service Ontario initiative, wants to transfer the responsibility for issuing stickers for your licence plate and renewal of drivers' licences over to the private sector. Do you know who is probably going to get this? The banks. If you look at the list of people who have bid on this, the people up at the top who look as if they're going to get this contract to issue licences, it's people like the Royal Bank, the Bank of Montreal, the Bank of Nova Scotia. My Lord, do we have to give them

more business? How much is enough for the Royal Bank? The Royal Bank made how much last year? In the billions of dollars, and now they're going to start going into competition with the Timmins Chamber of Commerce.

I find it passing strange for a couple of reasons. First of all, here are a whole bunch of independents—because about 200 of these issuers are independent business people and about another 30 or 40 of them are chambers of commerce that issue stickers and licences across Ontario. Your government, by way of this initiative, in the long run is going to undo their ability to make a living as independent issuers and, second, as chambers of commerce. I don't need to tell you what that means to individual chambers of commerce across the province. That is a core part of their revenue. That's what allows them to offer services in communities like Kapuskasing, Kirkland Lake, Timmins, Iroquois Falls and various places. The chambers are funded not only by membership but by the revenue they get from being able to operate motor vehicle registration offices.

I talked to the Minister of Transportation about this today, and I'm hopeful that in the end it ain't going to go to the extent that many people fear. But I'll tell you, I've talked to some of the independents out there and I've talked to chambers of commerce, and they're quite worried about where this is going. They're telling me that nobody is telling them what's going on. When they read the documentation, the guys who are at the top of the list are the big guys, the banks.

I just say, how much is enough? Do we need these banks making more money? I don't think so. What we need is the middle class getting a bit of a break and the ability to get into business and make a few bucks for themselves and, hopefully, by doing that, creating some good jobs for hard-working people who want to go out and work and not collect a welfare cheque. But I tell you, we need the policies to be able to get that.

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On that point, I want to bring you up to date on an issue that's happening in my riding at this time. Many of you will have heard of a company by the name of Royal Oak. Royal Oak is a mining company that was owned by Peggy Witte. She is supposedly a mining tycoon. She came into the mining industry, full fanfare, back in the 1980s. She was going to turn the industry on its ear. She went by way of acquisition. She did a whole bunch of things. She was even hailed at one point as the mining person of the year. She got an award about five or six years ago. Well, some award. They should take it back.

This individual threw this company over \$600 million into debt. The company went bankrupt and, as a result, the Royal Oak mine, a mine that was profitable in the city of Timmins for a number of years, that operated for at least 60 or 70 years, went into receivership—250 jobs in our community of 50,000. These are good-paying jobs. These are people who have been working at this company—on average the seniority on the Pamour property at Royal Oak was about 25 years. People I have

known for years who went to work there when they were younger are now in their middle age, as I am, and have seen no other employment other than Royal Oak.

I worked there myself for 10 or 11 years as an electrician at the McIntyre property: Not the richest company in the world, not the company that paid the best wages, but by and large a good company that had a fairly good corporate image, a company that seemed to somewhat care about its workers and tried to do the right thing. But this individual, Mrs Witte, basically put the company into debt, \$600 million worth, did not spend enough money on exploration to keep the reserves in that mine up to date and, as a result, the company went bankrupt. Why? Because she overextended herself and, as a result, the place was put under bankruptcy protection. Price Waterhouse, the receiver appointed by the court, was told last spring to go ahead and try to negotiate and find somebody to buy these mines.

With the price of gold, it was not easy. Price Waterhouse went out and did due diligence. They went through a fairly extensive process of looking for bidders. Fifteen or 20 companies came in, took a look at Pamour, went into the data room and looked at the information. At the end of it, by about the beginning of September, nobody came forward able to buy the company. Price Waterhouse announced that the company had no buyers, that the receiver was going to close down the mine and that the layoffs were going to commence as of that Monday. I and the Steelworkers went to bankruptcy court before Judge Farley, I guess about a month or a month and a half ago, made the argument that the workers had not been given an opportunity to make a bid on the mine and, as a result of the arguments of the Steelworkers and me, the court gave us two weeks to try to structure some sort of employee ownership bid.

Two weeks went by. The price of gold being what it is, we talked to a number of different private investors but were not able to come up with somebody who could bring in the cash we needed to structure the deal. Two weeks was not enough time to cut the deal. That was supposedly the end of the story, but not quite. It wasn't the end of the story.

We kept on pushing. The Steelworkers and I were still in discussion with a number of people in the private sector and, lo and behold, what came out of it was that one group of investors in the city Timmins, a number of local individuals, through a company called Potter Station, decided that, yes, they were prepared to make a bid on this property. They looked at the numbers and came to the conclusion that this was a good business investment for them as local investors, it would be good for our community and, overall, it was a win-win situation. A bid was put in.

Unfortunately, because of lack of time to put it together, the bid went in after the date set for bids to be accepted by the court. The court gave direction to Price Waterhouse to conclude a bid with a company called Kinross.

You wonder why I'm raising this in the Legislature. Because it's going to come back on your doorstep in about two days. I just want to give you some warning.

Here's what is going on. Price Waterhouse negotiated a deal with the receiver. The deal is that they will purchase Royal Oak mine, the Timmins property, for a set amount of money, \$5 million, which is public, but they want to buy it as an asset sale. In other words, they want to keep the mine closed. They want to buy the assets, buy the property, not hire any local workers and, at the end of the day, just get what they can out of the assets.

Who knows what they're going to do in the future? They may decide to do something. But when we push them to find out if they are prepared to hire local workers who were there before and reactivate the mine, they say: "No, we're not interested. That's not why we're buying it."

This group of local investors, through Potter Station, has put a bid before the court. We were there this morning. The court has issued two vesting orders: One to Kinross to finish their deal, and if they finish the deal they end up with the mine and we lose all the jobs. But if they don't get the deal, then the Potter Station group bid that's been put in is going to be accepted by way of that vesting order and the mine will be reopened.

Here's the kicker: There are two particular issues at stake. Kinross has two conditions on the offer, the first being that they want the workers to withdraw their claims for severance, pension rights and other things that are in dispute because of the closure. The receiver has not paid out all of the dollars that are owed to the workers as a result of closure. The bill for that is about \$200,000 to \$500,000, somewhere in that range. Kinross has the condition that if they're not able to at least meet and try to deal with that, they don't want to buy the mine.

The second issue lies here with the provincial government, and I want to put you on notice. The Kinross company wants to buy this mine, but they want to do it in such a way that they don't end up with too much environmental liability. There are 40,000 acres of mining land that is in question on this particular deal.

There are a whole bunch of environmental liabilities, because when you close the mine you have to have a closure plan, and at the end of the day whoever owns it has to be responsible to mitigate whatever damages are on that property. On this particular property, it could end up being quite substantial. They're now before your Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Northern Development and Mines trying to cut some kind of deal to limit their environmental liabilities on this property. There is a second offer that is before the courts, and your government should know about it, that'll see that particular mine reopened if they're successful.

I say to the government, if it were up to me, I know what I would do. If I had somebody before me saying, "Listen, cut me a deal on environmental liabilities and I'm going to buy the mine and shut it down and keep it shut down and not work it or hire any workers," and you had somebody else out there saying, "We're going to buy

the mine with our own money, we're going to make the investment and we're going to operate it and take over some of those environmental liabilities," I know what I'd do if I were the government.

I would hope this government sees its way through to helping the workers of the old Pamour mine, Royal Oak, and to assisting the community of Timmins and that it does the right thing: Support what is right environmentally and make sure the liability is taken for these properties in a just way; and that you give some consideration, when you're negotiating these final conditions with Kinross, and don't go and say, "There's nothing else out there so therefore we've got to accept this deal."

There's another deal. The offer is on the table, the cash is there and we're ready to close the deal. We need you guys, the provincial government, Mike Harris's government, to help us help ourselves by being able to deal with a fair and equitable settlement on environmental issues that are outstanding at that mine. We're prepared to deal with it as a group of investors. I'm only hoping that your particular government is prepared to do that as well.

This brings me back to the first point I made: how I feel that more and more the larger corporations are winning out daily when it comes to these kinds of battles. Every time I turn around in my constituency and deal with issues having to do with economic development—and I see I've got the attention of most of the government on this one because generally we all care about this; generally we understand this is a middle-class issue—I really get worried because I see more and more that the little guy is getting squeezed. It's much more difficult for people in the middle class to be able to compete within the economy than it was 10 or 15 years ago.

I'm not going to sit here and say, "Oh, it's all Mike Harris's fault." You know that's not the case. Certainly some of your policies haven't helped, but it's not all your fault. There is an agenda that has been in place for some time. It's being pushed forward by the large multinationals and special interest groups such as the C.D. Howe Research Institute and others. They're trying to get their provincial and federal governments to deal with making rules that make it easier for larger corporations to get a bigger share of the pie.

I just want to say on behalf of the middle class, and I think where we all come from, that we need governments that are clearly on our side, who say, "Yes, multinationals need to get a certain amount of leeway when it comes to certain issues so they can go out and do what they've got to do, but not to the detriment of everybody else." We in the middle class have to be able to be out there to compete and invest in the things we believe in to get our piece of that economic dream here in Ontario.

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Dans le temps que je vous adresse la parole, je veux aussi parler sur une autre question, sur quelque chose qui est très important pour la communauté en général, pas seulement la communauté francophone, mais la communauté en général.

On sait que les derniers quatre ans n'ont pas été faciles et simples pour la communauté francophone. On a vu à travers la province un gouvernement provincial et, jusqu'à un certain point, le gouvernement fédéral, qui ont été après les politiques, qui ont vu des réductions dans beaucoup de programmes. On voit dans la province de l'Ontario des réductions dans les programmes de santé, des réductions dans le domaine de l'éducation, dans les municipalités, et j'en passe. Et qu'est-ce qu'on voit dans toute cette paperasse, dans tous ces coupures ? On voit que le gouvernement oublie de plus en plus sa responsabilité envers les francophones et leur droit d'être desservis en français dans la province de l'Ontario.

On a vu à l'Assemblée précédente que le gouvernement, quand ils ont transféré des services aux municipalités, a fait ces transferts des services provinciaux aux municipalités sans donner des assurances envers toute la question des droits linguistiques des francophones. Comme on le sait, la Loi 8 qui a été adoptée ici dans les années 1980 dit que, quand un service provincial est offert dans une région désignée de la province, un francophone, ou n'importe qui, a le droit de demander ce service en français. C'est un droit qu'on nous a donné par une loi qui a été acceptée par les trois partis de cette Assemblée, d'un gouvernement minoritaire.

À cause des transferts aux municipalités, on voit que ces droits ont été érodés, et on trouve que les droits qu'on pensait avoir comme francophones, de demander des services en français, n'existent pas au point qu'ils existaient avec la province. Une fois que les services sont transférés aux municipalités, même dans les municipalités francophones, c'est de plus en plus difficile pour les francophones d'aller rechercher les services.

Je veux vous avertir que c'est quelque chose que la communauté francophone n'a pas oublié, et c'est quelque chose que ce député francophone de l'Ontario n'oubliera pas. Il est important que le gouvernement commence à réaliser que ses actions envers les transferts des services aux municipalités ont été au détriment des municipalités, et aussi au détriment de leurs citoyens francophones, qui trouvent qu'ils ne sont pas capables d'aller rechercher les services en français tels qu'ils ont été capables d'aller rechercher dans le passé.

On va continuer sur ce point. Il est important de reconnaître que ces services ne sont pas une question de luxe. C'est une question de nécessité pour la communauté francophone de la province.

I want to make one last point, because it would be passing strange as a northerner not to make comments on gas prices given what was said in the throne speech just this last Thursday. I've got to say that every politician, provincial and municipal, loves to get up and make these wild accusations on gas prices and about how, "I'm a politician, and if you elect me, I'm going to do something about gas prices, municipal and provincial, especially in northern Ontario."

The reality: We're kidding ourselves. Most of the responsibility lies with the federal government. There are federal statutes that allow the federal government to deal

with this issue. In fact, a committee was struck, I think about two years ago, where the federal Liberal government went out and consulted and decided to look into the issue. They came back and they said: "There's no collusion on the part of the gas companies. We don't see nothing. No, nothing's going on with gas prices in the province of Ontario or anywhere else."

Let me tell you what happened. Thursday was the throne speech. Friday, the following morning, the people of the city of Sudbury woke up to an increase of six cents a litre. Now, isn't it passing strange that all of a sudden, miraculously, without any kind of help from anybody else, all the gas stations across Sudbury increase their price at the same moment in time by six cents a litre, Petro-Canada stations, Shell stations, Esso stations. What's going on? I'm sure it was just like they all got up in the morning and said: "Great time to raise the price of gas. Let's go and do it." Not.

The reality is that the large corporations, not the retailers—Shell, Esso, Petro-Canada and the rest of them—get together in the back rooms and say: "Listen, we control this market. We can do what we want. The federal government, M. Chrétien, loves us. He's not going to do anything. He needs our fundraising dollars. Let's just go ahead and control the price of gas as we wish."

I say to the provincial government, you made comments on that in the throne speech. Bully for you. The reality is that it is a federal responsibility, and that's the one part in your throne speech that I do agree with, but when it comes to the issue of you putting out your gas-busters, it ain't going to cut it. Listen, pack up the cameras. These guys don't need to be running out on a long weekend to find out what's going on with gas prices. We know. The gas companies get together behind closed doors and they set the price. You don't have to go out with a camera on a weekend to figure that out. You don't have to send the gas-busters out to do that job. We see it every day when we go to the pumps. All of a sudden the price goes up across the city, and it's all at the same time and it's all by the same amount. You look at the price on this corner and you look at the price at that corner and it's virtually the same. Are you going to tell me, in a competitive system where there is actual, real competition and there is no price collusion, that that is going to happen?

The reality is that we've got a problem, not only here in Ontario; we've got a problem across this country, and the issue is squarely with the federal government. We've got to get the feds to take this issue seriously. It's becoming a joke more than anything else every time we see this government run around and talk about what they want to do with gas prices. If you can do anything, I would ask the Liberal members in the caucus across the way to pick up their cell phones, their computers, clairvoyant means, whatever way they have of speaking to the federal Liberal caucus and, please, try to get them to do something about gas prices at the federal level. It is a shame what's happening in this province. The only thing I would sug-

gest that the provincial government could have done—as you know, when we were the government we had introduced that if you live in northern Ontario you don't have to pay for the registration of your vehicle. It was a way of saying to northerners: "We understand that you're paying more for gas prices. We as a province will do something to assist you in a region that's most affected by gas prices." Unfortunately, your government did away with that. Not only did you have to recharge us for licence fees; they've actually gone up. I know because I just had mine renewed not more than three or four days ago. I say to the government that if you really did want to do something, you could have done something by way of eliminating the price of registering your vehicle.

This brings me to the end of my comments on this interim supply motion. I just want to say again that I really believe we are entering into an area where we are seeing more and more a growing gap between the middle class and those who make quite substantially more than the middle class. We see the larger corporations starting to strangle the little guy more and more every day. It's high time that somebody takes some initiative, not only in this province but at all levels of government, federal and municipal, in trying to deal with a way of giving the middle class what is justly theirs, and that is a chance at the economic dream that we all want to dream: an ability to go out, start our own business and make a few dollars.

I was glad to make these comments on behalf of the New Democratic caucus of Ontario.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Mr Speaker, it's good to see you back in the chair. At this late hour, I would like to recognize all new members in the House and wish them all the best in their deliberations over the next four years.

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I might follow up on the remarks from the member from Timmins-James Bay and try to help my constituents to understand. Everyone knows there are now 103 ridings in Ontario, and the member from Timmins-James Bay went to some length to describe the size and nature of his riding. I'll sort of help the members understand my riding of Durham, which of course is in the region of Durham.

I like to humorously think of myself as the only member from Durham, which in fact is true. But there are, respectfully, some wonderful members who share, in the region of Durham, the duty of representing the people from that area, some 500,000 constituents whom we represent with the integrity and respect that they deserve. It's kind of reciprocal: They entrusted us with the rights to represent their interests, and I take that very seriously.

The member sitting beside me, Jerry Ouellette, represents the city of Oshawa proper. It's actually better for the citizens now, because it used to be that Jim Flaherty, Jerry Ouellette and myself all had a little piece of Oshawa. The new riding boundaries are the identical boundaries that were set by the federal government, so it just makes very good sense.

A lot of things we do aren't for the reasons of smugness, perhaps, that others have suggested tonight but

because it's the most practical way of serving the people of Ontario. Quite often, when constituents call my office in the riding of Durham, they're not certain whether it's a municipal issue, a school board issue or for that matter a federal issue. I can assure you we're there to help, and that's probably the most important message.

My riding of Durham, a quite interesting riding, includes all the municipality of Clarington, which butts up on the east to my neighbour Doug Galt. Dr Doug Galt is Northumberland, a very well respected citizen, and it's good to see Dr Galt back. On the north part of my large riding—quite a large riding, I might say—I'm very fortunate to have, in Victoria county, Chris Hodgson, also a member of cabinet. If I move sort of swinging around from east to west, I share another boundary with Jim Flaherty, the member for Whitby-Ajax—that's the new boundary riding name—another member of cabinet from Durham. If you swing along a little further, you have another member of cabinet from Durham, from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, the Honourable Janet Ecker, who is of course the Minister of Education. Jerry Ouellette and myself bring up the rear, as it were—not really that simple.

But we do work as a team. We have three effective members at the cabinet table. I can assure you that people

in Durham—not just my riding, of course, but all of Durham—are more than ably represented.

If you ever came to the municipality of Clarington, the principal cities there, everyone here would know them. There is Bowmanville and Newcastle and Hampton, and you'd have to know Courtice as you're going along Highway 401.

The Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Ernie Hardeman, I'm pleased to say is here tonight. He spoke very highly of me in Blackstock, where he was the guest of the Lion's Club farm appreciation night. I thank you very much for attending, Minister, but next time, keep the speech a little shorter. He spent a little bit too much time flattering me, so to speak.

Anyway, it's a wonderful riding—

The Deputy Speaker: Brevity is a virtue.

Mr O'Toole: Very good. I ran out of time. Thank you very much, sir.

The Deputy Speaker: Mrs Ecker has moved government notice of motion 2. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? It is carried.

It being nearly 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 2113.

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