



**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 37th Parliament

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de l'Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 16 December 1999

Judi 16 décembre 1999

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 16 December 1999

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 16 décembre 1999

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PENSION BENEFITS STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
CONCERNANT LES RÉGIMES
DE RETRAITE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 14, 1999, on the motion for second reading of Bill 27, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act and the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 27, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite et la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Pursuant to the order of the House on December 15, I am now required to put the question. On December 9, Mr Skarica moved second reading of Bill 27. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1847 to 1853.

The Speaker: Mr Skarica has moved second reading of Bill 27.

All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

| | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Arnott, Ted | Hardeman, Ernie | Palladini, Al |
| Baird, John R. | Hastings, John | Runciman, Robert W. |
| Barrett, Toby | Hodgson, Chris | Sampson, Rob |
| Chudleigh, Ted | Hudak, Tim | Skarica, Toni |
| Clark, Brad | Jackson, Cameron | Snobelen, John |
| Clement, Tony | Johns, Helen | Spina, Joseph |
| Coburn, Brian | Johnson, Bert | Sterling, Norman W. |
| Cunningham, Dianne | Kells, Morley | Stewart, R. Gary |
| DeFaria, Carl | Klees, Frank | Stockwell, Chris |
| Dunlop, Garfield | Marland, Margaret | Tasca, Joseph N. |
| Ecker, Janet | Martiniuk, Gerry | Tilson, David |
| Elliott, Brenda | Maves, Bart | Tsubouchi, David H. |
| Eves, Ernie L. | Mazzilli, Frank | Turnbull, David |
| Flaherty, Jim | Molinari, Tina R. | Wettlaufer, Wayne |
| Galt, Doug | Munro, Julia | Wilson, Jim |
| Gilchrist, Steve | Murdoch, Bill | Witmer, Elizabeth |
| Gill, Raminder | Mushinski, Marilyn | Wood, Bob |
| Guzzo, Garry J. | O'Toole, John | Young, David |

Nays

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Agostino, Dominic | Cordiano, Joseph | Martel, Shelley |
| Bountrogianni, Marie | Curling, Alvin | Martin, Tony |
| Boyer, Claudette | Di Cocco, Caroline | McGuinty, Dalton |
| Bradley, James J. | Duncan, Dwight | Patten, Richard |
| Caplan, David | Gerretsen, John | Peters, Steve |
| Christopherson, David | Hampton, Howard | Phillips, Gerry |
| Churley, Marilyn | Lalonde, Jean-Marc | Ruprecht, Tony |
| Colle, Mike | Levac, David | Smitherman, George |
| Conway, Sean G. | Marchese, Rosario | |

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 54; the nays are 26.

The Speaker: I declare motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House of December 15, this bill is ordered for third reading.

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): G25.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Resuming the debate adjourned on December 15, 1999, on the motion for second reading of Bill 25, An Act to provide for the restructuring of four regional municipalities and to amend the Municipal Act and various other Acts in connection with municipal restructuring and with municipal electricity services.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I rise pursuant to standing order 46(a) through (e). Earlier today, we debated government resolution 26 in the afternoon session, which dealt substantively with the bill that the government has just called. Standing order 46(e): "A time allocation motion may not be moved on the same calendar day that any of the bills that are the subject of the motion have been called as government orders."

In effect, what we're arguing is that we've already in this calendar day debated substantively the bill that the government has now called. We are now, in the view of the official opposition, arguing that it's inappropriate to call this for a vote at this time. The very earliest this could be voted on would be tomorrow.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): On the same point of order, Mr Speaker: I would underscore my colleague's points with regard to why we urge you to rule this out of order. I would want to emphasize the fact, as

I'm sure you've been briefed by the table, that there are no precedents here; there is no jurisprudence. You will be deciding and breaking fresh ground with this. So it means a great deal to us in the opposition to ensure that the rights that we have under the standing orders are indeed upheld.

I would point out to you that, in my opinion, if this were being done the other way around, had we already debated Bill 25 earlier today and the government House leader was attempting to place a time allocation motion, I think it's fairly straightforward to assume that you would rule that out of order, because it would be consistent with exactly what's here. The only thing that's different this time is that we did the time allocation motion first when under the orders it was in order, because we had done nothing else with Bill 25 and the Acting Speaker in your stead—as much as he ruled against my argument, I understand the ruling—needed it to be on the floor before we could deal with it.

1900

Now here we are, and the only difference in terms of our rights being upheld or being lost is the order of the business within the time frame referenced in the standing orders, that time frame being one calendar day. For the sake of the chronological order in which we did business today, we could lose one of the few rights we still have.

I understand that the government House leader will in all likelihood point to the fact that his time allocation motion says “notwithstanding the standing orders,” assuming that transcends all of our rights. But again, Speaker, that argument would not last 30 seconds in front of you, in our opinion, were he trying to introduce a time allocation motion today, or a vote on it if we'd already dealt with Bill 25 earlier this afternoon.

One of the very few significant rights that we have is at stake here simply because of the order in which they've called them. On many occasions, sir, we have pleaded with you to ask you to find a way to assist us in maintaining the few democratic rights we have as opposition parties and as opposition members. This is one of those crossroads, Speaker, where if you rule in favour of the government, we've lost another right in terms of how quickly bills can move through this place.

This standing order was put in place to ensure that at the very least the government wasn't attempting in one day to ram through all of the legislation and all of the time allocation and all of the closure matters in one move, but to provide a pause to allow us to reflect, research, consider and then comment, hopefully from an informed position, the next time a bill that is proceeding through this place is called as government business.

The last thing I would point out to you, Speaker, is that I think there is a legitimate argument that the items 46(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e), with special emphasis on (e), need to be given some heightened importance because they are the rules that govern when and how time allocation motions are placed before this House. If they have but the same status as every other standing order, then in a case like this they might as well not be there, because

the simple wording of “notwithstanding the standing orders” eliminates the protections that are in here.

Our position from the NDP boils down to three things: defending what few democratic rights we have; recognizing that if this simply was being done in a different order during the same calendar day—I'm surmising now—I believe you already would have said, “It's out of order; call your next government business”; and lastly, the importance and ultimately the precedence that must be given to the rules around how a very heavy-handed rule like time allocation can be used and, most importantly in this case, when it can't be used.

Speaker, given the fact that you will decide precedents that will be quoted, not just in our place here but in all the parliaments across Canada for perhaps decades to come, I urge you to please give as much serious consideration as you possibly can to maintaining some of the very few rights that we as opposition members and opposition parties have in this place. Thank you for hearing me, sir.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The government House leader.

Hon Mr Sterling: I think standing order 46(e) is quite clear. It says: “A time allocation motion may not be moved on the same calendar day that any of the bills that are the subject of the motion have been called as government orders.” What I would like to talk about is, when you're moving from a government order, presumably a second reading day of debate, a sessional day of debate, to the time allocation motion, it's clear from 46(e) that you cannot move from a sessional day of second reading debate to the time allocation motion. I accept that.

There is a very different situation when you're moving from a time allocation motion to whatever is ordered in the time allocation motion, because essentially after the time allocation motion has been made, the House has decided the path or the route which this bill is going to take in the future. Mr Speaker, this rule contemplates the time between the second reading sessional day and the time allocation motion. I would suggest that perhaps the intent of the rule was to allow the government House leaders, as you are going from the third day of second reading of the bill, to negotiate some kind of deal which would not necessitate the move to a closure motion, or there would be a negotiating time after you had dealt with three days of second reading debate that would encourage the House leaders to come together to try to strike a deal which would be more reasonable. We tried that this morning, Mr Speaker, but the negotiations failed.

The words are quite clear. They refer to the time between the second reading debate and the time allocation motion—no argument that that cannot be done on a calendar day. But the standing order does not restrict the government as to when they would call the order again in order to carry out the will of the House which was decided earlier this day.

I guess that's the essence of my submission, in that the House has now decided which way it goes. The standing

orders do not restrict the government House leader when he calls that, whether it be in the same calendar day or the next calendar day.

The Speaker: The member for St Catharines on the same point of order.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a point of order in support of my House leader in this matter. I well recall when the discussions were taking place—"discussions" is perhaps too strong a word, when the government was dictating the rule changes to the opposition—one area where they did relent, because it was so obscene, was the possibility of the government dealing with a piece of legislation both in the afternoon session and in the evening session. The government has somehow declared that the evening session is a separate day, which is a lost battle, unfortunately—that should never happen, but it has—but clearly we dealt this afternoon with a time allocation motion which is dealing with Bill 25. This evening the government wants to deal again with Bill 25. What they're trying to do is get around the one rule they agreed they would not proceed with because it was so obscene: allowing the government to deal with a piece of legislation in the afternoon and the evening and whipping it through in an even shorter time than they can now.

Once again, we've had 351 rulings that seem to go in favour of the government every time a ruling comes up. The opposition powers, the powers of all members, are eroded every time we get one of these bloody rulings that allows the government to push something through the way they're trying to now. What I am suggesting to you is that what the government is doing is dealing with a piece of legislation this afternoon, Bill 25, through a time allocation motion, and trying to deal with it again this evening, and that is contrary to the rules of this House. It's certainly contrary to the intent of the discussions that took place over these rule changes.

Mr Christopherson: Just very briefly, in light of the government House leader's submission, two points. One is that what is dealt with here within the time frame of a calendar day really is, how fast can legislation move through here? We would disagree with the government House leader as to the fact that it matters, if you watch carefully, how the motions are placed versus when the bills are called. We see the spirit of this very much as being, within one calendar day just how heavy a hammer can a majority government use in ramming legislation through? In reality, we see what they're trying to do as getting through the back door what they couldn't get through the front door.

The Speaker: I thank all members for their submissions. I will have a 10-minute recess and I will be back with a ruling.

The House recessed from 1910 to 1921.

The Speaker: I would like to thank the members for their submissions.

In reviewing the point of order, I have looked beyond the simple and plain meaning of standing order 46 which, ironically, when read in reverse order, appears not to

prohibit the calling of second reading of Bill 25 tonight, despite the fact that Bill 25 was time-allocated. Doing these things in the other order clearly could not happen. The House leader for the third party is completely correct then and the government House leader acknowledged that.

Standing order 46 to the standing orders was amended in August 1997. I have reviewed the debates that took place at that time and have found discussions in a number of places on this very issue, that is, the opposition's view that the 1997 changes which added evening sittings as distinct sessional days could lead to an acceleration of a bill's legislative life, creating procedural conditions for it that it legitimately could pass more quickly than was the case before the standing order changes had been proposed.

Responding to the concern, an amendment to both the then existing time allocation provision and to the motion then being debated to amend the standing orders was made by Mr Sampson. Upon being passed, it became known as standing order 46(e).

During the debate on that aspect, the minister without portfolio responsible for privatization, Mr Sampson, representing the government, on June 23, 1997, on page 10943 of Hansard said, "this particular amendment I have put forward today will ensure that bills will not be passed any sooner than is the case today under the current rules that are governing the operation of this House. I believe that responds to the concerns that have been raised by members opposite in regard to the timely enactment of government bills."

Soon after, the member for Nepean, Mr Baird, said on page 10962 of Hansard:

"On this amendment it was so important to be clear and up front that not only was a commitment made that no, there would be no intention that any government would want to consider a piece of legislation in two or three days, but on this issue it was so important we'll wear a belt and suspenders; we'll write it right in the rules that no, you can't do that. In my judgement, that deals with one of the biggest objections that has been made by members opposite to that change to the standing orders, to say that no, under no shape or form would you be able to go any faster on a particular piece of legislation under these standing order changes than you could before...."

Standing order 46(e) must be read in the historical context—in the context of what gave rise to it being put in the standing orders in the first place. In view of the comments made during the 1997 debate that I cited above, I believe that the literal meaning of standing 46(e), as it is being advanced tonight by the government, lies in stark contrast to the spirit that motivated putting it in our rules.

It was, in my view, clearly designed to be a check against precisely what the government wishes to accomplish today. By proposing these changes in 1997, the government made it clear that it accepted this check and acknowledged that this is precisely what was meant in

the amendment. If the order for second reading of Bill 25 can be called tonight, then contrary to the intentions of 1997, the bill would go through the legislative process faster than it could have before the evening sittings and standing order 46(e) were added.

In effect, this House did me the service in 1997 of providing me an advance interpretation of this standing order. In acknowledgement of that, I therefore will not permit the calling of the order for second reading of Bill 25 during this calendar day, since the bill has already been time-allocated.

Orders of the day.

Hon Mr Sterling: On behalf of the two former cabinet ministers you mentioned in your ruling, I want to call G27.

PENSION BENEFITS STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
CONCERNANT LES RÉGIMES
DE RETRAITE

Mr Skarica moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 27, An Act to amend the Pension Benefits Act and the MPPs Pension Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 27, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les régimes de retraite et la Loi de 1996 sur le régime de retraite des députés.

Mr Toni Skarica (Wentworth-Burlington): Ironically, I'm speaking on this matter after your ruling on the other matter, Mr Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Wait until they quiet down.

I think it's quiet enough for the member for Wentworth-Burlington to continue. Thank you for your indulgence.

Mr Skarica: It's my privilege to speak to third reading of Bill 27, the Pension Benefits Statute Law Amendment Act, 1999. This bill and the accompanying regulations, when enacted, would provide individuals faced with serious financial hardship or shortened life expectancy with more flexible access to their locked-in retirement accounts. The money in these accounts is theirs. They should have the right to access it when they are in dire straits.

A lot of people have told us during consultations to eliminate the paternalistic rules governing these locked-in accounts. As I've indicated on previous occasions, these consultations were conducted by my predecessor, the parliamentary assistant to finance, Terence Young, and Bill Grimmett.

Before I go any further, I'm going to be splitting my time with my colleagues Joe Tascona and Wayne Wettlaufer.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think we're supposed to split the hour among the three parties. That was agreed, I

think. Agreed? I mean I think that's what we were supposed to do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): I think we better make sure. Is somebody proposing this?

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I believe it's already agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: So be it.

Mr Skarica: If I could split my 20 minutes with Mr Tascona and Mr Wayne Wettlaufer.

We listened in these consultations and we responded with this bill. This bill would help the needy access their own funds today when they need the money most

It gives people more discretion and control over their lives.

Bill 27 would also streamline pension administration and rules in Ontario and make them more compatible with pension legislation in other jurisdictions in Canada.

I want to thank everyone who participated in the consultations in 1998 and 1999 and those who wrote giving us their valuable input.

Almost 50 submissions were received from professional associations and financial industry stakeholders, and over 75 submissions from interested individuals on reforming the Pension Benefits Act. It is because of the input that we received that we are modernizing the pension system in Ontario so that it responds to the needs of members and plan administrators.

The year 1999 is an appropriate year to implement these changes as it is the International Year of Older Persons and so it's a truly appropriate time to introduce this legislation which would help pensioners.

The amendments to the MPPs Pension Plan Act, 1996, complete the transition to an RRSP-type plan that was committed to in 1996 and also in the Common Sense Revolution. No additional taxpayer dollars would be spent on this initiative. MPPs would have more flexibility in planning for their families' future.

With Bill 27 we are continuing to make Ontario the best place to live, work, do business and raise a family. With Bill 27 we are ensuring that Ontarians in difficult circumstances are treated with dignity and respect.

Further, an issue came up in the debates on second reading as to why we should proceed with this bill in haste, and is there any urgency to passing this bill? I've had my staff check letters we have received over the past couple of years, and here are some of the comments we've had from individuals who are in need and who will benefit from this legislation. As I've indicated, this government has heard from people and organizations all over Ontario pressing for legislation to assist them through hard times and through illness, and those asking for flexibility and fairness for the means available to them to access their money. Here is what some of the people have said in the letters that are in our files. We have one letter from an individual who indicated as follows:

"In the mid-1990s, my husband suffered a debilitating stroke. After several months of rehabilitation it became apparent that he would never be able to return to work. I

is now over 18 months since [he] had the stroke.... [His] sudden incapacity has left me facing considerable debt ... we are living in a home where we cannot afford the heat or the maintenance.... We have no bath or shower. Walking is impossible without a cane and night-time manoeuvring is dangerous.... We must move or renovate to reduce costs.

"We have been desperately looking for solutions that will allow us to pay our debts and retain our independence without relying on government-subsidized retirement homes.... I am selling all but essential possessions."

This couple have several hundred thousand dollars in life insurance paid in full through decades of premiums. However, to access the funds they need, they point out that, "We have to die first."

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In closing, they told us that: "We have borrowed from family and friends and have nowhere else to turn. Please help us get our money. We are not asking for a handout, but a hand up!" Here's an example of people who have access to monies, but with the legislation prior to Bill 27, they are unable to access it, and these changes will change that situation to help them out.

Another individual wanted to know why self-directed plans are not open to those who own them. Again I'll quote from a letter that we received. "Why are we allowed control over our investments and not over the 'fruits' of these investments? I resent becoming a burden to family and government, when we have vested money to look after ourselves.... I would like to make [my husband's] remaining months or years happier. At the present time we spend most of our time staring at the TV and the four walls that surround us. We cannot even consider a retirement home without a government subsidy." Again, these are individuals who could access monies, but cannot under the prior legislation. This legislation will remedy that.

Yet another individual said: "I have been diagnosed with [a debilitating illness].... I can no longer afford medication. Government legislation prevents me from accessing [my locked-in RRSP monies]. I'm aware that starting next year I will be able to receive some of this money as an annuity, but I need all of it, hopefully to save my life." That individual will be assisted by Bill 27.

Yet another individual said: "My disability pension is not enough to live on. My health is getting worse. [Financial planners] say I can get my money only if it was terminal. It's terminal all right, when I die it's going to be from the health problems I have now. How long depends on how good I can look after myself. I am anxious to hear from you." This individual will now hear from us, and in fact from the entire Legislative Assembly, with the passing of Bill 27.

Another individual indicates: "A great many of us have used all our savings and are just surviving on small fixed incomes. This money would make our forced early retirement less financially stressful and afford us a better quality of life. I would like to see special consideration

given to people in these circumstances, and would like this issue proposed in the form of a bill in the provincial Parliament." That bill now exists in this Bill 27.

Finally, another individual: "I have tried to unlock this pension plan because of a desperate financial situation that we find ourselves in. I am not trying to use up all the funds, only a portion of it.... I do not see the point in my being restricted from using my own funds to take care of myself.

"Today ... my wife and I find ourselves in a desperate situation, and we have funds sitting in a plan that is being held up by bureaucracy and will, in turn, force us to rely on the taxpayers of this province. Please look at this situation as quickly as possible."

We have listened and looked into the situation, and with the passing of Bill 27, that's yet another individual who will be assisted. I'm confident that every MPP in this House has had letters of a similar type, with similar pleas. This government is now listening to those pleas. With the passing of Bill 27, numerous individuals in financially desperate circumstances with shortened life expectancies will now be able to access their monies and will receive the financial assistance they need.

That completes my comments on the third reading of this bill. I would like to turn it over to my colleague and good friend Mr Tascona.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join in the debate on third reading of this bill. I spoke on it earlier. The two points I want to focus on, which I think are the major aspects of Bill 27, the Pension Benefits Statute Law Amendment Act, are the financial hardship provisions and the shortened life expectancy provisions.

Financial hardship: Funds in locked-in retirement accounts will be available to individuals in cases of serious financial hardship. Individuals must apply to the superintendent of financial services of Ontario, and an application to withdraw funds due to serious financial hardship will be based on specific criteria.

The shortened life expectancy provision deals with individuals faced with shortened life expectancy due to a critical illness or disability. They would be entitled to withdraw all monies from their locked-in accounts.

What we're looking at here is trying to help people who are in need, be it financial hardship or shortened life expectancy. In my riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, we have heard loud and clear from people who wanted this change. I'm going to share with you some of the stories I've heard. They certainly me prompt to support this piece of legislation.

One letter I received was dealing with a very difficult situation in terms of health care. I'll just quote from it. The person indicates that their funds are locked in under the Insurance Act and they would only be released with a letter from a doctor stating you have a short life expectancy. Both constituents are not in the greatest of health, one due to Parkinson's disease, and high blood pressure on the part of the other person. They're asking me, as their MPP, to see that this legislation goes

through. What they're facing is death, through no fault of their own. They have reached the point where they're paying out more money per month than they're receiving. All they're asking me as their MPP to do is help them with respect to this piece of legislation, that would allow them to get at the funds that are theirs; it's their own money. I received this letter back in July of this year and fortunately the government, on its re-election, has moved very quickly, and the legislation is going to be in effect January 2000. That's good news for the people from my riding, when they're dealing with the shortened life expectancy.

Another letter I received was with respect to an individual who had to retire because of serious and permanent injury. He wanted to change his career focus and also needed to get at his locked-in RRSP funds and pension funds to make sure he could do this. They had to sell their home, most of its contents, and had to move into a modest apartment because they couldn't get at their locked-in funds. That's certainly a tragedy. The interesting part of this letter was that he indicates:

"I came across some information at the financial services office in DeVry"—which would be the DeVry Institute—"which appeared to fit my situation perfectly. The province of Ontario is part of an initiative to assist mature students" and "provided for a student loan to help with living expenses. Students are allowed to borrow against their RRSPs to help offset the costs of attending school and raising a family."

The measure that the government has taken will certainly encourage mature students to change their career focus and get on with another career. But in this situation, this person had to go to a bank and he spoke with their loan officer, only to find out that the RRSP wasn't eligible because the retirement funds originated from the OMERS plan. They're locked in and cannot be borrowed against.

The question that he puts to me is, he understands why the rules were invoked, because he was paying into the fund at the time, but what he's having trouble with is why he can't borrow against the funds under the present legislative rules of repayment. He wasn't trying to cash in his policies. He was just trying to borrow against the value.

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That's a situation where an individual had to retire because of a permanent injury. He's trying to change his focus and his career, trying to get at the monies that he has saved through a borrowing mechanism, which you can do if you're a mature student in terms of borrowing against your RRSP to be able to go on in school.

But in this situation, this individual wasn't able to do that. That's the financial hardship situation where we have an individual who has to sell his home, sell the contents and move into an apartment, and can't pursue the changing of a career because basically his hands are tied with respect to trying to get at the locked-in retirement accounts. That's what this legislation is going to do. It's going to allow individuals to get at their own money.

It's going to protect them, I would say, from going into bankruptcy to protect themselves from their creditors when they could be contributing citizens in our society in terms of trying to move on with their own career, trying to pay their debts and just basically using the funds that they need at the time.

That's what this bill is going to do. I think that's the fundamental principle that we as a government are trying to do with respect to helping individuals. Certainly, that's going to help the family. It's obviously going to help children in terms of what we're trying to do with the retirement savings reform. There are many, many cases out there that we're dealing with respect to people who want to have access to their retirement funds. When you look at the exceptions here, certainly they're going to use the money because they need it, either from financial hardship or shortened life expectancy.

In principle, we promised that we would do this in the 1998 budget. Certainly there was extensive consultation with respect to the pension reforms, but the hue and cry from the people—and we're not just talking recently. I know an individual in my riding who had to go bankrupt because he couldn't have access to his RRSP. He would never have gone bankrupt if he would have had that access. Now this bill will allow, starting in January 2000, individuals who are put in those circumstances to have that opportunity.

On another note, in terms of my riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, I'm very pleased to see the initiatives that the government has taken within my riding. We've kicked off the new Ontario SuperBuild Growth Fund, a five-year, \$20-billion partnership. The government of Ontario is going to be providing \$2.3 million towards the cost of interim improvements on the Highway 400/Innisfil Beach Road interchange. That was announced by the Minister of Transportation. There are going to be improvements in terms of design to ease the traffic flow, increase safety and pave the way for future developments. That's something that is a tremendous need in my riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford on Highway 400 on the Innisfil Beach cut-off.

On that point, I'm going to turn my time over to the member from Kitchener.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I'd like to address this bill by commenting on how, over the past year, year and a half, there were several members of my riding who came and expressed a very grave concern that they weren't able to access their pension funds because of the fact that they had been locked in. These people were suffering with an illness and they would have liked to have taken trips or to have used the money in other ways, maybe having some parties, socializing, whatever, and they were not able to access this money. It reduced what they felt was already not the greatest quality of life in the world because of the illness they were suffering. They felt that it was their money and they couldn't understand why they couldn't access these pension monies even though they were locked in. I remember

taking the issue up with the Minister of Finance at the time and of course, this is addressed in this bill.

I felt very bad when a couple of those people who had come in to see me could not live out their remaining few months or few years in a fine quality of life. I was distressed when I saw they had died and the money they had, which was locked into an annuity, went not to their estate. First of all, they were penalized in that they could not have a good quality of life in their remaining few years, or few months, as the case may be, but then on top of it all, their pension monies didn't go to their estate, to their family. Their pension monies went to the life insurance company or to the financial institution. I was quite distressed at that.

I was in the insurance business for many years, but nevertheless, I never thought that was fair. To this day, I don't think that was fair, and there is no doubt in my mind that the life insurance companies are going to holler blue, bloody murder. They're going to holler and holler and holler, as loud as possible, and so are the financial institutions.

I don't know how the Liberals can justify opposing this bill. I don't know how they can justify seeing these people continue in that manner. I know that some of the Liberals have expressed concern that the MPPs' pensions, which will affect 61 former members, and some present members of this House—that they will be able to access these funds.

I invest my own RRSPs. I know most of the members in this House invest their own RRSPs. I know you do. Why should a few a members, past and present, not be able to invest their own funds? Why should they have their funds locked up?

Interjection.

Mr Wettlaufer: That's correct. So I think it's a simple matter that these former and present MPPs should be able to access that money and invest it.

If they make a mistake, if David Peterson or Sean Conway or Mike Harris or Bob Rae makes a mistake in their investments, well, I'm sorry, I don't feel sorry for you because we're all subject to the same risks when we make investments in our RRSPs. That's a fact of life.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'll be sharing my time with my colleague from Windsor-St Clair. I want to begin my remarks tonight by saying that the previous three speakers in the main make a strong argument for a very substantial part of the policy that's contained within in Bill 27. Any fair-minded person would want to support most of what is contained in this bill and I want to support most of what's in this bill.

Our former friend Bill Grimmett and others did good work and the stories that have been told by colleagues in the government, members of my own caucus, members of the third party, are compelling stories that justify most of the changes that are contained in this bill.

I have one very major caveat and it concerns sections 20 and 21 of this bill. I want to put on the record again

tonight what my concerns in that respect are, because we are not doing what we said we were going to do in April 1996. There has been some confusion sown about what this is all about.

Members opposite and the very competent minister's assistant, the member for Wentworth-Burlington, try to create the impression—and my friend Sampson's here and I'd like him to join this debate because he knows it probably better than most of us, being a former investment banker and all. What is being suggested—

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Interjection.

Mr Conway: I must say that we got a delicious bit of pre-Christmas pudding tonight from Speaker Carr. The point that's being suggested is, were we really just giving those members an opportunity everyone else would have? That is not true. That is not accurate.

I go back, as I did on second reading, to remind the House of what Mr Eves said on April 10, 1996, on the critical point of what happens and what would happen to the monies that were vested on behalf of members of the Legislature who were part of the old plan. Mr Eves, the Minister of Finance, said very clearly on April 10, 1996, that, "All members with benefits earned under the old plan, who have not yet retired, will have the appropriate funds transferred to a locked-in retirement plan."

Understand that if you were a member, fully vested under the old plan, as I was in 1996, and that plan was basically cancelled, what was going to happen to me, with all the monies that had been in the old plan, was essentially what would have happened to anybody in a similar situation where a company plan was being wound up. Those monies would be rolled into a locked-in retirement account, which would be governed by the pension benefits rules. The key rule there is that you are only able to withdraw a certain amount of money in any given year. That is a clear and understandable restriction under the so-called LIRA rule. That was going to apply to all the monies that had been vested on behalf of members who had entitlements under the old plan.

Members like myself and others, who were still here and were going to continue, would now join the new RRSP plan and have access to our monies on that part of the plan under the RRSP rules, and that's fair. That was clearly what was intended, and it was put under the understandable rubric of no special deals for people—most especially, no special deals for politicians—and we all said yes to that. There was no discussion in 1996, public or private, about turning vested monies out from under the LIRA umbrella and over under the more flexible RRSP umbrella.

Mr Wettlaufer: Why does it affect you?

Mr Conway: Listen, I'm no financial planner, but I have talked to financial planners. As I said here the other night, it's no secret what my payout was. I have checked with a number of financial planners and they said, "You should be so lucky as to be able to now take that payout"—which was initially made under the so-called LIRA rules—"and convert that to the more flexible and

more promising RRSP rules.” There is a real benefit to me and to others with names like Harris and Eves, and you know the others. That’s a special benefit.

Mr Wettlaufer: It doesn’t cost anything to the taxpayer.

Mr Conway: I accept the argument that it’s not going to cost the taxpayer any money. That’s not my objection. My objection is twofold: This is a breach of a promise we made. We made an all-party agreement. That legislation was passed in 1996 with everybody understanding the intentions. There was no talk, public or otherwise, of retroactively changing those rules. Certainly there was no talk of changing those rules to the benefit of a very small number of people who happen to be in the Legislature.

I would say to my friends opposite that it may very well be that you want to do this, but my argument is simple: If it’s good enough for Conway, Harris and Eves, it should be good enough for the guy or the woman who worked for the Acme Power Co, let’s say, a company that had a plan that was wound up. I’m sure there are lots of examples where company pension plans, defined benefit plans, were wound up. What would happen to those people? Then and now, as I understand it, those people have only one course: The vested monies go into a LIRA account. That’s exactly what we said we would do to those members who had been vested under the old plan, because the generally applicable rules for that kind of commuted pension account.

Now, three and a half years later, we come and say, “We really didn’t mean that.” Well, I’m sorry, the record is clear. Quite frankly, members elected in 1995 and 1999 are largely absolved of this, but people like Conway, Harris, Eves, Runciman and Sterling are not. In fact, I could argue a case that we are really in some difficulty standing in this House and voting on this, because we are, with the passage of this bill, conferring upon ourselves and upon our pocketbooks a real pecuniary benefit that is not generally available to the rest of the assembly or certainly to the rest of the public.

You can absolve me of this problem by doing one of two things: Amend this legislation to eliminate those offending sections and carry forward with what I have said before is an otherwise good bill with good policy that the people opposite have spoken eloquently to tonight or, alternatively, make that special provision of retroactive conversion of LIRA monies to RRSP monies available to the general public, thereby eliminating the obvious special treatment for a very small number of special people, one of whom happens to be the Prime Minister of Ontario and one of whom happens to be the dean of the Legislature.

As I take my seat, let me read again Minister Eves’s comments as he introduced Bill 42 back in April 1996. What did he say? He proudly said, “We will end the sweetheart deals for politicians.” We all cheered, and we all voted for it. What are we doing now? We are betraying a promise made to this Legislature and to the public.

I noticed in the *Globe* today that the Canadian Association for the Fifty-Plus have apparently written a letter to the Premier of Ontario saying, “We don’t like the

sweetheart deal either,” and they shouldn’t. This should be truly obnoxious to every fair-minded member of the community and certainly every member of the Legislature. It is a small point that speaks to fundamental values, and I submit that everybody here knows that.

Don’t think for one moment that I didn’t think about just quietly going for a walk when this bill came forward. I repeat: Nobody is potentially going to benefit more from this than myself. I don’t want to sound like some tub-thumping, 18th-century New England preacher, but as I turn the topic over to my friend the House leader, let me say that this is wrong. We should not do this, because it betrays a promise we made to the assembly, to the public and to ourselves. It clearly establishes a double standard to the benefit of important politicians with names like Conway, Harris and Eves, and holds us up to ridicule and abuse which, if we do not move to address with proper amendments to Bill 27, we regrettably will deserve.

Mr Duncan: I am pleased to follow my colleague from Renfrew, who has placed more eloquently than I ever could, both tonight and on second reading debate, the principal problems we find with this bill.

Let me say for the record that changes are proposed in this bill which we believe are necessary and needed. Like members opposite, like my colleagues in our caucus, like our colleagues in the third party, I have dealt with constituents who have been put at severe financial hardship, and had they been able to access a locked-in retirement account, they could have, in one case that I worked on for some time, avoided losing their home. There is no question that those changes would have benefited the vast majority of people.

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But like my colleague from Renfrew, I remember the debate in 1996. I remember the commitments of the government at the time. I remember the commitments that those of us on this side of the House made. We wrapped up the so-called gold-plated pension and we set up a new RSP. We agreed to certain undertakings and we made certain undertakings here in this Legislature and to our constituents. Like members opposite, I too voted in favour of those changes.

Until this issue was raised recently, I was under the assumption that what was done in 1996 was going to stay in place. We assumed, believed and indeed urged the government to bring forward the other changes that are contained in this bill. Frankly, when I first heard they were coming forward, I was quite pleased. But when I discovered and when we saw what actually came forward, when we saw essentially the government looking at 1996 legislation and undertaking in the face and throwing it out, we were extremely disappointed, to say the least because, as my colleague has said, the bill creates a double standard. It treats the average person out there differently than it treats certain people in this Legislature, and that’s truly regrettable.

One of the issues my colleague didn’t raise that I wanted to talk about is what the government has been

doing in terms of how it sets up these bills and how it tries to hide something in a bill—a bad thing among certain good things. I remember Bill 23, which was subject to closure debate in this House, that the government pushed through. That's the bill where we now discover the government has given the Ontario hospital insurance plan the right to sue third parties to recover health care costs. At the same time, they gave the Minister of Health essentially the powers that were originally bestowed on the Health Services Restructuring Commission under Bill 26, the bully bill.

We have seen many examples of this type of legislation. We see Bill 25, which the government attempted to drive through this Legislature tonight. Originally it was going to be second reading, third reading and then everybody goes home for Christmas because, "We don't want to debate it; we want to end it." They take all kinds of things and put them into one bill and try to pretend that the bad things aren't really happening. That's no way to govern. That is no way to do public policy. If we're truly interested in public policy that is meaningful and responsible, then we ought to be prepared to debate these things in and of themselves.

If the government really wanted to deal with the MPPs' pension and they really wanted to confer a special benefit on us, why didn't they bring in a separate act? I would submit it's because they know full well that they are undoing the undertaking they made to this House and to the people of this province in 1996, indeed I might add in the 1995 election campaign, and even before that in debates here in the House about that very plan.

No matter what they say here in this debate, their actions belie what is going on. They wanted to slip this through, hopefully unnoticed. I suspect there were changes in the bill from the time it was first conceived, I presume by senior members of the government, until the time it came to this House for first reading debate. I suspect there were substantial changes based on what we've gleaned from members of the government caucus and others.

I join my colleagues in saying there ought not to be a double standard. I say to the government again, divide the bill out, treat this special prize you're giving MPPs differently, treat it separately and let us vote on it separately. Let us take those good provisions and let's not corrupt them, let's not tarnish them by tying to it what is essentially an obnoxious change. Give us the opportunity to pass those parts of this bill which we think are sound public policy, which I know many members of the government believe are sound public policy, and let's leave the special treatment for MPPs out of it; or, if you want to continue on the path of giving special treatment to MPPs, bring in a separate bill. Don't try to camouflage it, don't try to hide it and don't try to let it slide through on the good intentions of the other part of the bill.

Many of us have seen plans wound up. I would suggest it's not even when plans are wound up; it's when people leave employment and they wind up their own personal plan that they roll it into a locked-in retirement

account, when they had a defined contribution plan before.

If you're being completely honest with yourselves as a government, give us a separate bill that deals with the MPPs' pension and let us all vote in favour of the other changes. The double standard you're creating in this bill contributes to the bad image that people have of people in public life. As my colleague from Renfrew said, we made a commitment here in this House, and here we are three years later essentially undoing it.

In conclusion, I support those provisions of this bill which will allow people in certain circumstances that will be more clearly defined in regulation to access locked-in accounts, particularly those who are experiencing financial hardship or shortened life expectancy, but we cannot and ought not to support this bill in its entirety because of the special treatment it gives MPPs. It is breaking what was I believe to be a fundamental commitment that all of us in this House made three short years ago. I say to the government, when you conduct public policy in this way, you bring shame on all of us.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I thank the member from Thornhill, the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and the member from Scarborough Centre. Speaker. Before I begin, I want to say that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Hamilton West. But I have been given dispensation, should I have a lot to say, to occupy the entire time, just for the record.

My nightmare is that I might end up spending Christmas Eve in this place with these people over there. That's the worst nightmare a member on this side could have. I tell you, if it continues this way, where we're sitting here tonight till, God knows, midnight, and Monday and Tuesday next week are already certain, but I'm told we could be here Wednesday and Thursday, no less, think of the nightmare.

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): That's not fair.
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Mr Marchese: I wanted to put it on the record because I've got things to do and love to be with people I love. I've got to be frank with you: This is not a group that I particularly love. I have regard for some, and because I'm getting older I'm beginning to like a few. That's a serious deterioration and flaw of character, I have to admit.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Natural Resources): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wonder if we might seek unanimous consent to allow the member for Trinity-Spadina to go home.

Mr Marchese: To go home? Speaker, I would love to go home, but these people are in such a hurry to pass so many bills. As you know, they've put the noose to so many debates. They did. You understand how the noose works. That's what they've done to this debate and to every debate in the House. They've put time allocation to bill after bill, meaning that we are prohibited from having our say, except for a mere 20 minutes that I may have to share with my colleague from Hamilton West. That's

what we're reduced to, sharing time with members to speak to particular bills. Can you believe that, Speaker? I know the public can't believe this, because some of them want to see us speak and they want to see us speak at length, on this bill, on other bills, and on any matter that concerns the citizens of Ontario.

You will recall, Speaker, that yesterday I spoke to this bill. I believe that you were here and you may have been in the chair. I have raised concerns about this bill, but not once did any of the three members who spoke today respond to any of the concerns we raised. In fact, they were repetitive, as is their fashion, raising the same themes that they've been raising for the last couple of days. Yet, in response to what this opposition member had to say, there was no response.

Mr Skarica, the member for Wentworth-Burlington, who spoke to this bill, talked about the hardship provision and read out, for approximately more or less, 10 minutes, from individuals who wrote to him saying how wonderful this bill is, "Please do it in a hurry," and so on. That's all fine. I want to hear from those national seniors' organizations, but I would also love to hear from people who have particular expertise in pension matters who could comment on this bill.

The other day I read sections of the bill that are very technical. Of course they're written by lawyers, understood generally only by lawyers, and we are grappling with them as ordinary Homo sapiens do here in this House. It's not easy. We've come up with some interpretations of this bill that I think are critical enough and we have some basic understanding of it, but it's very technical. I think we would benefit from having these bills, especially these types of bills, go out for public debate, for public scrutiny—not just debate, but scrutiny, because that's what such a thing would permit us to do.

If this bill is a debate presented by this government and opposed by us in great part or in some part simply with the expertise that we provide, we argue that it's not sufficient. We would love to see the level of support expressed by the member for Wentworth-Burlington from all over the province, if indeed such support exists. But I would wager to say to the public that's watching that 99.9% of the public doesn't have a clue about what this government is doing, not just with this bill but with countless bills. But again, because of the depth and wisdom this party has, I guess they must assume and think on behalf of 99.9% of the population that isn't able to reflect on this, debate on this, think about it and bring some opinion and expertise to this bill. I don't think this party and this government should set themselves up as being the overseers of people's opinions.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I know you got elected in 1995 but—

Ms Mushinski: The social contract comes to mind.

Mr Marchese: I know you'll always whine about something from the past, but the fact that they elected you in 1995 doesn't mean that they elected you to put forth such a bill. So when you put forth a new idea, it should be out there for public debate. I think it's only

right, it's only fair and it makes sense. I think the public would think it appropriate that you should do that. But you people don't do any of this.

You're going to drag me through this place, through Christmas Eve to spend that night here with you people. I tell you I don't like it, and I wager that on that particular night the people are not going to be watching us. They're certainly not going to be watching you.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I've raised objections to this bill.

Ms Mushinski: No.

Mr Marchese: Yes, I have. You weren't listening. You don't listen. If you indeed have all the knowledge that you need, then you can pass any bill you want, and presumably we on the other side are all simply debating but with no substance, of course, because only the Conservative members bring forth substance in this place.

We said, look, subsection 8(1). I know it looks very harmless when you look at, right? If you can understand it, it looks very harmless. If you don't understand it, it's incomprehensible and therefore it's meaningless to most humans. It says that in a multi-employer pension plan the administrator may be one of the employers. Do you recall that discussion? It's not much of a dialogue because you haven't responded to my comment, but at least I'm able to put it out for the record.

What it does is strip away a right that has been won by workers through the court system, because the courts have determined that multi-employer plans must be administered by a board of trustees, with half of the board made up of representatives of employees. I've raised that twice. This issue has come back here twice, hastily I would say, but none of you has responded to this, either by way of confirming or denying.

When you cut the debate, if you don't answer our questions and the public doesn't have an opportunity to read the bill—at least those who could understand it—and then be able to come to those hearings that New Democrats used to hold on a regular basis so that we could hear from the public, if you don't do that, it means that I'm not satisfied in terms of my ability to raise a question because you're not answering any of our questions. We're on our own, effectively. The public is on its own. They are literally defenceless against this onslaught of government by decree.

Hon Mr Snobelen: What about Rae days?

Mr Marchese: "Rae days"—you guys whine so much. You're always whining. I remember Mike Harris on this other side. Member for Hamilton West, do you remember the leader of the Conservative Party when he was sitting more or less right over there?

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): Clear as a bell. The good old days, actually.

Mr Marchese: Recessions are never good.

Mr Christopherson: We didn't have Harris in power, though. That was a good thing.

Mr Marchese: But Harris was not in power then and that was a good thing. People don't realize that if we had

had Harris in that recession, it would have been a true serious disaster for men and women in Ontario.

Bob Rae, our leader, used to say, "We are not getting the transfer payments from the federal government." At the time their buddies the Tories were in power and they started the cuts to the transfer payments in Ontario. Some people perhaps do not remember that. But now the Tories are constantly whining about the Liberals having slashed their transfer payments, forgetting that the Tories did that to New Democrats and the Liberals are doing that to the Tories at the moment. But they whine. When Rae used to raise this issue, Mike Harris used to say: "Stop whining. You've got the wheels now." But for the last two years all we hear is the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, the deputy leader, Mike Harris, in a continuous whine about the federal Liberal government not giving them the money and that's why they can't do their job in health and education and so on and so on.

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I wanted to point that out because some of you, M. Wettlaufer, were not here then, when your leader was saying to us, "Please, you've got the limousine, you've got the power." Now that you people have the wheels and the power, you can't leave those feds alone. You can't leave them alone because you desperately need the money to satisfy your urges to give tax cuts to rich people. Because you need more money to put into services such as health, education and the like, you want some money to flow in from the federal level. That's why you're whining, because you're giving it all away to your rich friends and you have very little left. "We've got to give our money to the people who own the money." Stop whining, because you sound like kids, and your leaders—you've got wheels, you've got limousines, you've got ministers, you've got power. Please.

Member from Scarborough Centre, I'm going to debate the second point that I raised earlier on, but I'll raise this matter with the others. Subsection 67(5) is the one that deals with hardship. We don't have any problem with the hardship clause. Inasmuch as it relates to people who face terminal illness, we believe it's not a bad thing. We think it's a good thing. Where we disagree with the government, and Mr Skarica as well, in this regard is that you have given yourselves the power to determine hardship in your own little backroom. That's the disagreement. We would love to see language describing hardship here for debate so we would have a better sense of its possible use and its possible abuse, but as it relates to terminal illness, it's not a bad thing.

Mr Christopherson: They're experts in hardship; they create a lot of it.

Mr Marchese: They're experts at hardship? They create a lot of hardship? Like the municipal bill, the tax bill, they passed one after the other after the other; seven bills to correct the previous one. I understand that.

We disagree with doing it in the backrooms, not every MPP backroom, because we know where decisions take place. So we're debating that. We're debating the definition of "hardship." A lot of us are worried that if a lot of

people have access to it, they will use the money in ways that we fear could hurt some of them in the end, because they're designed to be pensions. They're designed to protect people in their old age, assuming we live long enough in spite of the spillage of waste that's in our water and in the air, permitted courtesy of this government.

In this particular case this government says, "You want to be Big Brother all the time." No, I say to you. I argue that you cannot be inconsistent. With municipalities you have used the Big Brother approach, saying, "They don't know what they're doing." Isn't that true?

Mr Wettlaufer: We didn't do that.

Mr Marchese: You did, with the amalgamation of Ottawa, Hamilton and Toronto, the downsizing, and the amalgamations here. In that particular example, you have been nothing short of Big Brother. You have determined that they are incompetent, you have determined that they are not protecting their taxpayers, but even there, when it's convenient for you folks, you say, "You don't trust municipal politicians." You have often said that too. You are remarkable in your use of contradiction, and it astounds me that people let you get away with it.

Big Brother for the municipalities, because they don't know how to amalgamate themselves, and they need to, but on this particular issue you say, "No, we don't want to be Big Brother, we want to give them a choice." The thing about Tories is that they want it every which way, something that normally used to be a reserve, I thought, of my good friends the Liberals, but you people are good too. You people are really good at having it both ways. Your contradictions are egregious, yet the best way not to expose them is not to take anything out to the public and contain the discussion in this House. That's the better way to deal with it, it seems.

I raised another matter: section 93. We've argued here that the corporations must have lobbied you boys pretty good. I know they don't lobby, really, and you really don't have any friends in that particular corner, and they really don't contribute to your campaigns. You're quite right. Only the poor make contributions to your campaigns.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I'd love to talk about that but I only have two minutes and 30 seconds to deal with this bill. You give us no time for anything.

I've raised this matter because—let's leave the intense lobbying by the employer aside. It relates to pension plans with members in more than one province, as many do, but such pensions are registered, by and large, in Ontario. This particular change benefits companies, your buddies, the ones who have you in their pocket or pockets, because they'll be able to go to any province with this particular change where it's most suitable to them, meaning where the benefits are fewer. Isn't that wonderful? I suppose this will create jobs for people, you might argue.

No one has responded to the concerns we have raised here. We've said a number of issues are very progressive

here in this province that are not contained in other provinces. Allowing this particular change in section 93 will erode some of the benefits that working men and women have.

The final point that I touched on yesterday as well relates to the MPPs' pensions. My strong disagreement with you—and I would love for you to acknowledge it—is that your leader, the Minister of Finance and others continue to say, “This was part of an agreement.” It was not. All I want you to do is to own up to it, admit that it's yours, admit that you want it, and it will be a lot easier for us to debate this issue differently.

But when you try to suck me and the rest of the opposition into something you have done in order to try to convince the public that we were all in agreement, I tell you I disagree with you. This is a section that benefits 64 members of this place in a way that it benefits few people. Say that. Admit it. Don't hide from it. You generally don't hide from anything because you're all so tough, but on this particular issue you seem to weasel under the carpet, skulk away like skunks under the carpet.

Speaker, thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: According to the law of statistics and things, pursuant to the order of the House dated December 15, I am now required to put the question.

Mr Skarica has moved third reading of Bill 27. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: “Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on Bill 27 be deferred to the next sessional day during routine proceedings.” So be it.

2030

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): Mr Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to call government orders 1 through 3, inclusive, so that they can be moved and debated together and that at the end of tonight's debate there be a recorded division on the concurrences and that it be deferred until tomorrow during routine proceedings.

Interjection: Not tomorrow; the next sessional day.

Hon Mr Clement: The next sessional day.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Mr Clement has requested unanimous consent to debate them together.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, I'm going to take that point of order right now, please.

Mr Christopherson: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that. Perhaps your indulgence of one to two minutes, just to consult and ensure that we're on track—things are moving kind of quickly here today—because if there is unanimous consent we want to give it, and if not, I want to make sure they don't get it.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: Careful, careful.

There was a breakdown in terms of all of the caucuses being reached as to what's being put, so I have members throughout the Legislature who are watching, to explain this won't change in any way the time that's allowed or the vote that takes place, other than it gives us a breadth of debate among more ministries in terms of the estimates that we can debate. In light of that, then I do agree with the unanimous consent on behalf of the NDP caucus.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): Mr Speaker, we did communicate earlier. We accepted this and we're also grateful that the government will not raise points of order if we vary into estimates as they come up. That's my understanding of the agreement.

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): Speaker, we certainly concur with that. We will be watching very carefully, however, the range of debate. We are not agreeing that there will not be any points of order. We can't allow ourselves to be bound to that degree, but we expect that the opposition will be reasonable in their debate.

The Deputy Speaker: First of all, I'd like to say that none of those three are points of order.

Mr Clement actually has asked for unanimous consent to call government orders 1 through 3, inclusive, so that they can be moved and debated together and that at the end of tonight's debate there be a recorded division on concurrences and that it be deferred until routine proceedings on Monday, December 20, 1999.

I wanted to put that forth because that is what I'm asking. Is there unanimous consent to that? It is agreed.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Government order 1, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Community and Social Services (supplementaries only); government order 2, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Education and Training (supplementaries only); government order 3, concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (supplementaries only).

The Deputy Speaker: Debate?

Mr Toni Skarica (Wentworth-Burlington): It's my pleasure to open up the debate on the supply regarding the items, as listed, and in the standing order.

The details of this year's supplementary estimates are as follows and are the subject of the supply requests by the government.

Under community and social services, the expenditure item is child welfare, \$106.2 million; municipal affairs and housing, for federal and provincial social housing, is requesting \$196 million; education and training, the

expenditure item is general millennium awards, \$107.1 million; the Ministry of Education and Training, for the expenditure item employment insurance training agreement with the federal government, requesting \$47.2 million. The total is approximately \$556 million that's the subject of this supply motion.

I might indicate that these are substantial expenditures and are consistent with the government agenda. Dealing, first of all, with education and training, the expenditures there, contrary to what you hear from the opposition, have been going up each and every year.

For example, if you go to the Ontario budget, page 54, you will see—and there is a proviso here that there was some restructuring and reallocation of education and training monies—that in 1995 education and training had a budget of \$8.4 billion, and then it was reduced to \$7.8 billion in 1996-97. That was because, at that time, as you will recall, the Ontario government had an \$11-billion deficit. It was in fact taking monies out at that time in order to try to balance its books. But since that time, expenditures in education have been gradually rising. In 1997-98, \$7.7 billion was spent in education and training, but with school board transition restructuring of \$224 million, the total was higher than the year before.

The next year, there was a restructuring with the downloading and uploading. I won't get into the details of that, but the amount of spending in education and training by the province dramatically escalated to \$11 billion. The total sum with that, with the property tax that was being paid by residences and businesses, was an all-time high in spending in education. I believe the sum that was being spent for school boards was around \$12 billion. As you can see from the budget, the amount being spent for education and training is going to escalate further to approximately \$11.2 billion—that's in the Ontario budget.

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It's a well-known fact that next year's anticipated total operating expenses for the Ontario government will be at an all-time high of \$56.8 billion. The reason for that is that two areas of spending are going up dramatically. They are education and training and health care.

As is probably pretty well known now, the amount of spending on school boards is going up. At the same, the government is about to make a major investment of \$800 million to \$900 million in infrastructure spending in the university system. So total spending in education and training and colleges and universities, if we put it all together, is continuing on an upward trend and is at an all-time high.

The other area that is escalating pretty dramatically is health care. If you look at the budget, in 1995 we spent approximately \$17.6 billion in health care. That has steadily increased each and every year, to the point this year, 1998-99, that we're spending almost \$19 billion, and next year the expenditure will be over \$20 billion. So contrary to popular belief, what's being spent by the Ontario government is, in fact, going up and that's because of significant increments in spending in education and training and in health care.

Virtually every other spending area of the government is going down. One area that has gone down the most is community and social services. We see that the expenditure item here is child welfare: Volume pressure of \$106 million is being requested, pursuant to this supply motion. The government has made substantial investments in child care, and whatever cuts have taken place have been specifically designated so they wouldn't impact children and the disabled.

However, total spending by community and social services has gone down. If you go to the budget and look at community and social services, you will see that when we took over in 1995-96, the amount being spent by community and social services was \$8.8 billion—almost \$9 billion—and that the amount being spent has gradually gone down. The following year it was \$7.9 billion, in 1997 it was \$8 billion, this year it is \$7.7 billion and it will even go down a bit more.

The major reason for that is obviously the fact that more and more people are coming off welfare. Each and every year during those years, people were coming off welfare. When we took over, I believe 1.3 million people in Ontario were benefiting from welfare expenditures. As you recall, the amount being given to welfare recipients, except for the disabled, was cut by 22%. That in itself resulted in savings. But the real savings have resulted from the 1.3 million people on welfare having been cut dramatically and reduced by 462,000, which I believe is the latest figure. So you have a dramatic reduction in welfare, and that has obviously caused the community and social services expenditures to go down.

To give you an idea of the size, 461,000 is the population of Hamilton plus the towns of Ancaster, Dundas, Flamborough, Stoney Creek and Glanbrook put together. That is a significant number that have come off welfare. Where have they gone? Unfortunately there aren't great statistics on that, but many of those people must have gone into the job market. At the same time, welfare roles have been dramatically reduced to historically low levels, certainly the lowest for a long time, under 900,000 people now, which is still significant. You can see that we have a long way to go.

The population of Ontario is 11 million people. About 8% of those are still receiving welfare benefits, about 900,000 people. That's not acceptable when about 10% of your population is receiving welfare benefits. So there's still a lot to be done. We still have to continue to be aggressive in getting people off welfare, making sure that they have the dignity of a job. Where have all those people gone? Many of them must have gone to the job market. At the same time that the number of people who have gone off welfare has been in a steady decrease, and a substantial decrease, the number of jobs created has gone up dramatically, 615,000, I believe, since the June election. It's pretty simple math. The number of jobs has gone up dramatically. The number of people on welfare, at the same time, has gone down dramatically. It's obvious that the economy is flourishing and growing and so there are jobs available now for people who previously would have been welfare recipients.

Another item I'd like to point out—and I had about 10 minutes, and I've got about 30 seconds left—is that another very major misconception out there is that, as the province has introduced the 99 tax cuts, as the province has introduced a 30% income tax cut—that has already been done, and now we're into the next 20% income tax cut—we've had to borrow to pay for it, we've had to cut programs to pay for it. All of that does not bear up under scrutiny.

If you look at the budget—page 53 in the 1999 Ontario budget—you will see that the revenues, despite the tax cuts, have actually gone up. It was \$36 billion in 1995-96. The tax cuts started in 1996-97. In fact, the revenues continue to go up. They've gone from \$36 billion in 1995-96 to approximately \$42.5 billion this year, an increase of \$6 billion. How could that be? The tax rates have gone down, and 99 tax cuts having been implemented. How come we have more revenue? The answer is quite simple: More people are working. Even though they're paying less tax, the tax rates are less, more people are paying taxes.

There has been a great economic stimulus. As a result of that, the overall government revenue has gone up. In fact, that was predicted by numerous economists, that, basically, when you get up to a certain tax rate, you can increase those tax rates but you'll get less revenue because there's no incentive to work, there's no incentive to invest. So by cutting tax rates, we've brought those incentives back.

One of the best places to look is the movie industry. It was basically in a crisis in 1995-96. Part of the 1999 taxes are targeted right into that movie industry. What happened was that with some of the lowest taxes in North America, that movie industry has thrived to the point now where Toronto is the third most prosperous centre, after New York and Hollywood, dealing with that industry.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): That's because of the low dollar.

Mr Skarica: They say it's because of the low dollar. Well, fine. Vancouver has the low dollar, Winnipeg has the low dollar, Quebec has the low dollar. All of them have the low dollar. Why is it happening in Toronto? The answer is simple: We have the lowest tax rates, in fact the most generous tax breaks, for the movie industry in the country.

I'm going to split my time with my colleague Mr Stewart. We've each agreed to do 10 minutes. I've stolen his time. He can take over.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): It's a pleasure to stand and debate this concurrence in supply bill. It's interesting to note the number of expenditures that are suggested by my colleague, to the tune of \$566 million. These are additional pressures that we're finding on a daily basis in all four categories, and when there are pressures for financial increases, certainly our government responds, and responds very quickly, to them.

When I was asked to speak to this particular bill, a couple of my colleagues suggested to me, "Make sure

that you talk about money." Money has never been a real problem for me to talk about, because I believe in it very, very much. I believe in words like "profit," "savings," "revenues," "revenue increases," all of those words that in the past of previous governments seemed to have been bad and dirty words. I don't believe in inefficiency, I don't believe in debt and I don't believe in deficits.

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If you look at what has happened since our government took over in 1995, the commitment to get those deficits down, to make sure that we have good, sound management and core management proposals within every sector of the ministries, certainly that has happened. We are on the way, as we have said, to balancing the budget and will do so next year, as we promised—another promise made is another promise kept.

By doing all of this, certainly we have increased the revenues, one of the reasons being the tax cuts. When people have more money in their pockets, they will spend more money, which generates additional revenue and jobs. It's such a tremendous ripple effect across the entire country, and it causes the economic increases we want.

Certainly, when you look at things like the balanced budget bill and the more tax cuts for jobs and growth and prosperity bill, it is an indication that we're on the right track and will continue to do that. Then, of course, you look at other sectors—and we heard it from my colleague, where health care funding is being increased. Yes, we've got a long way to go on that yet, and we will continue to work towards that end.

Classroom funding has also been increased. When I look at the dollars for the general millennium awards for training in colleges and universities as well as employment insurance training agreements etc, to the tune of about \$150 million, I think to myself that we better make sure that happens and we better make sure that we continue to increase spending in education. I'll tell you why, because I'm getting very concerned, and I'm probably even more concerned over the last couple of weeks.

Certainly, the book, *My Ontario, the Millennium Memento*, which seems to have been around this House for the last couple of weeks—needless to say, some have had demonstrations. This is my millennium book. I'm very proud of it, and I have many signatures in it and will get more, because I think 40 or 50 years from now it's going to be quite a keepsake.

When I look at what the province has spent in millennium celebrations in Ontario, to the tune of about \$2 per capita, in comparison to what has happened in other provinces—Manitoba, \$9 per capita; BC, \$8 per capita; and Canada itself, \$5 per capita—I think Ontario has been very cost effective and very frugal in what they've been doing but yet still being able to have the celebration and have the keepsake for it.

One of the reasons I said I was very concerned about the dollars in education—and we are putting more and more dollars into classroom spending—is some of the defaced books that I got back in my office. Needless to

say, in Peterborough we had the first demonstration. As you know, they threw books on my counter and broke it. I would like to say publicly that I paid for that, not the taxpayers nor the boards of education that these students I believe were representing.

The concern I have is more with some of the comments that were in these books. When I said that I think we have to continue to put more and more dollars into education, into the classrooms—let me read you one of the comments. These would be from grades 11 and 12.

“This is a good book. I think that you could have saved money by making it smaller and less blank pages.” That’s l-e-s-t. That happens to be one. That concerns me a great deal. Maybe we have to continue to concentrate on things like we did with the new curriculum to make sure that people know how to spell, know how to use the right English words—and I’m certainly no example. I know that, and I admit that.

This happens to be another one: “Why did you mack this book?” That’s m-a-c-k. Grade 11 and 12 students. I get very concerned about this when I see what’s happening. There are a couple of other ones here—I see ears present who may not want to hear some of these words, and I would never use these words in this House.

But these are the types of things that concern me, and when I see that we have new curriculums and new dollars going in and when I look at what we’re trying to do in these estimates by increasing funding, again I would hope people support them.

As we go into the new millennium under the Mike Harris government, certainly the trend for efficiencies and that thriving, growing economy is very evident now and will continue to be so as we go into the future. More people are working because of the good management principles we are using in this province. Certainly the funding that has been put into areas—not thrown at particular problems, but the problems have been addressed and the money has been flowed to it as it has been proven that it has been required.

I certainly look forward to this concurrence in supply bill passing and would support it. Again, I look at a number of areas: community and social services and child welfare. Again, our government responds to areas where it is needed, but first of all we make sure that the facts, figures and information have been garnered, and then we have invested the dollars and will continue to do so.

I’m going to say thank you for the opportunity of speaking tonight. I believe, as always, that we are on the right track. We’ve got a long way to go, but as we go into the new millennium with a vision for the future, I think the dreams that we all have and certainly the dreams of these young people who have been quoted in this book will serve our future well, because again, this has been designed by the future, which is the young Ontarians of this great province.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I am pleased to continue the debate on, as we call it, concu-

rences on the supplementary estimates. Fundamentally, we’re dealing with three of them tonight: community and social services, education and municipal affairs and housing. I think those are timely.

The government recently released its Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. Among the numbers in here, the most important one, for me at least, was a table that showed what is driving the Ontario economy. What it shows is that the driving force—and this is the government’s document—behind the Ontario economy is exports. I think that’s going to be a fundamental debate for us to have here in the Legislature: What is the impact of the growth of exports for us here in the Legislature?

Page 22 of the document points out that exports now represent 52% of our gross domestic product. In 1989, it was about 29%. As this points out, there is no other area in the world that relies as much as Ontario does on exports. There is no question that that is what has built the Ontario economy over the last 10 years. That’s what the government says.

I found it interesting that, literally a day before this came out, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Mr Palladini, circulated to all of us a document that he said indicates why companies are investing in Ontario and growing in Ontario. It’s called the Site Selection Special Feature document, and it says this—and it’s important for us to recognize, because I happen to think these people are probably right:

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“There are two major reasons why companies that export are investing in Ontario. The first is, education attainment here is among the best in North America, and compared to major US cities that’s a huge competitive advantage for the province. A first-class education in Ontario is highly affordable and accessible.” That was the first thing that they said. “The second factor is the Canadian benefits system, which is a publicly funded system. Employers pay far less for such things as health care than they do in the United States. A typical company operating in Ontario might find its employee benefits bills slashed to one sixth of what it pays south of the border.”

So I say to all of us that if this document is right, which says the reasons why you should invest and grow in Ontario—not the only reasons; the two most important—are because of the quality of our labour force, heavily because, to use their language, “first-class education in Ontario is highly affordable and accessible,” and secondly, because of the publicly funded health care system, which provides a quality health care system at substantially lower cost for companies.

The reason I say it’s important is because we are undermining both of those things, both of those two competitive advantages. I go to the famed Blueprint document. The Conservatives won on this document, and I understand that, but here’s what they said about tuition fees. Remember, people want to locate here because we have a labour force that is highly skilled because our education system is affordable. Here’s what the government said, and quite proudly:

“Traditionally, tuition provided about one-third the actual costs of providing university and college courses, but previous governments allowed that to drop to less than 20% by 1992.” In other words, students were covering about 20% of the costs, and the public and other sources were providing 80%. Here’s what the government said: “To restore the balance in funding for colleges and universities, we brought tuition fees back to the reasonable ... 35% level.”

That’s my first point. If we believe that our competitive edge has been that we have a labour force well-skilled, we’re heading in the wrong direction. We are making it less accessible.

The second thing is—and there’s no question about this—that in Ontario, about two thirds of the health-care funding has come from the province and about one-third has come from other sources. The government’s share of that is dropping, at the rate of probably about 1% a year. In about five years, we’ll be down to under 60% funded by the province and 40% funded by other sources. We are heading in the direction of the US, where our publicly funded system is changing to much more of a publicly-privately funded system.

The reason I raise this is that if we don’t begin to have a debate about how we sustain our economic edge with exports, and we undermine those things that have built the export business, then we put ourselves at significant risk.

As I say, one of the things that’s in the estimates today is student aid. It is designed to essentially help them borrow more money, go deeper in debt. But it is making our education system less affordable and less accessible.

The second thing I want to touch on was raised by one of the previous speakers, and that is that in the education system, we are moving to use what the government calls its SuperBuild fund to fund our infrastructure. The plan is that the government says we need to spend \$20 billion over the next five years on our infrastructure; \$10 billion of that will come from public funding and \$10 billion from private sector funding.

I just want to begin to raise some significant cautionary notes about that. First, the private sector is not going to provide funding out of the goodness of its heart, and for good reason. They’re in the business of making a return on their investment. They will only invest in infrastructure if there is a significant return on their investment.

When we raise this issue and the SuperBuild fund, the government says, “Well, we’ve done this Highway 407 deal and we’re very proud of it.” I tell you, that is going to come back to haunt this government in a very significant way. I remind the people of Ontario what happened there. The government jacked the price up on that deal. How did they do it? They said, “We’ll sell this thing, not for the 30 years that was promised here but for 99 years.” It’s almost in perpetuity, 99 years. “Second, we will guarantee the buyer that they can take the tolls up at inflation plus 2% every year for 15 years.” That is a deal that private sectors die for. “Third, if anybody dares not to pay their tolls, we won’t renew their licence.”

There’s one individual in Mississauga who, through some bizarre quirk, owed a penny. The computer doesn’t distinguish between owing a penny and owing \$100. That person owed that 407 owner a penny and couldn’t renew their licence and couldn’t get an answer on the phone.

I remember, by the way, that one of the Conservative members said to the Minister of Energy that there are municipalities that are going to have a cash grab by selling off their electrical utilities—they used the word “stealing,” by the way, stealing money from the electricity users—so they could have a pre-election slush fund.

The biggest cash grab in the history of the province of Ontario, in the history of Canada, was the sale of the 407. It sold for \$3.1 billion, \$500 million more than the Canadian National railroad and Air Canada sales combined. Those two things sold for \$2.6 billion; the 407 sold for \$3.1 billion. It’s a deal of enormous proportions. Imagine that: \$500 million more than the national railroad and the national airline.

And guess when the deal closed. May 5, 1999, the day Harris called the election. The \$1.6 billion came into the election slush fund and the buses rolled that same day.

The reason I raise this is because now I have dozens of people who use the 407. If you drive from Markham to Mississauga and back every working day, five days a week, you’re paying tolls now of almost \$3,600 a year, \$300 a month. Not only that, but the government has guaranteed the company they can double the tolls.

I mentioned earlier about exports being fundamental to us. The truck costs are three times that rate. A truck is paying about \$10,000 a year right now to drive from Markham to Mississauga and back again, and that’s going to go up to \$21,000 a year.

The reason I raise this is because, first, I think the 407 is a terrific deal for the buyers. This is a deal made in heaven. All of us who live in this area know how crowded it is already. The Premier got \$1.6 billion in his pre-election slush fund, but the 407 users have been sold down the river. Yet every time we talk about the SuperBuild fund, the government says: “It’s going to be just like the 407. We’re very proud of the 407.”

Well, I repeat, we’re dealing with our education estimates tonight. A previous member mentioned about the building program going on in the colleges and universities. Half of our future infrastructure is supposed to come from the private sector. The government says we have to spend \$20 billion over the next five years, and I agree. I think we have to spend at least that. Half has to come from the private sector, but I guarantee you that the private sector is not going to provide any of this without one of three things. They’ll say, “We’ll build you another toll road if you guarantee the same kind of toll deal we can get on the 407,” or, “We’ll build you a sewage treatment plant if you guarantee a stream of revenue.” They will do it that way and it’s a tax by another name. You’ve just said, “We’ll let you go and put a tax on those people.” The second way they will build these things is to build them and lease them. That’s just debt by another name.

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I'm personally very worried about school boards. School boards right now are out borrowing money to build schools. The province said, "We'll give you annually one twenty-fifth of the cost to build that." That's just a shell game. The debt is not going to be on the provincial books, it's going to be on the school boards' books and the school boards have no revenue-raising potential. The debt-rating agencies will blow the whistle on the government on that.

I'm anxiously awaiting the government to come forward with some proposals on the SuperBuild Growth Fund, because there is no free lunch from the private sector, for good reason. It will only invest in infrastructure if there's a return on their investment. To use the 407 as a good example I think is wrong; I think it was a bad example of private sector involvement.

One of the members mentioned how he likes to talk about money, and that's fine, and believes in balancing the books and not running deficits and things like that. My background is business as well and I understand that language. I just remind Conservative members that the last time a Conservative government balanced the budget in Ontario was 1969. There are some members in the House I think who weren't even born the last time a Conservative—Mr Maves may have just made it.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): Nineteen sixty-four.

Mr Phillips: He was five years old when the Conservative government last balanced the budget. Mr Robarts was the Premier at the time.

I always say to my business friends, "Look at the facts." I know you think the Conservatives are the money managers, but it was in 1969 under John Robarts the last time a Conservative government balanced the budget. Even with Premier Harris the debt of the province has gone up almost 25%. Since he became Premier he's added \$22 billion of debt to the province.

Mr Maves: Hydro.

Mr Phillips: It isn't Hydro. If it were Hydro it would be \$31 billion. I've taken Hydro out of that. If you include Hydro, it's another \$9 billion. It's \$22 billion just from the Harris plan. It's a bit of a myth about the great money managers, frankly. Again I go back to the debt-rating agencies, who are the objective people on this, and they still give Harris the same debt rating they gave Bob Rae. A member said earlier that even though the government has cut taxes, the revenues have still gone up. Of course it's gone up. As the economy grows the revenue grows.

When Premier Harris took over, all the other provinces, except two, and the federal government were running significant deficits. They've now all balanced their books. The federal government went from a \$42-billion deficit at the time Harris became Premier and now will have had three consecutive surpluses before Harris has balanced the books.

Mr David Young (Willowdale): Talk about health care transfer payments.

Mr Phillips: There's someone at the back barracking about transfer payments. I remember so well Harris saying, when the federal government brought its budget out: "We support the cuts. We publicly endorse"—that's the language he used. He was clapping. In fact he said he didn't think the cuts went far enough.

I go back to saying to my business friends that the federal government balanced its books three years ahead of Premier Harris, and Quebec has balanced its books two years ahead of Premier Harris, with all the challenges Quebec faces. By the way, when Premier Harris took over, Quebec's deficit as a per cent of gross domestic product was higher than Ontario's but it now will beat Ontario by two years on balancing its books, dealing, I might add, with the same federal government and not having the advantage Ontario has of exports to the US.

Believe me, we all have to be cautious about taking credit for exports to the US. That is fundamentally because the auto sector has chosen to invest in Ontario. Ontario now produces more auto parts than Michigan does. Why is that? It goes back to the fact that they say, "We can get a skilled workforce here and we can get our health care at a dramatically lower cost than in the US." Both of those are things we are moving away from.

I go back to the point I made earlier. Quebec, without the advantage of the exports to the US, without exports representing, as they do here in Ontario, well over 52% of the economy, now is running a surplus while Ontario continues to pile up debt. So I appreciate the member from Peterborough having the good thoughts about fiscal management and saluting deficits and balancing the books, but I repeat that the last time any of the Conservatives were able to sit in this House and say, "We've balanced the books," was 1969 when Mr Maves was five years old. We can never allow that to go unnoticed.

I also want to talk a little bit about what the auditor had to say about community and social services. We are dealing today with their budget. He comments in two or three places on what the government has been doing in the social services area. By the way, I might add for the public that the Provincial Auditor is hired by the taxpayers to provide them with an independent view of the finances of the province. It's an extremely important function. It's the Provincial Auditor who reviews the books of the province and puts his or her stamp of approval on them or raises issues of concern. He's the watchdog.

The auditor brought out his report a few weeks ago and was asked about his overall comment on how well the money is managed. Someone said to the auditor: "You've seen them in action now for four years. From your perspective, do you think that under this government, for our tax dollars, the services provided by government are being provided more efficiently and more effectively?" This is the independent body being asked this.

The auditor: "Well, as my report points out, they really aren't. The improvements are not very noticeable

at this point and the accountability that has to be there for the spending of public funds is just not in place." So again I say to people who believe this is a government, as one of the previous members said, that is managing the dollars really well, the fact is that the Provincial Auditor says: "That's not the case. I've looked at them now for four years and they are not improving."

As a matter of fact, the government has done some outsourcing, outsourcing being taking services that were previously provided by Ontario public servants and privatizing them. In the analysis the auditor did, and this happened to be in the case where the government was moving to have the private sector maintain the roads, he said: "I don't think there are any savings here. As a matter of fact, I believe there are going to be higher costs involved in it. Furthermore, the government has privatized a third of the roads and is moving to privatize all of them, with no indication there are any savings there."

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The auditor raised significant concerns about this privatization, not because the auditor had a philosophy of whether that's good or bad, the auditor simply said: "If you are doing this to save money, you have not proven it. As a matter of fact, the evidence I've got says it's going to cost more money."

The auditor went on to say in the social services area—this happened to be the Family Responsibility Office. I mention this because the government, in one of its cost-saving moves, said to women on social assistance: "If you have an outstanding claim against your spouse at the family services office, we're going to cut you off. You're not going to get social assistance. We're going to cut you off, and you go and the money from your spouse who owes you the money."

Here's what the auditor said about people trying to get some service from the family services office: that at that time 128,000 of the active cases registered with the office were in arrears—75% of the cases were in arrears. The office had 170,000 registered cases, and 126,000 were in arrears. The arrears totalled \$1.2 billion, up from \$700 million five years earlier. The auditor pointed out that this situation was not only bad, it was bad and getting dramatically worse. What did the government do? They said to people on social assistance, "We're going to cut you off, and you go to the family support office and get your money," knowing full well that the Family Responsibility Office was in disarray.

The auditor went on in several other areas to point out the problems. This was again on community and social services, one of the supplementary ones we're debating. The auditor pointed out that he made several recommendations in 1995 designed to dramatically save money. Here's what he said: "In 1995, the ministry had agreed to take action to implement our recommendations to correct observed deficiencies, but did not follow through with its stated intentions. Therefore, we again make recommendations to overcome these deficiencies.

"The minister responded to our recommendations with a commitment to take corrective action."

I raise this because of the comments made earlier by the member who talked about good financial management. I repeat that the last time a Conservative government ever balanced a budget was 1969. They've had 20 times to try and do it and haven't done it.

The government says it is dedicated to managing the finances better. When asked, "Do you think there are any improvements?" our independent auditor made this comment: "As my report points out, there really aren't. Improvements are not very noticeable at this point," and went on to point out where in community and services he had made recommendations in 1995, when this government just came in, and they had not been followed up.

He went on to indicate some serious concerns in the area of health. The auditor points out that the government estimated that the hospital restructuring would cost about \$2 billion, and it's going to cost \$4 billion just for capital. But again I go back. The government says it's going to do it with the SuperBuild Growth Fund. The examples of it doing that are few and far between.

I wanted to make one other comment, if I might. The supplementary expenditure estimates and the expenditure estimates came into my office on December 14. One of those was the Legislative Assembly estimates. We are not allowed to debate that. When estimates were originally prepared and the three parties had to select which areas they will focus on, the Legislative Assembly estimates were not available, so we couldn't select them. They have now become available but, because we couldn't select them then, we can't debate that tonight.

The reason it becomes important, among others, is that we are going to be ordered, I gather, next week to appoint a new Environmental Commissioner. I should tell the people of Ontario that we in the Liberal caucus and the NDP caucus have some serious reservations, to put it mildly, about the candidate coming forward. I don't know the individual. I'm speaking more from the point of view that the person we appoint to the environmental commission should be seen to be independent. It will be that commissioner who will have the responsibility for Ontario of being the watchdog for our environment.

But I gather that the candidate coming forward is a former Conservative candidate in two different elections, has been the riding association president in the North Bay area for the Progressive Conservative Party. Frankly, the credibility of that individual as an independent watchdog on the environment surely is at risk. Surely we're not going to proceed to appoint as a watchdog someone who has that risk of a lack of independence. I think virtually of all the things we should be looking at in people, independence should be one of them. We cannot ask the minister about it because they say it's a Legislative Assembly responsibility. We can't even debate the budget for the Environmental Commissioner. We are, once again, gagged on an important matter.

I'm pleased to continue the debate on this motion and I look forward to the rest of the debate.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I think we're going to rotate. Further debate? We can go around again, if you like, or the member for St Catharines; it doesn't matter. The member for St Catharines, then.

Mr Bradley: I'll be looking forward to hearing from the Conservative and NDP members later in the debate, but I appreciate this opportunity because it allows some latitude to canvass many of the issues which are important, particularly under the votes which are before the House now.

There are a couple of items that I think should be of concern to members of the Legislature. I want to follow on with the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, who expressed his concern about certain officers of the assembly who are chosen to hold important offices. The obvious one is you as Speaker, Mr Speaker. We look forward to having independent-minded individuals who will make good judgments that are fair to all and who will uphold the rules of the House.

By the way, I want to compliment you on a rule that you made earlier. I don't want to compliment you on a ruling that you made on Monday, I think, of this week, but the ruling you made tonight is a very reasonable ruling. It just shows that a good Speaker is going to make some rulings that the opposition will like and some rulings that the government will like, but they're all independent rulings. I just wanted to compliment on what I would call a landmark ruling of profound importance to this Legislature, particularly when you're able to quote members of the government to sustain that particular opinion. Indeed, I think I'm going to borrow your researchers for the table to perhaps allows us to make some of those arguments.

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Hon Mr Klees: I don't know how he does it—so quick, in such a short period of time. That is amazing.

Mr Bradley: Yes, he is amazing indeed, but it gets to the point of officers of this assembly and the need for them to be neutral and to be seen to be independent. That is why when my colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt mentioned the position of Environmental Commissioner—Ombudsman would be another position that comes to mind, or Integrity Commissioner or a couple of other positions out there, the person in charge of freedom of information—these are the kinds of people you want to be totally independent, so whether you're sitting on the government side or the opposition side you'd have confidence that that person would be very vigilant. I understand that what goes on in committee is confidential. However, I have read in the popular press, as I do from time to time—when the government leaks things to the news media, I get to know it ahead of time. I did read a press release and was able to put a press release out myself after getting this information. It is noted that the individual whom the government members had favoured did not mention—and I think it's important to do so—that he had been the Conservative candidate provincially in Cochrane South in 1995, the Conservative candidate

federally in Nipissing and president of the federal Progressive Conservative association in Nipissing.

The reason I say that's important—I don't want to preclude a person from any position, ever, but when I look at the position of Environmental Commissioner, in my view the government fired the last Environmental Commissioner, Eva Ligeti, because she was too critical of the government. She brought down report after report. Instead of renewing her term, as you could have, the government chose to find someone new. As fine a fellow as Mr Gordon Miller might be, and he may well be a very fine individual, I can tell you that he would never be perceived to be totally independent.

As I mentioned to somebody else, when it comes to the environment—if you appoint a Tory to be trade commissioner somewhere, you'd say, "Maybe that Tory will do a good job at that—trade commissioner; that fits in." But when you say you're going to put a Tory in charge of the environment, a cold hand comes over my heart.

Hon Mr Klees: On a point of order, Speaker: I can't let this go on. The honourable member knows that the root word for "conservative" is "conservation." Surely he can't believe what he's saying, that Conservatives don't have credibility on the environment. I would ask that the member withdraw that. He's doing a great disservice to this House. I believe the public deserves to know the truth.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order.

Mr Bradley: You're quite right, Mr Speaker: It's not a point of order; it's a point of view, as Speakers always say. It's a point of view, and I simply do not agree. I'm just saying if you wanted to put him in charge of some investment board or something like that, that's probably reasonable; a Conservative might do a good job at that. But do not allow me to see—

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: Well, perhaps the Minister of Natural Resources might make a good environment minister some day; I don't know that. He may have that opportunity. I don't want to dwell on that, other than to say that I think it's important, when you have the Ombudsman, the Environmental Commissioner, the Integrity Commissioner and so on, that there's a consensus that the person who is selected is indeed totally independent and objective. I won't dwell on that because it's just a wee bit off the estimates which we are considering today.

I also want to say that I noted—I read some of these things—the Premier's speech to the Fraser Forum. The Fraser Forum is that extreme right-wing organization out West—I think British Columbia is where it's headquartered—which is idolized by the member for Brampton, the Minister of Environment and Minister of Municipal Affairs, who would live and die by the words of the Fraser Forum, no doubt. The Premier made his speech to the Fraser Forum the other day. I hope particularly those members who represent heavy manufacturing areas—automaking, for instance, pulp and paper, and other industrial and business areas—would note that the Premier was saying that what we have to do is move the dollar up

in value. Everybody who's objective knows that the reason our economy is booming is because of low interest rates and because of the low dollar. That's why we have these exports to the US; we're very much favoured. That's why we don't import as much from the US, because of that low dollar, so we choose those things which are purchased in Ontario.

The Premier was saying that the dollar should be allowed to go way up, in his speech to the Fraser Institute. I notice he didn't make that speech in Oshawa or St Catharines or Oakville or Burlington or other places—

Hon Mr Clement: Or Brampton.

Mr Bradley: —or in Brampton, indeed, where that would have a devastating effect. I remember talking to an official, a vice-president of a pulp and paper industry in northwestern Ontario. I asked the person, "How much difference does one cent on the dollar make?" "When the dollar goes up by one cent," he said, "it's \$17 million to our company." That's how important it was for that company to have a competitive dollar. The Premier, to the Fraser Institute, is advocating that that go up. I think that's dangerous.

As well, in 1996 the Premier attended, in Davos, Switzerland, something called the World Economic Forum. Since 1993, when its Global Leaders for Tomorrow program was first introduced, the forum has selected 100 young leaders who have demonstrated their commitment to taking a responsible role in society. The person who is responsible for this, Klaus Schwab, is the founder and president of the World Economic Forum. He had some interesting things to say in 1996 at the conference the Premier attended and I think it's something this government should take into account, because they seem to believe that people should be allowed to flounder out there, that the banks, for instance, should be able to make unprecedented profits and fire the bodies out into the streets. Some 17,000 of those people are going to be fired out the door while the banks are making huge profits. Service is deteriorating for people, and I would hope that our government would speak out against this. But here's what Klaus Schwab said, and I don't think he could be declared any socialist or any lefty, as you would say. He had the following to say, in late January 1996, in Davos, Switzerland:

"Companies have an obligation to their employees. While they cannot guarantee lifetime employment, companies should help ensure future employability. Every day someone works for a company, that person should have the opportunity to acquire new skills and capabilities. The winners in globalization have an obligation to assist the losers. Those who benefit the most should support social programs and income support for those who end up as losers."

Now, here's a person with a social conscience, because more and more what's happening out there, which is disconcerting not to the richest people in society or to the top bosses but to the average worker out there—it could be a white-collar worker or a blue-collar worker, someone in any kind of job—is this: Years ago, if a

company or a business laid people off and they were losing money, you wouldn't like it but you could understand it. If their products weren't selling or their service wasn't being used and they were losing money and they laid people off, you understood it. It was a sad day for those people, but you understood it. What we have happening today is huge corporations—and the banks always come to mind—making unprecedented profits and laying people off, firing them out the door, so they can get a blip in the stock market. In fact, the boss of the company, the top CEO, chief executive officer, gets a bonus when this happens, when there's a blip in the stock market, but meanwhile, all these people are losing their jobs. I think the banks have an obligation, when they're making these kinds of profits.

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What we see happening now is the banks willy-nilly closing branches and cutting back on the hours that people can access the bank and talk to a real person, a human being. It's not as though the people working in the bank are making huge salaries; they're not. They're often people who have very modest salaries. They're often friends of people in this assembly. We see them losing their jobs or having their hours cut back while the banks make unprecedented profits and, as I say, cut personal services to people in our province.

Trucks on the highway—I think that fits under Municipal Affairs, or at least nearly under Municipal Affairs. The former Minister of Transportation is here tonight. He probably was going to do something about this, but he got transferred. The problem is the huge volume of truck traffic on the highways and the intimidation of motorists.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: I think the member makes a reasonable point. I want to tell you that one of the reasons for that is because we have a booming economy in Canada. Therefore we have more vehicles, more trucks, on the road. But we have also deregulated. That's not the fault of this government, by the way. Deregulation took place some years ago. This government would have agreed with it, by the way. I didn't agree with it at the time, but this government would have. Probably the member for Brampton, as a whiz kid, was on the sidelines demanding this at the time.

But the effect of deregulation—we see a different kind of person on the highway today. All of us remember the good truck drivers—and there are still a lot of them on the highway—people who stop to help people out, people who are very courteous and very safe in their driving habits. Today, with free trade and the international deregulation of the trucking industry, we see far more people, often independents, who have to hustle, who are working more hours in the day than they should, driving vehicles that are not safe and, indeed, going faster than they should.

I think the government should look at going back to what the Davis government did a number of years ago—it might even have been the Robarts government—and that was having a differentiated speed limit. I think it was

55 miles an hour for trucks and 65 miles an hour for cars, something of that nature. What we're seeing, because of the pressure on many of these people, mostly from the States, is that you get bad weather and they're charging along the highway, they don't slow down, they're causing havoc for automobile drivers and a lot of people are intimidated by this. The people who are most critical of this are good truck drivers and good truck owners themselves, who feel their reputation is being besmirched by some people who are engaging in tactics that they shouldn't. I hope the government will look at ways, explore ways, of overcoming that problem.

Driver testing is another one. There isn't anybody here who isn't getting telephone calls at their constituency offices about the absolute mess of people trying to get a test. The number of people failing—I'm just thinking of those of us, particularly people in the age bracket of the Minister of Natural Resources and me, who would be relatively in the same age bracket—

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Today is his birthday.

Mr Bradley: Oh, it's his birthday today, too. It's his 39th birthday today.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: I won't get into other things; I'll leave it at the birthday.

I want to tell him that when he and I got our licences, it was a lot easier than it is today. What is happening now is that young people are frequently being failed on their drivers' tests. I don't know the reason for that. I'm not in the car; I can't pronounce on that. But I think we're all getting calls about how many people are not passing those tests. It costs them more money, under one of Mike Harris's new taxes, the 692 user fees that I have counted. These people are unable to get their licences, and there's not enough opportunity for them to book a driver's test. So it's very chaotic. One of the reasons is this government's mantra of wanting to cut back on every government service regardless of whether it's essential.

I should mention as well that I think somebody here who is really assiduous about Management Board rules and regulations should look up the one that says there cannot be a minister's name or the Premier's name on signs on the highway. I've seen one that says, "Your Ontario tax dollars at work. Mike Harris, Premier." That's like Georgia or Louisiana, where they have the Governor's name right on the sign. It had to cost a lot more money to put those signs up. The Minister of the Environment, who was a hawk when he was a whiz kid, would have been all over the opposition for doing that. But there's the Premier's name on the signs.

I also want to deal with gas prices, because I have presented a bill to this Legislature that I think the government could support. I wish they would bring it forward next week. Perhaps I'll ask the whip if he could use his influence to have the bill brought forward next week. All it is, is a bill that prevents predatory pricing; that is, it prevents the big oil companies, the oil giants, Mike Harris's friends, from selling to independent retailers at a different price from what they sell to their own retailers. It's called a predatory pricing law.

I think you could support that. I know the member for Niagara Falls would. He's a progressive person; he understands the importance of protecting independents and of providing some kind of competitiveness in the field. I know he would probably—I would give him the bill, let him put it in his name and put it through the House next week if he wants. I think it's a reasonable bill. I presented it to the House, and it passed first reading earlier in the session. If the government wishes to take it over and take credit for it, I'm all for that, because it's a good bill. It's not controversial. I can think of some bills that are more controversial, such as the one Bill Davis passed in the summer of 1975, which froze the price of gasoline and heating oil—a very courageous step on the part of the Premier. It had nothing to do with an election coming in the fall; I know some people tried to say that. It had nothing to do with that.

I'm not recommending that now, because I don't think the government would do it. Mike Colle is. He's got his bill asking you to do that, but I don't know if you'll do it. My bill is very supportable by all members of the House. I look forward to the chief government whip urging his colleagues to have it brought forward. We would pass it in a nod. Perhaps 15 minutes' debate is all that would be needed. I would be here to compliment the government on adopting this piece of legislation. You could use it in your constituency newsletter, if you put one out. Fifteen minutes—very reasonable.

Next, the health care system. I won't get into the thing we have. We've had trouble with the emergencies, we have trouble with hospitals and so on. I want to talk a little more on the theory and the principles of it. I am very worried by what I see happening.

Hon Mr Klees: Ophthalmologists in St Catharines.

Mr Bradley: Ophthalmologists in St Catharines. I'm glad you mentioned that, because I asked a question of the minister a number of weeks ago, and I have written a letter to her. What we have in St Catharines and Niagara—I'm glad the chief government whip listens, because he remembered this—is a situation where we don't have enough ophthalmologists. We have only 12 ophthalmologists, not all of them working full-time. By the government's criteria, we should have a minimum of 13 working full-time. So now these people are going to have to head down the road to Hamilton, down the busy Queen Elizabeth Way. We have in St Catharines and Niagara, on a per capita basis, the oldest population in all Canada. A lot of these people can't travel easily because they have visual problems. I'm imploring members of the government to help me out in persuading the Minister of Health that, indeed, she should remove the cap on the billing for ophthalmologists in Niagara until such time as we have no longer an underserved area.

2150

We also need more doctors in the Niagara Peninsula. My friend, the member for Niagara Falls, brought forward such an initiative in the House. It didn't pass but I want to commend him for raising the issue because we know, in the Niagara region, we don't have enough

family physicians. I encourage the government to follow the recommendations the Liberal Party made in this regard. I know you've adopted some of our policies and that's fine. I'm glad to see that. But we do need those kinds of initiatives to bring people to the Niagara Peninsula.

What I'm worried about is the two-tier system I see developing in Alberta, where you're going to have a system where, if you're wealthy enough, you buy your way to the front of the line where you get private health care. What is needed instead is an infusion of further dollars into the health care system.

I think most people will be prepared to say: "Look. Put aside your proposed new tax cut and put that money instead into health care." Doctors would support it, nurses, but particularly patients and families of patients. Some of our hospitals, because of the underfunding taking place, are in real trouble in terms of trying to deliver the services that we would require.

I want to also mention something in the field of community and social services; just two instances where I think the government has gone overboard. I can't think of anybody in this House who believes in welfare fraud and I would commend any efforts to wipe out genuine welfare fraud. However, I'll give you two examples of where I think the government has gone overboard and I hope somebody listens and changes it because I don't think anybody over there is a mean-spirited person who wants to do in people who are at the lower end of the scale.

In one case, a couple phoned and said, "We look after severely disabled adults." I think they're two young men in their 20s who are severally disabled and they require diapers. Not a very nice topic to talk about but there it is. The government has put in a new regulation that says instead of that being provided through community and social services or the Ministry of Health—I'm not sure which—that now they have to be paid for out of that person's so-called comfort allowance. These are people who are very disabled. If they're able-bodied, there's going to be much less sympathy. They're severely disabled. That should be changed.

The second is a person who is involved in, I think you call it the Step Up program, where you supplement a person's income. A woman phoned, she said she works at Wendy's now, at a fast-food outlet. She works, say, from 9 to 4, that kind of period of time. That way, she can be home when her children are there. Yes, the job doesn't pay a lot of money, it may not be a glamorous job for her, but she's making an effort out there. Now Ontario Work says: "Oh, you have to quit that job and get another job because that's not a good enough job. You've got to have a job where you're making more money." Here's a person making an effort, doing a job, getting some supplement from the government and trying to look after her children and the Ontario Work's rules are grinding her into the ground.

Two things I think you should look at. There are many, but there are two I think you should look at.

The millennium books. You know what that reminds me of? It reminds me of the phony bicentennial we had a number of years ago, where the Ontario government said it was a bicentennial—it wasn't—for Ontario. So we had all kinds of coins and flags and all kinds of things put out to do with the bicentennial. That's what this book reminds me of. It's got the Premier's picture, probably the Minister of Education or the Minister of Culture, Citizenship and Recreation—one of those other ministers; a glossy book put out.

I think why people are annoyed—there it is. The member for Bramalea has it.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: And many other places.

I think the reason people are annoyed with it is they look at other places the money could be spent. I like the children who have participated in it, but I think it's not the kind of expenditure that has the support that the average person would like to give to it. It's \$3 million and it's blown up in your face because people have seen the cutbacks that you have made in education.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Kitchener Centre, come to order.

Mr Bradley: I shouldn't respond to a member from Waterloo who's not in his own seat, Mr Speaker, so I will take your advice.

I have a couple of other things I'd like to bring to your attention. I know the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is listening at her apartment or at home to this very speech and I want to encourage her to provide the necessary—would you call SuperBuild the new name for your funding? SuperBuild fund I think is a phony name. It doesn't matter. It's capital funding out there. Even though the name is propaganda and phony, it's still money out there.

Mr Wettlaufer: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member for St Catharines has alluded to the fact that the minister isn't here. He suggested that she was back at home in her apartment watching on television. The member knows very well that she's out—

The Deputy Speaker: That is a point of order. I would like to hear the rest of what the member for St Catharines has to say.

Mr Bradley: The member should know that I was not making a disparaging remark. I'm saying that she's likely watching this because that's part of her job, to watch what goes on in the Legislature. She would be monitoring this, no doubt, while she's signing her books and reviewing a lot of her papers. I like Dianne Cunningham. She's been a long-time colleague and good friend of mine. I know, and that's why I said it, she's not a person out having a good time; she's sitting at home watching this, which is not a good time, I could say.

I am urging her to approve the two applications from Brock University and the two applications from Niagara College for funding under the SuperBuild program. I know the member for Niagara Falls agrees with me. He's lobbied for it. I want to give him his credit. All of us in

the peninsula have lobbied for that funding. I would be very supportive of it. I'm a fair-minded person. When the government does something that I think is good, I'm prepared to stand in this House and give credit, and the minister knows that. When the minister makes his decision not to allow a huge development on the Niagara Escarpment—he knows what I'm talking about—when he makes that announcement, I'll be prepared to give him the appropriate applause in this House, and I will write a press release saying the minister has made the right decision. So you can look forward to that.

The last thing I want to mention—unfortunately I have but little time left—is this obsession all governments have with gambling funds. We're down to the last 18 seconds, but I'm going to tell you that you are bringing in through the back door the Mike Harris gambling halls you kind of turned away from. Those are the slot machines going in anywhere and everywhere you can get them. I think it's wrong and I think a lot of members on the government benches agree with me.

Mr Christopherson: I'd like to begin—

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): If you want to share your time, I'll speak on your side.

Mr Christopherson: Thanks a lot, John. One of the government members has offered to share the time with me, which is really generous of you. I know it's only in the spirit of the season that you make that, but I'm going to have to take a pass on this occasion.

Mr O'Toole: Give me some of your message notes.

Mr Christopherson: I don't think you could say our message, John. You'd break out in hives, you'd start coughing, your knees would get weak, you'd buckle, you'd just fade, you'd be scratching all over. It wouldn't work.

Mr Chudleigh: In the spirit of the season, at least be nice.

Mr Christopherson: I'll be as nice as I can. How's that? I'm not sure how much that's saying, but I will try.

I want to pick up on a comment that the member for Peterborough initially raised in his comments on this and it was also touched on by the member for St Catharines, the previous speaker, and that was talking about the quickly becoming infamous Millennium Memento—is this meant to be helpful?

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): Yes.

Mr Christopherson: Are you going to feed me notes if I get stuck? Is that the idea? We're going to hold them up in stereo?

Mr Gill: Here's a book.

Mr Christopherson: You've got guts, I give you that, because if I'm stuck for something to say, guess what?

Mr Bradley: Is that the millennium book?

Mr Christopherson: Yes. He's a big fan.

Mr Gill: I brought my own.

Mr Christopherson: I've got some students who would love to autograph it for you too. In fact that's what I wanted to raise.

2200

Just today I had a fax sent to me on this matter and I can tell you that we've heard from other members over the last week or so who have expressed concerns on behalf of the students and parents from their communities. The books recently hit the Hamilton community and as a result Hamilton is no different in terms of the reaction by a lot of the students to what they see and their interpretation of this.

I would suggest to the government backbenchers, who maybe up till now have seen this as just another arrow of the day, a political arrow coming at them that they can deflect and not worry about, that in a similar vein to what we saw recently in Seattle with the WTO—I realize that members across the way on the Conservative side would see that event differently. My point in raising it is not to talk about the politics per se of what was happening in Seattle, but rather the fact that it was a spontaneous event and there wasn't the usual kind of organization that one sees behind and is a part of public demonstrations. By that I don't mean anything untoward or conspiratorial. I'm merely pointing out that usually, if you get a huge number of people, at the end of the day you will find that somebody has taken the time to organize it. In Seattle, apparently, it was really just information sharing through the Internet and then suddenly you had a lot of people spontaneously reacting.

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: I'm suggesting, notwithstanding the yabba-dabba-dooing coming from the member across the way, that what is happening here with this book is not something that the opposition parties are leading. I grant you, we're reflecting what's happening in our communities when we talk about this and when we do things out in front of the Legislature, but in terms of organizing it and sort of lighting the fire and causing it to happen, I'm sure that the official opposition, like us, would love to take credit but we can't.

The reality is that the kids—I should say “students”; not all of them are kids—students for sure are reacting in a very visceral way to what they see as waste. You've got to be ready for this because you set this agenda. You said that waste, inefficiency, finances and debt and deficit were the Holy Grails of your government. So you have to appreciate that for a lot of these students, who may be 17, 18, 19 or 20, for most of their young adult life they've only known your government. There ought to be a law against people only having those kinds of memories, but that's what happened to people who entered young adult life and then over the last four or five years only know one government. When they see a scam and a sham, they call it for what it is.

What do the students in Hamilton say? Certainly the students from Barton Secondary School felt strong enough to commit what they had to say in writing, sign a petition, forward it to my office and, in this, ask me to give voice to their concerns here in this place. I'm going to do just that. I want to read the covering letter from Sam Ramos who is the president of Barton's student government.

"Dear Mr David Christopherson:

"On behalf of the students at Barton Secondary School, our student government took it upon themselves to get feedback on the monstrosity that our Conservative government did. The monstrosity that I am referring to are the books that the Conservative government published. The book is called My Ontario Millennium Memento"—Exhibit A—"Students here at Barton (aged 14 to 19) found this book to be useless. The petition that is included with this letter better defines the reasons why we think this book is an extreme waste of money."

If nothing else, I say to the Tory backbenchers, they're future voters. You might want to listen up.

"We're very certain that the Conservative government does not pay attention to what is happening in their province, although it is their job to do so. The students here at Barton are fed up with having to put up with this government, which clearly is not looking out for the concerns of the people of Ontario, but for their own self-image. We hope that through you our voices will be heard."

This evening, indeed, their concerns are being given voice.

Let me just say parenthetically that when the students say that the government is "not looking out for the concerns of the people of Ontario, but for their own self-image," I can only surmise that they mean the nice colour photo, right on the opposite side of the first page, of the Premier. It's a nice colour photo, beautifully laid out. You flip over one more page—wow, another colour picture of a Tory cabinet minister, in this case the Honourable Helen Johns. We have her picture in here. I have to believe that when these students say it's your own self-image that you're more concerned about, I suspect that's exactly what they mean in terms of why they think you published this.

Their petition—signed by a lot of students, let me tell you; there's pages of them—reads as follows:

"To whom it may concern—"

Mr Chudleigh: We have no petitions in this session. That's in the afternoon session.

Mr Christopherson: Oh, thanks, Ted. I appreciate that civics lesson. Thank you.

"To whom it may concern,

"Students at Barton Secondary School in Hamilton—"

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: Sorry, John? Am I interrupting you, John? If I am, I do apologize.

Mr O'Toole: I was just reading Newman's book on titans.

Mr Christopherson: Titans? Are you hoping to be a titan, John?

Mr O'Toole: No, I'm hoping to be myself.

Mr Christopherson: Just yourself. OK.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): He's excited by the meritocracy in it.

Mr Christopherson: Maybe that's why he's not sitting in his seat. He wants to get as close to what he considers to be titans as he's going to get. I feel for the

poor fellow if the best he could come up with for a titan is to get near the Harris cabinet seats.

However, back to the students at Barton Secondary School, who say:

"Students at Barton Secondary School in Hamilton received books that seemed worthwhile. However, after scanning through several pages, the students (aged 14 to 19) found this book to have a lot of content that has no relevance to high school students."

That's got to concern you, given the fact that that's who you geared it to.

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: But I'm assuming that part of the audience that you're sending to would be high school students. I look at these students; I look at some of the things here.

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: You like to split hairs, don't you, Bart?

"The majority of the content is elementary work. These books were called My Ontario Millennium Memento. In the past few years since the Conservative government has been in power, \$1.5 billion has been cut from the education budget, and it is anticipated that \$800 million more is going to be cut over the next four years (Globe and Mail), not only in education but in various other places. Money going into Ontario's education is decreasing while the problems are increasing. The main concerns that the students here at Barton have, (and probably many more in the province) is that taxpayers' money should be spent more wisely."

"Taxpayers' money should be spent more wisely." As an aside, if you listen to the government, they'll tell you that they're the only ones who know how to spend money wisely. Yet our young people, evaluating the job this government is doing with regard to spending money wisely, are saying that it shouldn't be spent this way.

What else do they say?

2210

"We the members on Students' Government took it upon ourselves to get feedback from the students here at Barton about the books which were distributed. Many of them felt that the money spent on these books is a misuse of government funding. Once again demonstrating our government's inability to take into account the needs of its people. It is stated by the government that, 'It should focus on Ontario's young people.' Publishing useless books and distributing them to high school students is not taking into consideration the needs of the students in Ontario. Money should be spent more wisely on class materials, such as properly printed books (eg, which the printing is non-erasable, resources for students with special needs"—I'm going to talk about that before I sit down—"desperate need for school renovations, more teachers so that classes will not be oversized, and many more necessities.

"As leaders on student government, we feel that the Conservative government is not a good role model. These books which were distributed are propaganda. The

Conservative government spends more money in order to gain a good image, rather than to take care of the people that count on them, the people of Ontario. Cutbacks in the education system are only one of the many cutbacks that the Conservative government is making.

“The undersigned students of Barton Secondary School are outraged, and will not remain silent about the ignorance shown by the Conservative government.”

As I said earlier, it's signed by many of the students and I will just mention a few of the names: Brad Cook, Paul Spear, Ashley Strand, Kevin Andrews, Jamie Thomas, Charlie Best, Jeff Armstrong, Diana Nuredini, Suzanne Bell, Bryan Barrett, Chris Miller, Kelly Baptiste, Misty Eves—you've got to wonder if there's a relation—Susan Murray.

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: Rather than heckle, I would say to the member across the way, at the very least maybe you ought to be thankful that we've got young people who care enough about what's going on around them, and to them, to take an initiative even if you don't like the initiative, rather than just heckle and condemn them like you would us. We're used to it. We're the opposition; we expect you to do that. I would think that the young people of Ontario expect a little more, even from a backbench Tory MPP, than just to be heckled as their names are attached to a letter that they've sent.

Julie Gwan, Penny Eves—another Eves there—Laurisa Bennie, Pav Dhillon, Raechel Nicholson, Stephen Grasley, it just goes on and on, and I think it's important that students are standing up and saying, “Look, \$2.5 million was wasted.”

They didn't have to do it. You meant for these to be something that they were going to thank you for. They could have just taken them and said nothing. Instead, they looked around their classrooms, they listened to their parents talk about what they think is happening in the community. They have an understanding of what's happening in the health care system. They know what's happening to the family, the families of their friends and neighbours and schoolmates, and they've decided that when a government says nothing is more important than spending money wisely and efficiently, when they believe that's not happening they're going to bell the cat, and I applaud them for it. I think it's disappointing and borderline shameful that the opposition backbenchers can do nothing but heckle and deride these young people because they're taking a political stance that you don't happen to like.

But I can say from firsthand experience, as can every other member of the opposition, that that's the way this government deals with anybody who disagrees with them.

They will not accept for one moment that they could ever be responsible; it's always somebody else. It's always somebody else; it's never them. They are perfect.

The word “infallible” was thrown around here earlier, and you would start to believe that many of them think they are infallible, that because they think it and believe

it, it must be true. Anyone who dares to oppose them, number one, is public enemy number one; number two, is wrong; and number three, you're going to go after them.

That's why you did what you did to the school boards, because you didn't like the fact that the trustees, as they did in Hamilton and other communities, said, “No, we're not going to eliminate junior kindergarten just to meet your artificial budget bottom line that frees up the money in the Ontario budget so that you can give it to your rich friends.” They said no and they put on the table a modest tax increase—yes, increase—to ensure that the money you took away was replenished to keep junior kindergarten going.

Why did they do that? I'm sure that government members on the opposite side of the House will say it's because they're tax-and-spenders. They love to tax people and they love to spend money and that's what it is, which of course is so insulting. These are trustees, these are politicians, who have to get elected just like the rest of us. It's always easier to get elected or re-elected on a platform of no tax increases, or of tax decreases. Yet, what were they prepared to do? They were prepared to put the needs of our youngest children first because there is overwhelming evidence, irrefutable evidence, that junior kindergarten is a plus for our children and that those who have the opportunity to attend JK are better off for it. Ray Mulholland, Judith Bishof and all the rest believed in it enough that they were prepared to put their political careers on the line and their reputations on the line.

What did you do in response to all the school boards that did that? It's there in the history books. You went after them. You rearranged the whole school board system. You cut back so that it's an honorarium; I think \$5,000 is the maximum that anybody can receive. You took away virtually 70%, 80% of the local autonomy that they once had. You took that power unto yourself and gave it to one person, the Minister of Education, unheard of in the history of Ontario.

I say to my colleague next to me, the Liberal House leader, had either of us done that, centralized and focused the power of all the school boards into the hands of the Minister of Education, we would still be peeling them off the ceiling. But because it was your idea, well, this came down from Mount Olympus and one can't question or challenge it for fear of facing the wrath of the Mike Harris government.

So I want to applaud the students at Barton Secondary School, first, for caring enough to do something and for recognizing that what you hear your government is doing and what you see it doing around you are two different things; and then second, for having the courage—because there are a lot of people out there who are literally afraid of this government. There are a lot of groups and organizations that over the last few years have become so frightened that they would rather accept a half or a third of a loaf than risk nothing, and so they say nothing. You've shown great courage in standing up for what you

believe in, and at the end of the day, it's going to matter that you spoke out and continue to speak out.

This issue has still got legs. There are an awful lot of students in an awful lot of schools who are not yet heard from. Every day this story is alive, there are more and more students, not being organized by, as you believe, OSSTF or by the official opposition or by the third party or any other entity out there, but rather just their own personal, spontaneous reaction at calling a fraud a fraud when they see it. And that's what this is—a fraud.

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I want to turn a bit to some of the things we've been following as the government's economic plan unfolds. I want to again bring to the attention, especially of the backbench Tories—mainly because, other than two, you all are backbenchers here tonight, and second, oftentimes backbenchers are the last ones to be told what's really going on. I want to state at the outset that the numbers—

Mr Chudleigh: We look forward to your enlightenment.

Mr Christopherson: I appreciate that type of reception for my message before you even hear it.

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: I'm not sure what you said, but I'm not sure that I want to hear it.

I'm referring to your own books. These aren't our numbers, they're not made-up numbers from anywhere, they're not magical numbers, other than what the Honourable Ernie Eves is able to do. It's your publication. It's the 1999 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, and I'm going to go to page 55.

Before I read these numbers, I want to remind the government backbenchers that one of your mantras over the years has been, "Our tax cuts are generating more revenue now than before we implemented the tax cuts, so therefore not only are you wrong, opposition members, in what you say about our economic plan, but the numbers prove that you're wrong."

When we take a look at this and we look at what's happening with personal income tax—because the government said they'll give all these great tax benefits, these tax cuts to the very wealthy and what they will do with the money is invest it, because they have the discretionary income to do so. That will generate jobs and those people who then are employed by virtue of these new jobs being provided will increase the amount of money that the province will receive from personal income tax. The old trickle-down theory, supply-side economics.

Your own numbers tell a very different story. The actual, in terms of revenue received by the province in fiscal year 1998-99, was \$17.19 billion. According to your mantra and theory, when we look at the fiscal year 1999-2000, we ought to see an increase in personal income tax. If your theory works, it should show here in the numbers. Not my numbers, your numbers. It should show. The outlook in 1999-2000 is \$16.75 billion, \$1.1 billion less than you took in in 1998-99.

For anyone who happens to be watching, I wonder how many of them as individuals feel that out of this \$1.1 billion—and believe me, that's only a fraction, because the total money that's been handed back is about \$5 billion to \$6 billion. But let's deal with the real number in this one category. I wonder how many people watching believe that they got their fair share of this \$1.1 billion. I'll bet most people thinking about it will say: "I didn't get it. I don't know where the \$1 billion went, but not that much of that \$1 billion went to my family."

If they've been to the hospital lately, they have a sense of where some of this money is coming from to give these very wealthy Ontarians a tremendous tax gift, an ongoing gift that you're going to increase again by another 20%.

If they've got children and they go to the schools and look around at the condition of the schools and the lack of books and the overall deterioration of the education system, they will see where part of this money is coming from: the public education system.

If they've had any occasion to be involved in municipal services, which most people have—garbage collection, sidewalk repair, snowplowing, recreation centres, libraries—odds are they have seen a cutback in service, total elimination of service, and/or an increase in user fees or the implementation of new user fees that didn't used to be there.

If they care about the environment, then they know what has happened to the Ministry of the Environment and the ability of that ministry to enforce the laws that protect us. If they have really been paying attention and they happen to be people who really care about the environment, they will know that not only is the enforcement of the regulations that protect our public health diminished, if not eliminated, in many cases, but the actual regulations that used to be there have been watered down or eliminated.

Certainly anybody active in the labour movement knows what you've done to labour laws in this province and what you've done to injured workers.

The list goes on and on and on, and yet the document you're so proud of points out that there is \$1.1 billion in hard money that's going to somebody, and it isn't anybody they know. It's got to be your friends. In fact, we know that up until last year, the top 6% of income earners in the province of Ontario received 25%. So if, for example, that \$1.1 billion represented the value of the tax scam, the tax cut—and it doesn't, because the figure is actually \$5 billion to \$6 billion, as I said earlier, but let's go with this—that means that 6% of the population got 25% of that \$1.1 billion.

Now, as we see that tax cut take hold, because these things take a while to work through the system—I know that for a fact. I was in the Ministry of Finance for a couple of years prior to going into cabinet, so I know how the system works. It can take a number of years for tax changes to actually work their way through the system. We now know, and this number will continue to

grow, that this same 6% of the population are getting 36% of the pie.

The other 94%? Oh, they might get some. They might get a little bit. But by the time you factor in everything else that I've mentioned, the price that they are paying for the loss of public services that unless you are very wealthy you can't afford individually—that's why we pool our money. It's to make sure there are hospitals there. It's to take care of your needs or those of your family whenever and no matter what the circumstances, because none of us can afford to build or buy into a private hospital, so if we all kick in a few bucks, we make sure the services are there. They see the price they are paying at that end of it, and it's not nearly worth the amount of money they are getting even if they are one of the lucky ones, and the luckier ones are the ones who can even identify it on their paycheque. The fact of the matter is, most of the people in Ontario don't even notice they got a tax cut. That's how irrelevant it was to them. But, boy, they sure feel it when they go to the hospital or go to the schools or use the services that I have mentioned. And I haven't even touched on all the areas you've cut, not by a long shot.

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If you need further evidence of that, if you have any interest at all in what's happening in terms of the haves and the have-nots, even if you never make a reference to it, I urge you to take just a few minutes and at least leaf through a book called *The Growing Gap*. This is the 1998 edition. The 1999 updated edition will be out shortly. This is based on StatsCan figures, government figures, government calculations, figures and numbers that most of us don't question in terms of their source. We might from time to time, but by and large they are seen and deemed and in reality are arm's length from the political process, numbers that are crunched by people who are professionals, do not have a political axe to grind, belong to professional associations and so have standards to meet. That's where the raw numbers come from in terms of this book. What this book does, however, this analysis, is take these figures and put them into some context that makes sense, that helps us understand what's going on in our province.

I've referenced this before and I know that sometimes the government members don't like it. They'd best get used to it, because I'm not the only one who is going to continue to read out these numbers. My leader, Howard Hampton, who has just joined us here in the House, as well as all my colleagues in the NDP caucus, are going to continue to make references to what is said, to the story that's told, the picture that's painted by the people who publish *The Growing Gap*, because herein lies, if you will, the reverse image of what you say is happening in Ontario. So to do just what I threaten to do, I want to read a couple of parts of it.

For instance, the top 10 CEOs in Canada each brought home more than \$10 million last year.

Mr Chudleigh: Are they worth it?

Mr Christopherson: I understand there will be a number of government members who will think there's

nothing wrong with that at all or will find ways to rationalize why someone, one individual, might be worth \$10 million. Well, there are a lot of people who aspire to a decent standard of living and have a tough time meeting it in your Ontario.

The next point they make is that, on average—

Interjection.

Mr Christopherson: The member from—and I really have to learn everybody's new riding names. Ted?

Mr Chudleigh: The great county and region of Halton.

Mr Christopherson: Fine, the great region of Halton.

Interjection: Former apple grower.

Mr Christopherson: By the way, that's a great commercial. I love that commercial. I have a seven-year-old daughter who reminds me of it whenever I hear that, with the "Chudleigh, Chudleigh, Chudleigh." It's very cute.

Having said that, you mentioned that we're the best place in the world to live. Let me tell you what I think about that. Number one, I'm very proud as a Canadian to have that distinction, and I'm sure all of the honourable members are, but what's happening—

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): You guys are gradually wearing that capital down.

Mr Christopherson: My leader has said that you're gradually wearing that capital down, and that's the point. I want to say to you that we don't win that distinction because we have the weakest environmental laws in the world. We don't win that distinction because we have the lowest labour standards in the world. We don't have that distinction—

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): No?

Mr Christopherson: Listen, I'm not making the statement that we have the lowest in the world; I'm saying that we win that because we have some of the best. We don't win it by doing what you're doing, which is lowering them and racing to the bottom. Yes, that is exactly what you're doing. The same thing with the minimum wage, the same as how we treat the most vulnerable in our society, how we provide health care services, how we provide educational services. It's those things that determine whether or not we win and maintain that distinction, not what you're doing. They don't have a chart that says, "OK, we're going to decide where the best place in the world is by deciding who is watering down their environmental laws the fastest," because that's what you're proud of doing. You call it cutting red tape, you call it removing blocks to investment, but the reality is you're watering down environmental protection. I can guarantee you, we don't get any points for that when the United Nations or anybody else takes a look at our standard of living.

When you start saying, "The minimum wage is too high; it's an impediment to investment while we watch the United States of America and other provinces surpass us," that's not going to help us win that distinction.

I'll tell you something that's absolutely not on that list: who gives the biggest tax cut to their most wealthy

citizens. You'll never find that as a category; in fact, quite the contrary. Many of the individual countries don't win because they don't have the types of systems that we have, and by that I mean an education system that helps to redistribute wealth. I know that just sends shivers down your spine, but the reality is that if you look at countries that say, "Nothing but the accumulation of wealth matters. Public hospitals don't matter and public education doesn't matter," they are never going to be chosen for the position that we now hold, and if you continue down the road you are, we won't either.

That's my response to the member from the great county of Halton when he says he is proud of the fact that we're the best place in the world to live. If you want to keep it, you've got to do a 180 in terms of the direction you're taking us.

The next line says that on average the top 100 CEOs saw a 56% increase in their compensation last year. For anyone watching—upper, middle, working; pick whatever category of class that you want to put individuals into in terms of their income—how many people know anybody who got a 56% increase in compensation? That's what's going on. That's why it's called The Growing Gap, the disparity. It's not that there's this idealistic world out there where everyone will receive exactly the same pay. That's not the point. That's not the simplistic point being made. The simplistic point that I am making is that the difference, the disparity, the gap between those who have and those who have not in our society is growing to a proportion we have never seen before in the history of Ontario.

We know the same thing—not only the same thing but an accelerated version—is happening south of us. There are horrible prices to pay, not the least of which, I say to the honourable member from the great county of Halton, is the fact that at some point, if we continue down this kind of road, we won't be seen as the best country in the world to live in. We won't. If there isn't some mechanism to ensure that the generation of wealth in this great province—and we have so much—if some of it does not go into the health system and into the education system and into a social services network and all of those things, then we're going to be so far down the list that it will take us decades to get back.

That's what's happening. I know you don't like it and I suppose you can disagree with it, but I haven't heard any one of you—Marilyn, you included—stand up and refute what's going on in terms of what they're saying. I haven't heard it happen.

Ms Mushinski: It's right here.

Mr Christopherson: Never mind holding up your election platform. My God. Boy, oh, boy. You're right, leader. Maybe that's why she's a former—I don't know.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Member for Niagara Falls, come to order.

Mr Christopherson: My point was, if you think this is not the truth or not the reality, then at some point stand up and refute it. Don't just throw rhetoric at it or heckles;

stand up and take on the analysis, take on the stats. I haven't read where that's been done. Maybe it has, but I haven't seen it. If so, I ask the members of the government to send me a copy of it. If you've seen somewhere where there is as credible an analysis that tears this apart as there is in terms of the credible input that created it, I'd like to see it, I really would. But I haven't seen it and I suspect it's not there, because these are not stupid people; these are professionals, and they're going to use numbers and stats that can be verified.

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What is different about what Armine and the others at The Growing Gap, Trish and David—what they have done is take those numbers and just looked at them differently in terms of saying: "What do the numbers tell us? What's the picture here?" You've painted one picture with this, and that's fair ball, that's what you're entitled to do, but there's an alternative view, and they're one of the folks who are leading the argument based on many of the same kind of numbers that create your documents. What it really comes down to is, what version of these two analyses of what's going on in Ontario best reflects people's everyday reality?

I'm going to take about another five or six minutes of the time remaining and then leave the closing 10 minutes for my leader. But one thing I wanted to raise again is—by the way, this will make you happy; I'm going to take a shot at the Libs. Will this make you happy? I thought you'd like that. Only because you guys asked for it. It'll be brief, but I've got to get it on the record.

Your finance critic took the time to fire over volleys about how long it's taking them to balance the budget. They're legitimate volleys, but I've got to remind you, when you talk about balancing the budget in 1990, that \$25-million surplus disappeared faster than the cookies on that bureau in the back lobby. After we got in there and had a look at what was really going on, we went from \$25 million in the good, according to the Libs, to over \$3 billion in the hole, when we checked in all the cupboards and in all the categories. That's Liberal budget balancing.

Interjection.

Mr Smitherman: There's a point of order in there somewhere.

Mr Christopherson: No, just a history lesson. However, recognizing that the actual opponent is over this way, let me mention what the New Democrats in Manitoba found when they took power. As you know, the Conservative government of Gary Filmon—

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): They passed a balanced budget.

Mr Christopherson: They did, and that's exactly where I'm going. My leader jumps out ahead of me because he knows the story well; it makes a very poignant point. The Tories, under Gary Filmon in Manitoba, passed the much-heralded balanced budget legislation. You know, the stuff that was going to guarantee that the taxpayers never again—you've heard this all put to music

many times over. Many of you have sung it for us, I say to my friends across the way.

Well, what's the reality? Once again, the reality of what happened in Manitoba is not unlike the experience in many of the states of the United States of America where they passed balanced budget legislation, and that is, all balanced budget legislation does, of the type that they've passed—by the way, what we passed in Ontario, in terms of the other provinces in Canada that have it, Manitoba was the one that we have paralleled the most.

We found, and there are studies to support it, that in the United States of America many of the states that passed this legislation found all kinds of rather unique and creative ways of just moving the shell around, but a shell game nonetheless. Just because it says so on paper, that there can't be a deficit, doesn't make it so. Circumstances, economic changes around the world, the needs of your population, they can all change; projections that don't work out the way you say. All kinds of reasons that quite frankly may have nothing to do with being a bad government or lousy managers. It's just the circumstances of the world that every government of every political stripe finds itself in once you're in power and have to deal with these things.

What's the Canadian example? The Tories, prior to the election, were predicting—and I love the irony of how close this dollar figure is to another dollar figure—a \$21.4-million surplus. Gary Filmon's Conservatives, in power for quite a few terms, had balanced-budget legislation and ran on an election platform that said their fiscal plan would give the people of Manitoba a \$21.4-million surplus.

We know they didn't win that election. In fact, it was the NDP who won that election, and they now have formed the government. I've said this before, but to their credit they hired an agency at arm's length from the government, arm's length from the NDP, arm's length from any of the political parties, and asked it to come in because they suspected there were going to be some surprises. All they had to do was look at the experience of Ontario and other provinces to realize that these things do happen a lot. They brought them in. The independent consulting firm, very respected, very professional, did an analysis of the books, and what did they find? Was there a \$21.4-million surplus? No. They found that there was going to be, in the fiscal year 1999-2000, a deficit of between \$262 million and \$417 million. They had a government of the same political stripe as we now have here in Ontario, and they already had the much-touted balanced budget legislation that's almost identical, word for word, with the version the Mike Harris Tories brought into Ontario.

The moral of the story? There's no guarantee by any stretch of the imagination that just because it's Tories in power they are good managers, which is the spin you like to put out there, and secondly, balanced budget legislation does not do what you said it would do. The reality and the history and the proof of what happens is, as usual, very much the opposite of what you said. What

you say and what's reality are light years apart, and the Manitoba experience is just further evidence of that fact.

With that, I would leave the rest of my time to my leader.

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Mr Hampton: I thank the member for Hamilton West for an enlightening discussion, a discussion that I know many members of the Conservative government don't want to hear. I want to continue on with some of the same exposition. I know the members of the government would like to take credit for the recovery of the Asian economies, they would like to take credit for the expansion of the economy in the United States, they would like to take credit for the recovery of Brazil. They would like people to believe that the answer to every issue is yet another phony tax cut. But the truth was told when the largest and most rapidly expanding industry in Ontario, the auto industry, confessed earlier this fall that some time in the next year, Ontario is going to outstrip Michigan in terms of producing more cars and trucks than any other jurisdiction in North America.

What did they cite when they said this? Did they even mention the much-boasted-about, the much-ballyhooed Harris government income tax cut? No, they didn't even mention it. They didn't even give it a comma. They didn't even put it in exclamation marks. What they said was the reason that Ontario's auto industry is expanding so rapidly, the reason that Ontario's economy is expanding, is because if you compare the value of the Canadian dollar with the value of the American dollar, it makes more sense for the auto industry to buy parts, to buy equipment and to assemble trucks and cars in Ontario. Because if you've got a car radiator manufactured in the United States and a car radiator manufactured in Ontario, just by the exchange rate the radiator in Ontario is going to be that much cheaper. They didn't even mention the phony Harris government income tax scheme.

They went on, after the difference between the Canadian dollar and the American dollar, to mention that medicare, something that you are taking apart day by day, week by week, saves them between \$1,200 and \$1,500 a vehicle, in comparison to the private delivery of health care in the United States. What are you people doing? In home care you're turning it over to private, for-profit American companies. In long-term care you're turning it over to private, for-profit American companies. What are you doing in public health? You're going to download it and then turn it over to private, for-profit American companies. What are you doing to ambulances? You're downloading it and turning it over to private, for-profit American companies. These are the very things that the auto industry identifies as efficiencies, as something that saves them money.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just wanted to remind the honourable leader of the third party that he has a microphone. There's no need to shout.

The Speaker: The member can continue.

Mr Hampton: I recognize they're really thick over there, and I'm doing my best to bore through the bone, hoping there's a brain down there somewhere.

The very thing that the auto industry cites as one of the biggest cost savings, as one of the biggest efficiencies, publicly funded, publicly administered medicare, you people are, day by day, tearing apart.

Then what do they cite? Do they cite in third place the much-ballyhooed, boasted-about Harris income tax cut? No. They cite the historical skill level and productivity of Ontario workers. What are you doing to invest in that? Well, we're now virtually the last in North America in terms of investment in university education, the last in North America in terms of investment in college education. You literally punched our system of apprenticeships into virtual holes, so that in all the trades where we need to have apprentices, where we need to have apprenticeship training so we've got the skills in the future—you're punching it through with holes.

As my colleague has said, the very things that have made us productive, the very things that have made us an efficient economy, day by day you are taking apart.

The health care system: We see in cancer care that now we're sending them to the United States because they can't get cancer care here. Home care: You're cutting that such that people who need home care have to pay for it privately. Does that sound like the inefficient American system? You bet. Emergency room care: Don't try to get into a hospital emergency room.

In terms of public health, again, the investments in public health are being lowered, decreased, cut, day by day in this province. In terms of an efficient system of long-term care, you're turning it all over to those private, for-profit American corporations. In terms of home care, again, you're turning it over to those private, for-profit American corporations.

In terms of education, virtually every day in this province now a university president or a college president comes forward and says, "We are not achieving the kind of investment in our education system that we need to maintain ourselves in a knowledge economy."

You people are literally running down the social capital, the health capital, the education capital and the infrastructure capital of this province in order to give people who are already well off a tax cut. At the end of the day, the people out there who are in fact expanding production in this province say your income tax cut is irrelevant, that that's not why they're investing, that's not why they're building.

The auto industry was so expressive about this. They didn't even mention your income tax scheme in a footnote, not even in a footnote, not even in a bracket somewhere. They didn't even refer to it. That tells you how phony it is. That tells you how irrelevant it is.

What is powering Ontario's economy is, first of all, the fact that the Americans are purchasing just about everything we produce, whether it's in the auto industry, other transportation equipment, in terms of the aeronautic industry, in terms of pulp, in terms of paper, in terms of

lumber, in terms of the computer industry. And why are they purchasing? Because of the difference in value between the Canadian dollar and the American dollar. And when they do move production into Ontario, what do they cite, after the difference between the Canadian dollar and the American dollar? The publicly funded, publicly administered health care system that you people are tearing apart even though you don't want to admit it—even though you don't want to admit it.

Every time I get into a debate with one of your advocates at the local level, they say, "We really should privatize the health care system." Every time I hear Mr Clement—after he's out of this place, he talks about the benefits of a profit-motivated, private, corporate health care system. The very thing that the auto industry cites when they make investments in this country you people want to tear apart, are tearing apart, on a daily basis.

We enjoy this opportunity to engage in the wide-ranging debate. The fact of the matter is, the investments that need to be made—the investments in human capital, the investments in education, the investments in social capital—which will make us all more productive, you people aren't making. In fact, you're cutting. That's why municipalities can't find the money for transit. That's why they can't find the money for sewer and water. That's why they can't find the money for public health. That's why they can't find the money to deal with child poverty. That's why they can't find the money to help people do the things they need to do to become more productive. Shame on you for riding down the political capital—

The Speaker: Order; the member's time is up. Further debate?

Mr Spina: Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with a number of other members from our caucus; I don't think I have to list them.

In any case, I wonder if the leader of the third party is inhaling some of that glue from the Christmas envelopes that he's licking. You see, he talks about the American economy like it was the only one in the entire world. The reality is that we have record auto sales and truck sales right here in Ontario and in fact in most provinces across this country. The reality is that Ontario's economic expansion—let's talk about Honda in Alliston and its supplier parts plant in Listowel and Toyota in Kitchener. Let me talk about something in my own backyard: the Chrysler expansion in Brampton. What happened there? Two thirds of the production of the LH platform cars was taking place at the Brampton plant and the balance were being done in the States.

Chrysler had a choice. You know the process they go through, Mr Hampton. The factories also have to go through the competition process to see what and who gets the opportunity to do the production. What happened was that Chrysler decided to come to Ontario. They had an option, they had a choice. Where did they go? They came to Ontario. They came to Brampton. They hired 1,200 people in my riding because the economic environment was conducive to doing business. Why did Magna build a

bunch of factories to build auto parts? Because it's conducive. With the auto trade, you know darned well they could have built plants in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, anywhere. Where did they build them? They built them in Ontario.

2300

Let's go one step further. He cries about education. Well, let's look at what Magna's doing. Here we have a couple of excess buildings after the NDP moved the OPP headquarters to Orillia, so I've got a big hole in Brampton now, with 100 acres of the old OPP lands. What do we do with it? The interesting thing is that Magna has taken two of those classroom buildings and is using it for engineering training. Wow. I think this is fantastic. Why didn't they go to Michigan? Why didn't they go to Ohio? Why didn't they go to New York? Why didn't they go to Pennsylvania? Why didn't they go to Minnesota? Because they came to Ontario.

Interjections: Why?

Mr Spina: Lower corporate costs in what way? Well, he talked about health care. That's right. Because of our publicly funded health care system—

Mr Hampton: Which you guys are tearing apart.

Mr Spina: —which is still fully intact and in place. The reality is that it costs the company less money for health care and for benefits to have their employees in Ontario—a lower cost of production, therefore a more highly marketable product worldwide.

The man talks about tax cuts being worthless. The reality is, folks, whether it's tax cuts or the simple attitude of the government of the day—and do you know what it is? It's the attitude of the government of the day, which you're not going to find in some footnote of an economic report. It's the attitude that promotes a positive business environment. That's what the corporate sector looks for.

I'm just going to make a couple of quotes. Iris Murdoch in a novel called *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*, said: "He led a double life. Did that make him a liar? He did not feel a liar, he was a man of two truths." Perhaps that's the Leader of the Opposition's role.

When he talked about politics, let's look at this: "A Liberal is a man too broad-minded to take his own side in a quarrel," quoted by Robert Frost. As usual, the Liberals offer a mixture of sound and original ideas. Unfortunately, none of the sound ideas is original and none of the original ideas is sound.

Spike Milligan, when he remarked about a pre-election poll, said, "One day the don't-knows will get in and then where will we be?" That happened in Ontario in 1990.

Last but not least, I just wanted to make this comment about socialism. It says, "There is nothing in socialism that a little age or a little money will not cure." That was quoted by Will Durant. Who was he? The founder of General Motors.

Lastly, Tom Stoppard said, "Socialists treat their servants with respect and then wonder why they vote Conservative."

This is why this government is in power and why they are sitting on that side of the House. We have created 700,000 jobs for our people in this province.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Maves: It's a pleasure to follow my colleague Mr Spina from Brampton Centre's very enjoyable speech. It's interesting that the leader of the third party was here tonight to speak. He has his third party; we did give them that status. I don't know what happened to him. He's actually been quite calm this whole session. He's very exercised tonight, even sending some personal slurs across the aisle, which has been unlike him in this session. I was saddened by the slur he threw at the member from Scarborough. After all, she beat his boss, Sid Ryan, by 10,000 votes in the last election, so there are a lot of people in Ontario who think quite a bit about this member.

The member opposite I think misses a lot of the point about tax cuts. This government has cut taxes 66 times and has another 33 on the way, and they're not all just income tax cuts. He doesn't like them. I don't think he sent them back to the province of Ontario, but he doesn't seem to like them, doesn't think they've had an impact. If he had been listening back when he was in office from 1990 to 1995 and devastated the economy, he would have listened to the people down in the Niagara region, where we did a survey. Back in 1993-94 they did a report and asked businesses, "What are the biggest problems facing you?" Businesses were closing when the NDP were in office, either going bankrupt altogether or moving to Buffalo. What did they say the biggest problems were? High taxes, WCB rates out of control, hydro rates out of control, employer health taxes out of control, and it went on and on and on. All kinds of different taxes—corporate taxes, you name it, they were out of control. The top three things cited in the Niagara region were high hydro rates, workers' compensation rates and taxes in general.

The member's former leader, Premier Bob Rae, was named businessman of the year in Buffalo in 1993. Why? Because he raised all these taxes, made our economy a terrible place to invest, and they all moved to Buffalo. They didn't learn then and the people of Ontario said, "Look, you guys, you don't get it," and they elected this government because this government promised things in our 1995 platform. We were listening to the public of Ontario.

What did we say? What is our philosophy? The member from Hamilton actually hit it on the head. We say if we cut taxes and get rid of red tape, we're going to create economic growth by putting more money in people's pockets. They'll spend the money. It'll increase jobs, which will increase tax revenues, which will reduce our deficit and which will eventually allow for higher expenditures in things like health and education. In fact, all along we've been increasing expenditures, especially in health care, where we've gone from \$17.4 billion to \$20.6 billion.

That's the theory. Has it worked? You'd better believe it's worked. Consumer consumption traditionally makes

up 60% of any economy. The NDP and Liberals increased taxes 65 times in the 10 years they were in office. They continue to increase taxes. I remember working at General Motors as a summer student. Every time those poor guys got a paycheque, they'd stand there and weep, in tears almost, about the amount of taxes coming off their paycheques. They weren't running out buying cars; they weren't running out buying new houses. They weren't running out buying anything else, for that matter. These guys made it impossible for the middle class to live. They made it impossible for the middle class to spend money.

When we started to cut taxes, when they started to get the impact of cutting taxes, what happened? Consumer spending is going through the roof in this province. Year after year after year, retail sales are hitting record heights. That's the absolute truth. Statistics Canada will show you all those statistics. Retail sales in department stores—they're looking at their best Christmas ever this year.

New homes sales, new home construction—through the roof. What was the helpful tax cut there? We reduced the land transfer tax. Sure enough, has it had an impact? It certainly has, along with all the other tax reductions we've done.

This was the theory. We brought it into practice, and has it worked? As I said, yes, it has.

I want to just read an article while I'm on this point. It's called *The Little History Lesson*. It's a Sun article. It says, "Well, well, well, what have we here? Why, it's Liberal Leader Lyn McLeod's reaction to the 1993 Ontario budget expressing her outrage that the NDP government had just raised taxes by \$2 billion. McLeod was incensed." This is of course the former Liberal leader. "She described it as the largest tax grab in Ontario history. She said it would destroy 50,000 jobs. She called it a disaster for working people, offering no hope and no prospects for the future. 'Far from stimulating the economy,' she said, 'this budget strangles it.'"

That was the leader of the Liberals in 1993 about a huge—one of the many—tax increase by the NDP.

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If you go back a little further, it's really interesting. The article goes on: "But wait, what's this we see even further back in our files? Why, it's then NDP leader Bob Rae reacting to the 1989 Liberal budget that grabbed an extra \$1.3 billion from taxpayers' hides. Rae described that as a death by a thousand cuts for ordinary Ontarians, adding he opposed the Liberal hike to provincial income tax."

They didn't like them back in 1989. They didn't like them in 1993. We didn't like them either. So in 1995 we said, "We're rolling them back." That's what we are doing. It's what you asked for in 1989. You said to the Liberals, "Don't do it." The Liberals said to the NDP, "Don't do it." We got in office and we rolled them back and now you're saying: "No, don't roll them back. I guess we did like them back then." A little consistency fellows, please, somewhere along the line.

Small businesses create 80% of all jobs in Ontario. The CFIB represents them. What did they say in some of their surveys? Out of the top six things, as they continue to ask, "What are the problems you face in expanding and creating more jobs in Ontario?" they are, "Total tax burden," "employment insurance," "government regulation and paper burden," "cost of local government" and "workers compensation."

Another, similar survey done of businesses in Canada: "What are the four most important things that we need to do to continue to expand our economy?" "Reduce payroll taxes," "reduce income taxes," "pay down federal debt to reduce tax pressure" and "ease burdensome regulations."

We've gone a long way to doing these things, but businesses are saying we still have a longer way to go. We know we're still one of the highest-taxed jurisdictions, the highest-taxed jurisdiction among the G7 nations.

I want to go back now to after we fixed the workers' compensation system, as we said, and reduced premiums by an average of 25%. We've reduced income taxes. We've reduced employer health tax. We've reduced all kinds of taxes: corporate taxes and so on and so forth. What did we say would happen? We said, "Number one, consumer spending." Has that happened? Yes, it has. I've recited some statistics.

We also said that the business community would come back. Remember those people I spoke of who moved to Buffalo and went to invest south of the border because they couldn't stand Bob Rae's and Howard Hampton's Ontario? We said that if we changed the investment climate, they would come back. Are they? Yes, in spades. They're setting up shop all over the place. They're setting up shop everywhere. Let me give you some of these examples of some business investments.

Business investment in this province was \$35 billion last year. Statistics Canada says that's going to grow by 8% this year. I guess it's just an accident, I don't know. Apparently the member opposite thinks it is. IBM, \$125-million software development lab in Markham; Lucent Technologies, \$50-million investment in a manufacturing facility; Owens Corning, \$40-million manufacturing facility in Guelph; Astra and Ekerd Pharmaceuticals, \$250-million manufacturing facility in Ontario; the member for Brampton has already mentioned the \$600-million plant of Toyota in Cambridge; in 1998, \$300-million Honda expansion in Alliston; GM research facility in Oshawa with hundreds of engineers. It goes on and on.

Let's talk about those tax cuts again. We put more money in the pockets of those guys at General Motors I used to work with. As the tax cuts kicked in, did consumer spending go up? Yes, we know from statistics it did. We also know from economic growth that it did.

In the first year of the tax cut, 1996, economic growth was 1.6%. In 1997, once those tax cuts started to kick in, 4.8%. The year after that, more tax cuts are kicking in, 4.2%; in 1999, 5%. If we're on the coattails of the American economy, why are we leading them in growth?

Because we've cut taxes and we've increased consumer spending. We've increased exports dramatically. Where have these jobs been created? We've created over 650,000 jobs since we took office. Where? The manufacturing sector: We lead every American state except one in manufacturing job creation.

You know, the members opposite actually get mad that we've created jobs, if you can believe that. They say: "Oh, they're McJobs. They don't count." First of all, we on this side of the aisle believe that any job's a good job. But I just showed you one graph we've got with over 100,000 manufacturing jobs between 1995 and 1998 in Ontario.

How about the information technology industry? In management and technical consulting, 15,000; engineering and design services, 25,000 new jobs; computers and electronics, 42,000 new jobs; computer software and systems, 57,000 new jobs. They're not McJobs, I hate to tell you. They're excellent jobs. In Ottawa they've got 5,000 high-tech jobs going wanting right now, good, high-paying, excellent jobs.

Did our exports go up? Is the auto sector booming? It sure is. Yes, we cut Ontario income taxes. We also cut all kinds of other taxes you fail to mention.

Hydro rates: When the NDP was in office they went up 6%, 11% and 11% again. We froze them. It matters to business. That's why they're coming back. The employer health tax: You've got savings for them there. That's why they're coming back.

Ontario auto exports to the US are up 10.4%, annual change, excellent growth. But is that it? No. Non-auto exports are up 9% also, so exports in every sector are up.

Mr Hampton: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Hydro rates were frozen in 1993.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order. Continue.

Mr Maves: That's not a point of order. It's too little, too late. The average Ontario unemployment rate, what was it under the other two governments? It was over 9%. What is it today? It's 5.6%. I guess we're not doing anything right.

Ontario housing starts, consumer spending, the folks at home can see that graph: There were 35,000 in 1995. It went up every single year. In 1999 it was 66,000. That's that consumer spending. Machinery and equipment investment, up dramatically.

I want to go on and on with that document, but the member Mr Chudleigh is going to scalp me if I don't leave him some time. Has everybody caught the fever? Has the rest of Canada caught the fever of the Mike Harris revolution? You'd better believe it.

Ottawa: There's an upcoming budget and everyone is expecting Paul Martin to cut some taxes. "Ottawa should cut personal income taxes by \$3.5 billion and restore fairness to the tax system in the next federal budget, says the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. The move would shave \$600 off an average family's tax bill." That is \$600 a year.

The International Monetary Fund has come out. Do they believe we should reduce taxes? Yes. "The IMF has

urged the Liberal government to concentrate its looming surplus on debt reduction and tax cuts. It urged the government to restore full inflation protection to the tax system, increase the income threshold at which the middle and top rates kick in, cut the 26% middle rate and reduce the clawback on national child benefits."

The National Post did a survey of economists and asked them: "What should the government do? Should they reduce the debt? Should they cut taxes? Should they increase spending?" Every single one of them said, "Cut taxes first." Why? Because it will lead to more economic growth. The stronger economy and the more jobs, revenues go up and you can reduce your debt more quickly. Nobody home over there. They don't want to hear it.

Let me give you a couple of more quotes. Here's a quote: "A national consensus that tax cuts are essential is emerging. The vast majority want tax cuts." Who said that? Federal Liberal MP and finance committee chair Maurizio Bevilacqua. The federal Liberals are getting it, finally.

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In 1997, John Manley saw what was happening in Ontario. What did he say? This is the federal Liberal industry minister. He said that taxpayers "have more money in their pockets and therefore they have more money to spend. Tax cuts increase domestic consumption." John Manley in 1997 was one of the first Liberals to realize that what we were talking about was working. Now what's happening in Ottawa? I think in February we are going to hear of some major tax cuts.

The president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Nancy Hughes Anthony, says, "Tax reductions need to be the number one priority and can no longer take a back seat to program spending."

Mike Harris caught on before anybody else. He actually listened to what people were telling him. He knew what the people in the GM plant were saying every time they opened up their cheques and saw how much income tax was coming off. He knew they weren't spending their money. He knew they weren't generating jobs because of not spending their money in the Ontario economy. He knew that Bob Rae was the businessman of the year in Buffalo because he increased taxes so much, all kinds of taxes, that they left.

I want to end my comments with one thing. I have a lot more I'd love to say, but I want to end with one thing. I just happened to find a comment from The Wizard of Id. It has the people below—of course, everyone is familiar with the comic. "Tax break, tax break, tax break," says the king. "That's all I hear from you people. Without tax monies, what will happen to the poor?" And the poor look up and they say, "We'll all be rich."

Speaker, we get it; we heard them. That's why we're reducing taxes. That's why this economy has 650,000 more jobs than it had in 1995, and that's why there are 450,000 people off social assistance and back in the workforce in this province. For the next four years we are going to continue that growth and we are going to

reinvest those increased revenues into health care and into education, the systems that Ontarians hold dear.

Mr Chudleigh: It's a pleasure to rise, and it's also very reassuring to know that the people in the kingdom of Id understand economic policy as well.

Tonight we're speaking on concurrences on three ministries, including community and social services. It's interesting to note that when we were first elected in 1995, we inherited a welfare system in this province, which is administered by the Minister of Community and Social Services, in which welfare had increased from 1981, which was a Conservative government at the time, in a recession. The numbers of people on welfare had increased from that point every year until 1995, right through the 1980s, which were pretty good years, probably some of the highest nominal growth rates in Ontario's history, and yet welfare rates went up.

We turned that around. We created jobs, and those numbers started to decline in 1995, 1996 and 1997. They are still declining today; as the member for Niagara Falls pointed out, 462,000 people off welfare and into the job market, winning some of those over-600,000 new jobs. I think this government will be remembered for that.

Another concurrence that we are debating today is education and training. When we were elected in 1995, we inherited a system that had seen costs increase 120% in the educational system. We had seen student numbers increase by only 16%. Inflation over that same period of time was about 41%.

We restructured that system. When we came to power in 1995, 37% of the students who started grade 9 did not graduate from high school. Some 20% of those who did graduate couldn't read and write at a high school level by the time they graduated. If that's not a crisis in education, I don't know what is.

We changed that system. We reinvested in education. We restructured it through municipal restructuring so that the cost spiral was stopped, and yet we are putting more money into education. We will be remembered for that.

Tonight we're also debating the concurrence of supply for Municipal Affairs and Housing. When we came to power there was a tremendous number of municipalities, 815, in this province. Through our restructuring and through our principles of having fewer politicians, lower taxes and better services, we are going to have a better municipal structure, a better municipal affairs and housing situation in Ontario. I think we will be remembered for that in the future.

I think our finest hour, and the thing that our government may be remembered for in the future, and perhaps in the distant future, will be the introduction of Ontario's Living Legacy. In Ontario's Living Legacy, we have introduced a system of parks and conservation areas that will be second to none in Canada. In 1893, the province started their park system with the introduction of Algonquin Park. In 1992, almost 100 years later, all 10 provinces met in Victoria, BC, with the World Wildlife Fund—it was under an NDP government at the time—and we decided at that meeting, it was agreed by all 10

provinces and the World Wildlife Fund, that by the year 2000 we would complete the parks system in Ontario. Ontario did that on March 29, 1999. We divided this province into 14 separate districts, on gridlines that run from east to west based on rainfall amounts, and gridlines that run north to south based on temperature variations. Within each one of those 14 districts, the natural heritage and the finest examples of that natural heritage are preserved in parks and conservation areas. That completes Ontario's parks system. We're the only province to do that, we're the only province to do it on time, and I believe that it may be our finest hour, in preserving those examples of our natural heritage, not for our children and not for our grandchildren but for Ontarians for all time in the future. It's a legacy that this government will leave for Ontario for all time.

The extent of that living legacy, in putting those parks together: We created 378 new parks and protected areas. That will bring into Ontario 9.5 million hectares of protected land. To put that in perspective, that's a piece of land about the size of New Brunswick. To put it another way, if you drive along the 401, if you drive throughout Ontario and look at all the agricultural land that you see in southern Ontario, in northern Ontario, in northwestern Ontario—all the agricultural land you see—and then you double that acreage to 9.5 million hectares—that's the amount of land that is now protected in Ontario for the future. It's truly a momentous occasion and it's something that is being overlooked. It will make for a tremendous number of additions.

Within that group of parks there will also be a number of signature sites. These signature sites are areas that have a particularly special interest. Perhaps the most important or the most interesting signature site is the piece of land that runs from the southern tip of Georgian Bay—Port Severn—all the way up the coast of Georgian Bay, all across the north coast of Lake Huron into Lake Superior, and all along the coast of Lake Superior to Thunder Bay and then down to the American border. That's 2,900 kilometres, much farther than a drive to Florida, and it will be one continuous coastline that will be under protection for Ontario today, for our children and our grandchildren in the future. It will be one of the great coastlines of the world. There will be few other coastlines that are protective of that nature in the world. This, I believe, will be the finest example of a protected coastline. I believe that will be one of the great things this government will be remembered for in the future.

We're running short, and I know there are a lot of people who want to have a word on this. I'd like to pass the remaining time over to my compatriot the member for Thornhill.

2330

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): It's a pleasure to speak in the debate on concurrence in supply. What we need to remember is that this is about responsibility and accountability. I want to talk about some of the ways our government has demonstrated that in the last number of years.

Certainly everyone is aware of the growth of the economy, the jobs that have been created and that small businesses create 80% of the jobs. Thornhill, which is my community, is just north of Steeles and covers two municipalities, Vaughan and Markham. The small businesses in my community have flourished from the tax cuts. The job creation there has been in Thornhill has been more so than ever before.

I want to talk about one company that started off very small, a plumbing company that now has expanded and grown and is actually building. In the last few years they have noticed, because of the jobs that have been created and the tax cuts, that they have been able to increase their business much more so than in the past. Of course, because of mortgage rates that have been reasonable, more families are able to afford homes, and this allows them to continue to build more homes, employ people and create jobs.

I want to talk about a number of things that the member for Scarborough-Agincourt spoke on earlier. He talked about the education system and where it is today. One point he made is that school boards are now borrowing money to build schools. I think it's important for members of the assembly to recognize that the building of schools is much better situated now than it ever was, because now all school boards have the autonomy of where they are going to build schools. In the past they developed a priority list and submitted it to the government of the day. At that point, they would decide which one these projects would be allocated to the school boards. This is not the way to fund schools in a community. Those who are directly involved in the community—the trustees, the constituents—are the ones who know best where the schools are needed. Now it's a fairer system, where money is allocated per pupil in every school board, and this allows the school boards to build in the locations they see fit.

I'm also excited about SuperBuild, which will allow the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to work with the colleges, universities and training centres to provide space for the students who are going to be needing post-secondary spaces within the next few years. I'm very excited about the work that's being done with the minister, and all the partners and stakeholders, in developing ways of accommodating all the students. We are committed to every student who is qualified and wants a post-secondary education, that it will be made available for them. I'm very excited about what we're doing in that respect.

Mr Speaker, I know that others want to speak, so I thank you for the time and I thank the members for sharing their time with me.

Mr Young: I appreciate having these few moments to address this august chamber. I really wanted an opportunity to speak to the fact that the leader of the third party spent a great deal of time addressing what was not in a particular report dealing with job growth, dealing with the prosperity and dealing with the recovery of this province. I think it's particularly enlightening to consider

how, albeit a very well-meaning politician on the other side of this chamber, addresses this issue. The member talks very much about what is not in the report. He looks at the footnotes and keeps coming back to the fact that within the footnotes he cannot find reference to tax cuts. That's the difference between members on the other side and the members on this side.

We are here to talk about the job growth and prosperity. We are here to encourage and to continue to stimulate this province. We are here to reinforce and enhance what has been a four-and-one-half year project to raise this province from where it was when the NDP left office four and one half short years ago, from being the 10th, the last, province in terms of economic growth to being the first. Rather than become bogged down in what is not in the footnotes of a particular report, which was the subject matter that seemed to be the obsession of the honourable member, we are here to continue to stimulate the economy.

He also talked at great length, much along the Chicken Little line, about the fact that our education system and our health care system are crumbling around us. I want to share with you the following quote: "We are saddled with an Education Act which is ambiguous and contradictory, that is underfunded and underpublicized, that rips apart a system of government that has worked well for 25 years, that changes borders, changes responsibilities, changes taxation and, worst of all, contains no mechanism for settled differences." This was a quote from the Reverend Robert Murray, who was the first superintendent of Ontario schools and who unfortunately passed away in 1853 in Port Albert in this province.

What it symbolizes very clearly is that since this province began, and even in the years preceding the beginning of this province, there have been those who have said there is a great deal wrong with the education system. Yet it continues to be, and will continue to be, one of the great strengths of this province in spite of the rhetoric we hear from the other side.

The Speaker: I thank the members. Pursuant to the agreement of the House earlier tonight, the votes on the orders for concurrence in supply for Community and Social Services, Education and Training, and Municipal Affairs and Housing are deemed to be deferred until Monday, December 20.

RED TAPE REDUCTION ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 VISANT À RÉDUIRE LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES

Mr Klees moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 11, An Act to reduce red tape, to promote good government through better management of Ministries and agencies and to improve customer service by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting four new Acts /
Projet de loi 11, Loi visant à réduire les formalités administratives, à promouvoir un bon gouvernement par une meilleure gestion des ministères et organismes et à

améliorer le service à la clientèle en modifiant ou abrogeant certaines lois et en édictant quatre nouvelles lois.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Sorry, the time-allocated debate until tomorrow. I apologize. Chief government whip.

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): Speaker, I'm certainly happy to simply have a vote here, if that's what members agree to do.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Klees: I assume I don't have unanimous consent for that?

Interjection: We want to hear you speak.

Hon Mr Klees: Really?

Speaker, the member for Guelph-Wellington will be our leadoff speaker. I believe we have agreement that the time be divided equally among the three caucuses.

The Speaker: Agreed? Agreed. Debate?

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph-Wellington): I am very pleased to join in the debate tonight on Bill 11, the Red Tape Reduction Act, and I'd like to read out the complete title of this bill, if I may: An Act to reduce red tape, to promote good government through better management of Ministries and agencies and to improve customer service by amending or repealing certain Acts and by enacting four new Acts.

As someone who used to be in small business, I know full well the difficulties that too much red tape can lead to: wasted time, wasted energy and, indeed, wasted investment in our province.

I thought it might be interesting to indicate to my colleagues where the term "red tape" actually came from. I'm told that in colonial India years ago, bureaucrats used to wrap their bundles of documents in red cotton ribbon. The bureaucracy in India became famous for their reputation of excellence and diligence but, of course, in the process those who receive these great bundles of documents ended up themselves being wrapped in red tape, and so now we've come to know that red tape means excessive bureaucracy.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): And we've got a lot of it.

Mrs Elliott: We have a lot of it.

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I'm very pleased that our government has undertaken consistent initiatives to reduce the amount of red tape that our companies struggle with. This is the third red tape bill we've introduced in the Legislature. With its passage we will have repealed 28 acts and amended more than 149 others; 1,300 antiquated and redundant regulations have been revoked; more than a thousand licences, permits and reports required for food processing and farm businesses have been eliminated. Registering a business is now down from six weeks to 20 minutes. The most important thing for people involved in business, and "in business" means in creating jobs, is that we have made it easier and friendlier to do business in Ontario.

We were elected in 1995 on a promise of creating 725,000 jobs. Our ambitions are even greater in this next term of office: to create 825,000 jobs. Reducing unnecessary red tape is part and parcel of making those numbers happen. Those numbers aren't just numbers; those are jobs, those are opportunities for the Ontario that we know and love.

I want to say from personal experience that I am very pleased with the work that the Red Tape Commission has undertaken. I have a list here of various things this legislation will do—amending the Consumer Protection Act. I was interested to know that this act will expand consumers' rights by allowing a 10-day cooling-off period for people who go door to door and sell products. This is particularly important, of course, for seniors who may be pressured into purchasing something and then in the past only had two days to change their minds. This will be a very important thing. Other things—changes to the Mining Act; simple things, like the colour of the ink is now not going to be restricted to red.

I've heard regulations described in the past that it's sort of like sandstone, where one layer was just added upon and added upon another, and this is what our government has worked hard to do: to take off those layers and to make the regulations work properly which governments need to protect consumers.

I had an experience in my riding today which, although it's not directly related to red tape, reminded me of process. Today was a very eventful day in Guelph-Wellington. I was able to return to the riding for a short period of time to witness the signing of a tender. The tender was for the building of St Joseph's long-term care hospital. This was a very important event for people in my riding, people like Claude Flood, who has been working for 30 years to restructure our hospitals. Guelph was one of the communities to begin to realize that restructuring needed to occur on our own. We didn't have to have the restructuring commission come into our city. Our citizens, although not easily, found a way to restructure and to realign services.

I must say that there were many people very pleased that today the tender was finally signed. They were very pleased that it was our government that showed the leadership to see not only St Joseph's Hospital and Home receive its tender and move forward into building a brand-new facility, but that's following on the building of a new Guelph General Hospital which was sought for years and years as well.

I would like to draw to the attention of the members in this House that in 1988 the Liberals promised to have that same facility built in our riding. In fact, there was a groundbreaking at St Joseph's in 1988 and absolutely nothing was done. The situation was left to languish. Regretfully, during the regime of the NDP from 1990 to 1995, again, not a single thing was done in the riding of Guelph-Wellington. Health care was allowed to sit. Our consumers, our providers, our doctors, our nurses and of course the citizens were very concerned and extremely

disappointed that neither the Liberals nor the NDP took action in all that time.

When we took office, following a promise by the Premier in the election campaign that we would build those hospitals, we followed through, as we have done in so many areas of government. Not only is the General under construction, but today there is proof positive the tender documents are signed and the hospital is underway. Even though the documents were signed, the drawings were sitting on the table, the nurses could hardly believe it and even spoke to me and said, "Brenda, is this actually going to happen after all these years?" I know none of them will be up watching, but I can assure you that it is finally happening.

Although it's not directly related to red tape, it does make you wonder, when governments of the past couldn't accomplish such very important initiatives for our community, what on earth were they allowing to happen in things like red tape? This is a very large bill. As I said, it's our third act of reduction of unnecessary red tape, the kind of things we need to do in this province to create another 825,000 jobs.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): A red tape bill is always interesting. I've read it thoroughly. It's one of those bills that has so many things in it that could be detrimental if you read it a certain way.

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of the Environment, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): An omnibus bill.

Mr Bradley: An ominous bill. In this case, I'm not so worried about the omnibus aspect of this as I am of the ominous aspect of this bill. What you always find somewhere in there—I'm glad the Minister of the Environment is here tonight—is some attack on the environment in these bills. I know he has probably gone through the bill carefully to ensure that there isn't something in this bill that adversely impacts on the environment.

There was one good thing I liked about this bill—and I think it's in this bill because I heard one of the members mention it—and that is the door-to-door salesperson and the cooling-off period. That's in this bill, isn't it? That's a good idea.

Interjection: So you have read it.

Mr Bradley: I have.

That is a good idea. I don't like being negative all the time and saying everything you do is wrong. That part of the bill is good.

That doesn't mean we're voting for the bill, because I know you always have a hostage in the bill, something we don't agree with. I know there's something we don't agree with in this bill. That's what you always do. If you would bring in a bill that the opposition and the general public thought was good, I'd love to get up and vote and say, "You know something, we've got consensus in this House and everybody is voting for the bill." But just when you've got something in the bill that you think is good, you look somewhere else and there's something negative, like they'll do something to the Niagara

Escarpment Commission, they'll make some administrative change, and that's contained in this bill. There's an administrative change in there in the periods of time that folks in our area, or any other area, have to comment on proposals before the Niagara Escarpment Commission. When you start shortening that timeline, the only people who can afford to get their comments ready quickly are the big developers or the people who can afford to hire those consultants, who seem to grow larger and larger all the time.

I'm concerned about that when you have one of these red tape bills. That doesn't mean everything in the red tape bill is bad; it just means in this case there are some things in it, and that's one of them I'm worried about, that make me not want to vote for this particular bill.

What I did want to indicate to you, and it's related to this bill—if you listen long enough, you'll find out how it's related.

"The town of Fort Erie today released the results of the first major poll of the views of Niagara region residents about the debate over municipal restructuring. The poll, conducted by Environics Research Group, shows almost two thirds of residents would oppose the amalgamation of all Niagara municipalities into a single city. In addition, an overwhelming majority favour a referendum before any changes are implemented."

The reason I say that is that the Minister of the Environment, who spends a good deal of his time trying to unite the right, that is, the Progressive Conservative Party, which is progressive, and the Reform Party, which is not progressive—

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Preston's right-hand man.

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Interjection.

Mr Bradley: I wouldn't say he's Preston Manning's right-hand man at all but he certainly sounds like Preston Manning many times when he speaks in the House.

Anyway, what they want is a referendum. What I'm worried about with the referendum—and I'm wondering if this is hidden in the red tape bill. I know another bill that has already been the subject of some discussion, and a very profound and landmark decision by the Speaker of this House that you couldn't deal with that bill, Bill 25. I know what would happen is that you'd get to frame the question. I don't mean this in an illegal way, but it can be rigged in such a way or framed in such a way as to elicit an answer that the government wants.

Fort Erie believes that we should have a referendum throughout the Niagara region before you would even contemplate implementing any changes in the Niagara region. I hope the minister remembers that.

I'm worried, as you know, about the 75 provision, where you get 75 of your United Alternative people who want to bring something in to you and then say, "Send in a commissioner."

Hon Mr Clement: Not in Niagara.

Mr Bradley: The minister assures me he will never invoke that in the Niagara region. I have him on the

record now. Hansard picked that up. I know they could hear.

Hon Mr Clement: It doesn't apply to Niagara.

Mr Bradley: "It doesn't apply to Niagara," he says. It applies only to other areas. It's worrisome, nevertheless. I'll tell you why it's worrisome: because the region of Niagara used to be two counties, Lincoln county and Welland county. So I think you will find some way to try to apply it to the Niagara region.

Anyway, "... 65% of the residents oppose amalgamation into a single 'city of Niagara'; 44% are actually strongly opposed to it; "... 85% of residents want a referendum on any proposed change in governance structure, with over 66% saying it is 'very important'; 65% of residents believe their local municipality provides good and efficient government, ... residents are sceptical of the benefits of even more limited local amalgamation, with more people saying there would be an adverse rather than a beneficial effect on tax levels, accessibility and accountability of public officials, quality and efficiency of services, bureaucracy, and protection of local identity and neighbourhood needs."

The member for Wentworth-Burlington agrees with me on this. I know that. I can tell you, if a government I was ever part of was to implement one big city in Niagara, like the member for Wentworth-Burlington, I would say that if that bill passed, I would resign my seat in this House and go back to being a crown attorney or whatever I might be able to look forward to. I admire him on that, and if any government I was part of ever implemented that, I would do the same thing he's going to do.

The Speaker: Further debate? The member for Hamilton West.

Mr Steve Gilchrist (Scarborough East): The future mayor.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): The first thing I would like to mention, just because we've been talking about it—

Mr Hampton: And the former cabinet minister.

Mr Christopherson: I pulled that punch—something we've been talking about all day, that is, the time allocation motions, the fact that legislation is being rammed through this place faster and faster.

Earlier, I had talked, and others had too, about Bill 23, changes to the health portfolio and long-term care, and I referenced the fact that on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* was an article by John Ibbitson pointing out some of the concerns that are now cropping up as a result of this bill in terms of the way that individuals, or the government for that matter, may interpret the actual wording that's here, even if it wasn't what was intended, and the real damage that can be done by passing laws in a hurry and the implications for all of us.

I was pointing out that that's only a five-page bill. The front page of the *Globe and Mail* today, in Mr Ibbitson's article, was pointing out the problems with a bill of only five pages. I'd mentioned it earlier in the context of Bill 25, which of course is the omnibus bill that merges a

number of municipalities and actually is five bills wrapped into one, pointing out that following the same process as the one that caused the problems in Bill 23 is exactly what you did with Bill 25 in terms of introducing it, bringing in time allocation and ramming it through.

I raise these things because now we're dealing with Bill 11, and Bill 11, under time allocation—it's now about six minutes to midnight. When we're done there, I believe we are done debating the bill. I don't see the chief government whip indicating differently, so my recollection is correct.

Guess what? First of all, the problem bill was Bill 23: five pages, and we already see problems.

Bill 25: You tried to ram it through today. Fortunately, the Speaker saw that this would have done serious damage to the rights of individual members here in the opposition parties and you weren't able to make 25 law today; otherwise we'd be seeing time allocation, second reading and third reading all happening in the same calendar day. By any objective analysis that has to be unacceptable, or should have been. Yet we saw a government today try to convince you to make just such a ruling, Speaker. Obviously, we're very relieved on this side of the House that you saw fit to protect our rights.

That only buys us, however, a few days. This will still be law on Monday, more than likely. No public hearings, no opportunity to look at amendments—ram it through: Bill 23, five pages; Bill 25, 167 pages; and today we're dealing with Bill 11, on which we got less than a half-hour debate, and guess what? It runs a grand total of 225 pages. This wasn't a big enough boondoggle; 25 is not going to be a big enough boondoggle. No, we have to go here.

Bill 23, as I just mentioned, is a problem bill, already identified as a problem, a five-page bill. There could be serious implications because you didn't take the time to let other people—experts, professionals, stakeholders, people in the field—give you some advice, because you don't take advice. You don't need it. You're above that as a government.

Mr Hampton: They know it all.

Mr Christopherson: You know it all, my leader says, and that's right. That's the way that you project.

The explanatory notes alone, in smaller print, in Bill 11 run about 17 pages—the explanatory notes alone. I can't count how many different pieces of legislation are amended by this bill that we're giving 25 to 30 minutes' debate at third reading, no amendments, no public hearings, no opportunity for anybody to make any comment to you whatsoever: unheard of in terms of ramming through this much legislation with virtually no input from anyone, and you don't care.

I only have two minutes. Let me point out a couple of quick things.

First of all, the government on their Web site for this bill says as a part of the background, and I quote: "The Red Tape Reduction Act, 1999"—that's this monster—"if passed, will repeal the Oleomargarine Act, the Abandoned Orchards Act, the Fur Farms Act and the

Policy and Priorities Board of Cabinet Act.” The fact is that if you go through every one of these pages, you won’t find a reference to any one of those acts. If you don’t know what’s in the bill, how’s anybody else supposed to?

As if that wasn’t bad enough, when they make reference to the fact that the Policy and Priorities Board of Cabinet Act would be repealed in Bill 11, if passed, the fact of the matter is that you already repealed that act in December of last year, and this is on your Web page. You don’t even know what’s in this bill.

I can appreciate that backbenchers aren’t going to be expected to memorize this, and the truth is—don’t admit it, don’t say anything—but you probably haven’t read it. Really, why would you? You’d need to be a lawyer to fully understand this. But you put it on your Web site that things are going to happen if this gets passed and those things aren’t even in the bill, and one of the things that this is supposed to do, you already did a year ago. And then you have the audacity to tell us you know what you’re doing and you don’t need to listen to anyone.

At some point this government has to admit you are not infallible. You indeed do make mistakes and you

more than anyone would benefit from the expert advice others could give you if you had some decent public hearings.

The Speaker: Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 1, 1999, I am now required to put the question.

Mr Klees has moved to third reading of Bill 11.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell. Don’t call them in quite yet.

I have received from the chief government whip: Pursuant to standing order 28(h), the vote on Bill 11, third reading debate, will be deferred until Monday, December 20, 1999.

It being 12 o’clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30.

The House adjourned at 2400.

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