



No. 57

N° 57

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 11 May 2000

Jeudi 11 mai 2000

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 11 May 2000

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 11 mai 2000

The House met at 1000.

Prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

E-COMMERCE ACT, 2000

LOI DE 2000 SUR LE
COMMERCE ÉLECTRONIQUE

Mr Hastings moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act with respect to Electronic Information, Documents and Payments / Projet de loi 70, Loi concernant les renseignements, les documents et les paiements électroniques.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): I'm profoundly delighted to participate in today's discussion of Bill 70. I hope everybody will join with me, as we can make history today in ensuring that Ontario joins the Internet communications revolution going on in the 21st century.

There isn't any doubt in my mind: Bill 70 proposes that Ontario recognize digital signatures as the legal equivalent of our paper signatures that we use so often today; also, that all contracts made electronically be made legally binding.

In my estimation, Ontario must show initiative in this electronic age where more and more businesses and everyday activities of our citizens are being conducted on the Internet. This legislation, I believe, will have a positive impact on the demand for Ontario's products and services on-line and encourage and promote the growth of e-commerce in Ontario's communities throughout the 21st century. Furthermore, I think it will help sustain one of the longest economic growth cycles we have seen in recent economic history, certainly since World War II.

In my estimation, we must foster an environment that supports e-commerce and entrepreneurship. This bill represents an opportunity for Ontario to show vision and demonstrate leadership in this Internet age.

This law will introduce a measure of certainty to the world of e-commerce in Ontario and provide a measure of convenience for citizens or businesses in this province.

As you know, our existing laws regarding legal and binding relationships, including contracts, were developed for a paper-based system and economic model, and whether we like it or not, that system is fast becoming a way of the past. Every day more and more

people are accessing the Internet and using it to conduct business, purchase goods, communicate with grandparents and grandchildren and families throughout the world, and interact with government. In this fast-paced world, people do not have the time any more, unfortunately, to wait in line or on the phone for government services.

Instead of going to their local banks, more and more people are paying their bills on-line and conducting other transactions on-line via the Internet. This convenience should also be provided by the province of Ontario to its citizens. This law would take a leading role in promoting an accessible and Internet-friendly government.

If e-commerce over the Internet is to develop, consumers and businesses will require the ability to make contracts with digital signatures. This government must be in the forefront of the development of this economic model in order to promote and enhance e-commerce business and entrepreneurship well into the 21st century.

I also believe and hope that you will all join with me in the second reading of this significant and historic bill as the federal government has already translated a similar set of laws from a national perspective. Ontario being the economic engine that it is and has been regarded as being for the last 132 years or more of Confederation, I believe this measure will not only significantly improve our economic leadership across this country, but will reduce economic barriers over time, particularly intra-provincial barriers in trade, so that we can have a more prosperous economy, with more people working than we've ever had in the history of this great country.

As well, Canada has become—as has been noted so often in this chamber and, as has been quoted by members of this government, the United Nations regards Canada very highly—one of the best countries in which to live, work, raise a family and invest. We are attracting more and more newcomers on a daily basis. Within that broad context, I think the E-Commerce Act, 2000, will provide significant leadership in creating jobs, but more than that, in providing for the future well-being of our citizens and future citizens in the 21st century.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): It's a great honour for me to have an opportunity to participate in discussion on the private member's bill by the member for Etobicoke North. I will be sharing my time with the member for Brant, my colleague and friend.

As the Liberal Party science and technology critic, and as one, like so many members in this place, who is both struggling with and challenged by the use of new tech-

nologies to improve the efficiency of the services we provide, this is a timely debate. I would say it's a timely debate but interesting in one very significant way, that we're debating this as a piece of private member's legislation.

It's my intention to support this private member's bill by the member for Etobicoke North. It's unlikely that he and I will share similar instincts on too many things, but I do believe this is a good start.

1010

I would say at the outset that on this side we're surprised that on an issue like this the vacuum is left to be filled by a private member in the absence of meaningful government legislation. I would like to put on record our view that while this bill is a good start, we believe that it merits significant consideration by committee, and that we need the government, from a ministry-by-ministry standpoint, to take a look at what this legislation does and also at what this legislation doesn't do, in the broad minefield of regulation with respect to the Internet and electronic activities.

We had yesterday in this House a very poignant point of personal privilege raised by my colleague the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, and what that highlighted was one of the things this bill does not deal with: the protection of privacy for individuals. I believe we have seen from this government a wanton disregard for the privacy of citizens, and in the case of the point of privilege by the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, the privileges of customers of the Province of Ontario Savings Office.

I believe there's a very important message we need to send alongside this, and that is that we recognize that electronic commerce, paperless transactions, ought to bear the same burden of responsibility with respect to the protection of privacy as do transactions which have paper, and I'm not sure that's a standard this government has lived up to.

The member for Etobicoke North in his opening comments mentioned, without referencing the bill's number, Bill C-6 in the federal House. Not having had a chance to take an extensive look at that bill, I understand that bill also dealt with privacy provisions.

In terms of putting on the record our concerns, I would state, first and foremost, two. Number one, we believe the government should have had an initiative on this rather than leaving the vacuum to be filled—well, I might add, but filled nevertheless—by a private member's bill. This is a consideration that the government needs to take a look at, and in committee I believe we need to do that. We need to ensure that more work is done. All citizens should be very concerned about the absence of privacy protection as a topic of discussion in the context of this legislation. Those are two comments I would like to recommend to the member, and I look forward to hearing his point of view on those in his closing comments.

I'm one of those who embraces these new technologies and I recommend to anyone watching that they log on to my Web site, georgesmitherman.com, and see all of

the interesting subjects we've got there. It is a way we're using to try and communicate more effectively with a very diverse populace and I'm very excited about it.

In the context of working towards trying to embrace technology, but at the same time protecting against excesses, we have some very real challenges. I believe that, with the engine of Ontario's economy, as the member has stated, we have a responsibility to ensure there is an appropriate balance between the desire to appropriately regulate and, at the same, to ensure governments don't provide a disincentive to moving forward in this way. There is some real concern, if we follow the debate around regulation, the discussions around how e-commerce transactions ought to take place. If we follow that debate from the United States, which is where the stuff is even more broadly used, there are dangers there. We see there are some who would begin to take a look at the ways they can tax those activities.

The member spoke at length in his comments about the extent to which this bill takes a look at the way we can provide services to our constituents and to the citizens of Ontario. We should all embrace service models which provide a broader range of activities, but I worry that this government will use that as an opportunity to cut off, for hard-to-service individuals and people in harder-to-service communities, face-to-face services provided by public servants and also the kind of information that can best be obtained by talking to a live person across a telephone line. Our party has very real concerns about the deterioration of service in that way. We hear so often the government talking about virtual services and I think that too often this can be an excuse actually to provide cover for diminishing public service and hiding behind the mask of technology.

I believe it provides great opportunities to provide an alternative range of services. We see a transition, many people wanting to receive government information and services that way, but let us not make a mistake in terms of moving forward and providing government with cover to actually diminish the amount of public services that are being provided.

We've seen some attempts in the last year or two from the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, an organization that's dedicated to harmonizing Canadian law. They've developed a uniform electronic commerce act that provides a legal framework, a model for e-commerce. Saskatchewan has embraced that, but I think it's interesting that in the Saskatchewan model we've seen a government bill amended for deficiencies very shortly after its passage. I think that helps to restate, to reinforce my view that we need to ensure that the committee that takes a look at this really views whether it meets all of those tests. Again, the absence of this being a government bill with all of the resources of the various ministries being put to it is something we highlight as a concern.

I believe we have a responsibility as government to do what we can to reassure the citizens of this province that the people of Ontario are well served by their Legislature with respect to this. I touched on privacy. I can't high-

light enough the extent to which those protections need to be built into legislation from this province and this government. We know of course of the crisis that struck so much of the wired world with respect to the "ILOVE YOU" e-mail problem, and this place, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, was as crippled as any organization. It highlights the extent to which we are all vulnerable on that. We have a responsibility to provide our citizens with a sense of assuredness that our legislators are working on this, and more work needs to be done.

We will be supporting this in principle. We think it's a step in the right direction. We expect and ask that the government embrace e-commerce and look for opportunities to provide better services to our citizens, but we expect that they will take a look at privacy provisions, which are not contained in this legislation, and which by their absence cause great concern to us on this side, and also that the government not use this as an opportunity to hide behind e-commerce as a service model at the expense of other service models which are particularly important in communities where language barriers and concerns around using technology are evident.

In the case of my own constituency, I have very serious problems with the withdrawal of banking services in poorer communities. Many more affluent people have embraced technology, but what's left behind are underserved communities. I also think that with respect to seniors there are some barriers there, although we know seniors are one of the groups that are increasingly using technology. My mother has recently joined the wired world and bombards me with "I love you" e-mails of the type that aren't problematic, and this is a good thing. But we need to make sure that government doesn't hide behind electronic commerce as a way of doing business and diminish services provided to the citizens in our province.

1020

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I'm pleased to join the debate. I think it's very timely that we have in front of us a matter that deals with privacy, given the issue we've dealt with over the last little while, which was brought to a head yesterday, talking about the amount of information that was inappropriately released—according to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, unlawfully—wherein the provincial savings office released not just the names and personal information in terms of addresses and phone numbers for all the people who had accounts there, for the purpose of giving it to a pollster who was going to poll those individuals to find out how they felt about the privatization of the office, but also, as we found out afterwards, the actual balances that were in the bank accounts of these Ontarians were given to pollsters. When the freedom of information commissioner was requested to delve into this, she was obstructed, and says so in her report.

It's good that the government, through one of its backbenchers, is saying, "We need to tighten it up, and here's a way to do it, through using the new technology that's available," and it is proper that we should consider that.

But there still have not been answers to the questions that were raised about the last breach, and it would seem to me that it is a bit hypocritical to argue that this is the most important thing—

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: "Hypocritical" is unparliamentary, and I would ask you to rule, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Sorry, I missed that. Of course it is not used in here, so if the member would withdraw that word.

Mr Christopherson: I don't believe I called anyone a hypocrite. I just used the word. But certainly, Speaker, I will withdraw.

I was saying that I found it somewhat—

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): Paradoxical.

Mr Christopherson: Paradoxical—thank you. Very good; I appreciate the help. I found it somewhat paradoxical that at the same time as we're talking about the electronic transfer of information, we have a transfer of information in the old way that breached all the laws. The fact that we would now provide for electronic transfer, because that makes for more efficient government and savings for the taxpayer—but if at the end of the day we aren't protecting the personal information of the citizens better than we did under the old system, what have we really gained?

This is a concern that I think all Ontarians ought to be worried about. As I mentioned yesterday in the House, other than your personal finances, the only thing that's more important to you in terms of your right to privacy in a democracy like this is your medical records.

We're talking about transferring electronic information. Here's a government that transferred information to a private pollster about citizens that contained their bank account balances. That can never be acceptable, and yet this government refuses to do anything. They make some noise about, "Well, we've complied with what the commissioner has requested," or, "We're attempting to comply with what the freedom of information commissioner has brought forward," but she points out in her report that the job's not done. In fact, she takes the extraordinary step of outlining all the questions that remain to be answered, and a lot of them have to be, à la Watergate, who knew what when, and who approved what when?

We think this is a positive step. This is a good thing, a good use of new technology and an attempt to make sure that government stays on the cutting edge. But let's not lose sight of the fact that at the end of the day, governments have an incredible responsibility with all information. Whether they're transferring it by paper, by phone, by fax, by e-mail or other new electronic technology that's available, at the end of the day, one of the most important things about information is making sure that an individual's personal information is kept just that way—personal.

Somehow the government thinks, in this specific case, that they can just ignore what's happened. "Oh, well, the fact that nobody would talk to the commissioner when

they were requested to doesn't mean anything," or there's the fact that the commissioner points out that she has never seen an issue that received so much blockage in attempts to get answer to questions as she has in this particular case.

This is a good measure. Assuming things don't take a U-turn during the debate, I think we are going to be comfortable supporting it and I commend the member for bringing it forward. It's an important issue. But with the means of transferring information also has to come the absolute guarantee that citizens' rights around having information protected are to have equal priority. I would hope that other backbenchers would use this one opportunity we have to come to this place as individuals, as opposed to caucus members, to express their concern that they aren't satisfied their government has provided the answers the public are entitled to about this breach, not only of protocol, but according to the commissioner, of the law. We don't know at this point with any certainty that we won't end up with a criminal investigation, possibly even criminal charges. We don't know that.

So we would call on the government members to acknowledge that this is an important part of this subject, as much as the mechanics of transferring information: Where are the protections, especially when information is being moved around? That responsibility always, in the case of a majority government, lies with the government. We have one prime example of where they failed us. I would hope that anything new we move to in terms of new means of transferring information would have better protection than what you have offered the people of Ontario to date.

Ms Mushinski: I take great pleasure in rising to speak in support of Mr Hastings's E-Commerce Act, 2000, which will bring Ontario into the 21st century and obviously beyond.

It's important to stress that our government firmly believes in good customer service, and what this bill will do is provide convenience and service to the citizens of Ontario as they conduct business with this government. It will also set up the framework for the future of e-commerce in this electronic age.

By making electronic signatures the legal equivalent of paper signatures, we can ensure several things. We can ensure that the citizens of Ontario receive services in a timely and accessible manner—something, of course, that we strongly espouse in terms of improving customer service. We can also ensure that electronic signatures are legally equivalent to paper signatures.

By making contracts agreed to on-line legal and binding, we will be able to create an environment in Ontario that promotes and encourages economic growth through innovation and technology—something that is also very important to us as a government.

Ontario, as Canada's economic engine, must always make sure it has a vision for the future, by keeping up with technological advances in what we know is a very rapidly paced electronic age. We must also make sure

that our citizens have every opportunity to interact with the government in the most effective way.

As of now, there are a few ways that Ontarians can interact with the government electronically, such as paying fines and updating licences with the Ministry of Transportation, or reserving a campsite with the Ministry of Natural Resources. I think it's important that we keep pushing the envelope and raising the bar of expectations to ensure that we are not left behind.

This law will ensure that the Legislature of Ontario is ready for the innovations of electronic commerce and technology into the 21st century. I commend my colleague John Hastings for having the courage, the foresight and the vision to recognize the technological needs not just of present generations but of future generations and of society.

1030

Mr Levac: I will probably be giving a couple of minutes of my time, if it's OK, to the member from St Paul's.

I want to thank the member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale for expressing our opinion on this side of the House.

First of all, I want to state very clearly that yesterday we were involved in history-making. I'm going to tie that in to this particular bill and I'm going to speak specifically to the bill in a moment.

The first thing I want to do is talk about yesterday's historic moment. In the House, for the first time ever, we passed a committee bill. It was done so with the co-operation of all members on all sides of the House in agreement. Bill 65 forms the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians. Now, that's a harmless situation, except it showed that we are capable, in a very quick moment, of doing something that's absolutely right and good for the province.

However, that being said, I want to come over to the bill today. I did mention yesterday that I believe we need to do some more reforming of private member's bills in order to get them to the House quicker so that we can make some decisions, as parties and as individuals, as to the value of those bills.

I want to speak to the value of this bill today. It does speak to an important point. The member from Etobicoke North is bringing to the House something that was neglected. We have had e-commerce for quite some time and it's been an open minefield. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, the government had not acted until now. As the member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale has indicated, we believe that it needs to get discussed. I'm sure the member opposite introducing the bill would give us that opportunity at committee to make sure all of the little nuances are taken care of. I'm sure, as was mentioned by the Minister of Labour and a couple of other ministers, that we don't pass perfect legislation, and that there are glitches—using a computer technology term—that do come up. We have to take care of those.

I want to mention something very important for the record, and I'm glad the member who's introducing the

bill did take care of this. For the public, this act does not apply to wills, trusts created by wills, powers of attorney, documents created to transfer interests in land, registration and a prescribed class of document or instrument. Those things are not in this bill, and I want to thank the member for recognizing that very important point, because I think we need person-to-person on this.

What I also want to bring up, and the member from St Paul's is signaling me to go ahead and make reference to this—is that one of the things that is very important for us to recognize is that we're slowly taking human experience out of our transactions. When we did contract, it was person to person, at one time telephone to telephone; now we're talking computer to computer. The one thing computers still have yet to be able to do is duplicate emotion, the human connection; we have to concern ourselves with the "click, I agree" syndrome. If we click a button and say we agree, have we not been able to do that human transaction? We must be careful that we don't avoid the human interaction that is so dear and necessary when we come into these very important agreements. So there must be provisions and there must be something that we need to discuss that prevents us from getting into the "click, I agree" syndrome. I think that needs to be addressed, and I'm sure that all the members agree that we are probably desensitizing that human experience.

The one last comment I want to make is something that the banking industry has picked up on. When they made the transition to using fewer people, interacting people to people, they put their machines out first. They put all the bank machines out and got people used to those things. Now that we have e-commerce, we really have to be careful not to have that out there first.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): I'm pleased to speak to this bill today. I think it's an important bill and I'm pleased that Mr Hastings has brought it forward. I don't think he and I have agreed on one thing in this House before.

Ms Mushinski: Sure you have.

Ms Churley: I don't think so. Tell me what else.

Mr Hastings: Stockwell Day.

Ms Churley: "Stockwell Day," he says. Heaven help us; protect us from Stockwell Day and Tom Long.

We're off the subject now and I want to come back to the bill, which I am supporting today. I would say that the electronic transfer of information and the conducting of business dealings electronically are not new, and certainly the time has come for legislation that sets clear rules for government and for the public and does so in a manner that is subject to scrutiny. My caucus is pleased that the member for Etobicoke North has followed the example of the NDP government in Saskatchewan. We wish his government were as forward-thinking as the NDP government in Saskatchewan, because they have already done that.

This is so important, and the electronic use of information and the lightning speed of technology are happening on a daily basis and we can hardly keep up with them. The younger generation is much more able to keep up

with the latest technology than I am. I'm constantly falling behind and having to learn. But it is moving at lightning speed. I just wonder why the government hasn't had the courage to bring forward a bill like this to, in an open and democratic way, with full public participation and scrutiny, bring Ontario into the 21st century. I'm pleased to see that Mr Hastings is trying to do that today.

I agree with the principle of the bill, that we need to provide for the electronic transfer of information, and I believe my caucus—although it is private member's hour—supports this. They're happy to let it pass second reading today so it can go to committee for full hearings all across Ontario and allow some of the concerns we have and that I'm sure the public would have to be addressed.

The thing is that you can do this right or you can do it wrong. Bill 70 gives us a chance to now address the issue. It's a good thing that we now have that opportunity. But we have some concerns. I'm far from sure at this point that this bill in its present form is acceptable. But I would say as well that quite frequently with private members' bills, once they go to hearings, some concerns and further information are added and amendments are made. Of course, that's why we need to pass it today, so we can have those hearings, and any changes we need to make, any considerations that have not been included in this bill, would come forward and we could make those amendments.

Some of the questions we have to ask are, will public access to public records be guaranteed? I'm sure we all agree that that is absolutely necessary. My colleague Peter Kormos raised the other day what happened under this government to court dockets. So before we consent to allow the government to replace paper record-keeping with electronic record-keeping, we must be certain that public access will in no way be compromised.

One of the first items of the bill, subsection 6(2), says that a person's consent to accept a document in an electronic form can be "inferred from the person's conduct." We have to ask, is that good enough? Then again, we have to look at how we will verify electronic signatures, and then how we will protect the security of electronic signatures? I'm sure those are things that Mr Hastings has thought about, and perhaps when he sums up he will provide some of his thinking on those questions.

Subsection 6(1) says, "Nothing in this act requires a person to use or accept information or a document in an electronic form."

This is fine and good, but only if that person can be certain that their entitlement to receive information from, for example, the province is not undermined if they cannot accept electronic information.

1040

Another question is, how can the transmission of electronic information be verified? That is a major concern, and it is not immediately clear that the bill covers that.

The issue that some of my colleagues have raised around privacy I think is pertinent, and I wouldn't say

just in the context of discussions around some of the things my colleague from Hamilton talked about, the Ontario savings account and the release of private information there, and some other concerns we have about private information being released to the public. In a larger context, technology is being developed at lightning speed and the potential for misuse of personal information is great. We're all aware of that, and people are somewhat concerned as there is more and more business and there are more transactions being conducted on the Internet and through our computers. Those are the things we have great concerns about. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do it. It's time for us to move forward into the 21st century, and I'm glad we're addressing this issue today. So there are big concerns about privacy, about the protection of citizens' entitlement to information and access to information, about the verification of transfer and receipt of information, and finally, about the integrity of public records and about public access to public records.

Whether or not this bill meets the test remains to be seen. The rights of citizens and not the ease of business have got to be our first concern here. I believe that full public hearings are a must.

I will close by congratulating Mr Hastings for bringing this bill forward.

I'd like to tell people that if they want to check out my Web site, it is <http://www.MarilynChurley.com>. I'd be very pleased if people would take a look at that and get back to me and tell me what they think of it.

I appreciate all the e-mails that people send me. Let me use this opportunity to apologize to people if I'm not able to get back to them immediately. We know, of course, with the advancement of technology, that people can now sit down in front of their computers and get through to us right away and expect an immediate answer. We get hundreds of those. I want to thank the member again.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 70, An Act with respect to Electronic Information, Documents and Payments.

Once again the member for Etobicoke North has done an outstanding job in researching and preparing his private member's bill, and I am pleased to speak in favour of his initiative. I support this bill not just because it would help to make business transactions faster and easier, but also because enabling e-business creates more opportunities for more people to benefit and prosper from goods and services obtained on the Internet.

Specifically, we are talking about allowing people to electronically file documents and contracts with their signature over the Internet. This will provide a tremendous boost for ordinary citizens, business and governments and will help to put Ontario at the forefront of a new and ever-changing economy.

I want to note also that Bill 70 directly addresses the issue of getting rid of red tape, which we know and experience as wasted time, long lines and paper trails slowing the path toward the services we may need. That

is what makes this bill particularly democratic and consistent with this government's effort to reduce unneeded regulations and unnecessary paper burdens. Less red tape means more access to services, and that means more equity and enhanced democracy. If this measure is enacted, there will be far less red tape.

So far, this government has eliminated over 1,000 regulations that were laid to rest by our red tape reduction plan. We have made that effort permanent by creating a Red Tape Commission, headed up by Frank Sheehan, the former MPP for Lincoln.

Bill 70 is exactly the kind of measure we need to enhance this effort, and with its passage we will likely be talking about a far greater number of unneeded regulations gone in the near future: reams upon reams of paper that will disappear, I am sure.

In my riding of Waterloo-Wellington, we are part of what is known and even renowned as Canada's technology triangle, or CTT. The CTT is also at the forefront of the electronic revolution, and I'm pleased the government has worked in partnership to help them pave the way. The CTT is the place to start with partnerships for growth in the new economy. The triangle region has the right mix of rural and urban area, along with solid government and business expertise, which combine to make it the leading example of how communications technology can help provide an exceptional quality of life and enhance economic vitality.

The Ontario government has played a leading role in developing leading-edge infrastructure in the CTT through the telecommunications access partnership program. In fact, two of these information highway projects are located in the region: the rural Waterloo community network and the Waterloo information network.

Recently, I had the pleasure of joining the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Natural Resources in Waterloo for the announcement of a new initiative to further advance the information highway in Ontario, a program called Connect Ontario. This SuperBuild initiative will invest \$82 million that will improve Internet and electronic connections within, between and worldwide for 50 Ontario communities. Connect Ontario will enhance the competitiveness of our communities in the new digital economy and foster growth in jobs, new investment and economic development opportunities. As the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology said in reply to my recent question to him in the House, "We are leading Canada, indeed we're leading North America, in Internet connectedness," a government record we should be proud of.

As I conclude my remarks on the point of leadership, I want to return to the leadership brought to this House by the member for Etobicoke North. At a time when there is some concern that all governments may be having difficulty responding quickly enough to the changes of an ongoing information revolution, the government stays ahead, and this member, the MPP for Etobicoke North, shows how one member can keep us ahead.

Here are some other notable accomplishments by the member that should be recognized today:

The member for Etobicoke North has a remarkable record of bringing forward private members' bills which seek to improve the quality of life for all Ontarians. His bill to permit large private donations to hospitals was immediately recognized in our government's first budget.

He has since brought forward many private members' bills and resolutions to, among other things, establish taxpayer rights legislation; encourage private sector investment in classroom technology; recognize the contributions of Canadian historical figures; enhance grandparents' rights; license locksmiths; and make the purchase of computers more affordable for families and students.

Most significantly, I think, it was the member for Etobicoke North who called upon all Canadian provinces and the federal government to pay tribute to Princess Diana's life. His work in this area has resulted in the donation of over \$1 million to Canadian children's charities.

When you look at the diverse range of issues that have been brought forward by this member in the Ontario Legislature in terms of private members' bills and at the very broad range of issues that have been canvassed over the years by this member, he has made a very significant contribution.

This Bill 70 is part of that legacy, part of that record of accomplishment of this member, and I would encourage all members of this House to support it today.

1050

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to follow the member for Waterloo-Wellington, who has ably described the purpose and scope of Bill 70, the member for Etobicoke North's bill.

I want to make it very clear from the beginning that certainly I will be supporting Bill 70. I would like to commend the member for Etobicoke North, as the member for Waterloo-Wellington has. When you look at his record and his interests, they are very diverse and very forward-thinking. I don't think there's anyone who has been critical of any of the actions, in a legislative sense, that the member has taken, and that should be on the record. I want to recognize it. He works quietly and effectively.

In fact, I could say he's ahead of the ball on this thing. The province and the ministries responsible have been diligently working on the whole issue of e-commerce, or being connected, if you will, but in a formal, legal sense, I think he's months ahead of the government introducing legislation on this, and I think much of his bill will be reflected in it. So it's an appropriate time for opposition members to bring forward concerns so that government members can listen and can amend in any future attempts at change.

What does e-commerce mean in Bill 70? I'm looking at a copy here, and I think it's important for those who may be watching to understand what this whole e-commerce or e-business is all about. If you look in the

definition section, section 1 of the bill, it describes "electronic" as follows: "includes created, recorded, transmitted or stored in digital form or in other intangible form by electronic, magnetic or optical means or by any other means that has capabilities for creation, recording, transmission, or storage similar to those means and 'electronically' has a corresponding meaning."

It's a technical definition, but nonetheless—a lot of people ask me, "What do you mean by an electronic signature?" for instance. It isn't something that we transmit in sort of an art form, our name signature. What he has defined here as "electronic signature" is: "means information in electronic form that a person has created or adopted in order to sign a document and that is in, attached or associated with the document." So it could be a series of number or other kinds of digital pieces of information that represent that person's electronic signature.

The point was made earlier about the impersonal nature of moving forward in this venue of electronic communication, and I certainly recognize that. It doesn't negate the responsibility each of us has to keep the human contact there, even though when I do my banking at the automatic teller machine, it's more convenient for me on the way home at night to drop in and pay my bills and do the other transactions. More conveniently, if I look at what we can actually do electronically today, it's fascinating. In a general sense, I think the whole B2B thing we hear about, business-to-business communication, the whole Internet or faxing—all of that kind of digital world is just exploding all around us. If we don't deal with it, and this is what the member's trying to do, we're not going to be prepared. We need a framework, a legislative framework, to think about it.

I'm going to list some of the things I've done. I've actually bought a book on-line. I've bought a trip, planned it and got the maps of another country on-line by signing on. I have an e-commerce account with TD-Waterhouse and have traded stocks on-line. I have an account. I've placed orders for various things, from books to stocks. I've downloaded information forms. Of course I have my own government member's Web site, which is john_otoole@ontla.ola.org. Plus, yesterday, at the CAP site in my riding of Durham, in Clarington, we opened up a new Web site. The students of Courtice Secondary School, with their teacher, Mr John Winder, working in partnership with co-op students, have developed and written all of the code for my own Web site, which was launched yesterday. I could say more about that. I have a co-op student who's actually inputting the data. You'll be able to sign on to my Web site in my riding and get everything from the budget to booking a campsite.

Telemedicine was mentioned in the budget. The previous member mentioned Con-nect Ontario, which complements the virtual classroom, videoconferencing. It's amazing what you can do today electronically. That being said, it really expands everyone's opportunity to become more accessible. It has been a long time in

coming, but it's essential that we become prepared for what Alvin Toffler called the third wave, the new world, the new order in that respect. Also, I wouldn't like to negate the personal responsibility issues, the privacy issues. I think the member for Etobicoke North has done a wonderful job to bring this legislation forward. I can tell you I'll be supporting it, and I know most of the members in the House today, if not all, will be supporting it. Again, I commend you for that, and thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

The Acting Speaker: For a response, the member for Etobicoke North.

Mr Hastings: I'd like to extend my personal appreciation to all the members who spoke today on Bill 70, the E-Commerce Act. In my estimation, this piece of legislation or whatever comes out of the sausage machine, the legislative process in committee, can be a significant advancement in formalizing the everyday legal activities going on in business and in social activities of citizens in this great province. All you have to do is go on the Net at whatever Web site and you can see the plethora of new business models that are emerging—from the old economy actually: the pulp and paper industry; the chemical and plastics; the new media and entertainment industries; the publishing industry; on-line education. Internet voting is very near us and it has significant implications for the Legislative Assembly.

I think many members in this House already have—and if they haven't, I would heartily advocate and endorse that they get one—a Web site. Mine is at www.johnhastings.com. It's another way of communicating with people.

I want to emphasize that I'm not fascinated by the technology, that in and of itself it's something magical—it is, in a way—but it's simply another piece of hardware or software to advance knowledge, to bring better communications and services and products to the people of this province.

Finally, I'd like to comment on some the concerns from members opposite. I think they raised some significant issues, and one is the issue of privacy. When this goes to committee, I think that's what we will see addressed. I'd also recommend a book dealing—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. This completes the time allocated for debate. The question will be put at 12 o'clock noon.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN INVOLVED
IN PROSTITUTION ACT, 1999
LOI DE 1999 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES ENFANTS QUI SE LIVRENT
À LA PROSTITUTION

Mr Bartolucci moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to protect Children involved in Prostitution / Projet de loi 6, Loi visant à protéger les enfants qui se livrent à la prostitution.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I'm very happy today that we have children in the audience, because this bill deals solely and entirely with their protection. In the forward to the Progress of Nations, Kofi Annan, secretary general of the United Nations, wrote in part: "The day will come when nations will be judged not by their military or economic strength, nor by the splendour of their capital cities or public buildings but ... by the provision that is made for those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, and by the protection that is afforded to the growing minds and bodies of our children." It is in that context that I would like to begin our debate today.

My private member's bill, Bill 6, has a history, I believe, worth mentioning. I first introduced An Act to protect Children involved in Prostitution back on May 12, 1998. At that time it was known as Bill 18 and there was no other jurisdiction in Canada that had enacted this legislation. The bill passed second reading on May 28 and went to the standing committee on social development. It received a number of days of public hearings: August 17 in Sudbury, August 18 in London, September 28 and 29 in Toronto, October 5 in Toronto; and clause-by-clause was scheduled for October 5 as well.

During public hearings the committee members heard over 50 deputations from both individuals and organizations. Individual presentations were made by former and current child prostitutes, like Meaghan, who so passionately said she needed this type of legislation because she was desperately looking for a way out of this lifestyle of sexual exploitation.

We also heard from parents like Alan, whose child was a child prostitute. He pleaded with committee members to pass this bill so that their children, in particular his child, could be protected from the exploitation and sexual abuse at the hands of pimps and johns preying on their children.

Organizations which showed strong support for this bill were countless. The bill received support from several social services agencies, such as the John Howard Society of Sudbury, the Toronto Child Abuse Centre and Covenant House, to mention only a few. In addition, in excess of 30 police chiefs from across the province, including the Sudbury Regional Police Service and the York Regional Police Service, then under the leadership of Toronto's current chief of police, Julian Fantino, wrote in support of this legislation. After all this, Bill 18 unfortunately died when the House prorogued in December 1998.

1100

I reintroduced the bill on April 26, 1999. It was then called Bill 10. Again the bill did not survive the dissolution of the Legislature and the call, of course, of the 1999 provincial election. I reintroduced the bill for a third time in this Parliament on October 26 which brings us to today's second reading debate. I thank the House, especially Claudette Boyer, for moving my bill up 30 spots so that we could debate it today.

The purpose of the bill is to protect children under 18 who are involved in prostitution. The bill gives police

officers the power, with a warrant, to remove a child involved in prostitution and return the child to his or her family or to place the child in a protective safe house. The police officer may also apprehend a child without a warrant where the child's life or safety is seriously endangered. If a child is brought to a protective safe house under this act, a child protection worker shall be responsible for the child and for determining whether to return the child to his or her parent, to a person who had care and control of the child before the child was taken out of the situation or to another adult who is capable of providing for the child's needs.

The child protection worker may also decide to apply to the court for an order under section 57 of the Child and Family Services Act, for example, for a supervision order, a society wardship order, a crown wardship order etc. The bill would allow a child, his or her parent or a child protection worker to apply to the court for a restraining order against the person who has abused the child or who is encouraging the child or is likely to encourage the child to engage in prostitution. The bill makes it an offence for a person to encourage a child to engage in prostitution. The penalty for the persons known as "johns" and "pimps" is a fine of up to \$25,000, imprisonment for up to 24 months or both a fine and imprisonment.

As you can see, the bill works in tandem or in conjunction with the Child and Family Services Act. It is an act, though, and I do not make any apology, that deals solely with the sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children through prostitution. It does not conflict with but rather enhances other pieces of provincial legislation to ensure that these vulnerable children are no longer exploited but are protected.

I said earlier that there was no such legislation in place when Bill 18 first received second reading support. Since then, Alberta has passed identical legislation, and I make no apology for learning from other provinces about good child protection legislation. In fact, they passed it on February 1, 1999. In June 1999, the Alberta government heard from several stakeholders involved in this. Here's what some of the youth said: "Going to a protective safe house is good because it removed me from the high-risk situation."

Police in urban areas of Edmonton and Alberta who have experience with this legislation view it as an overwhelming success. To date—and I'll give you some accurate statistics from Alberta—310 children have been removed from dangerous situations and put back into protective safe houses. Sadly, though, the average age of these children removed has been 15.5 years of age.

During public hearings and since I reintroduced this bill, I have received many letters of support. Let me read only a few to you. Julian Fantino, the police chief of Toronto, "We welcome any initiative which serves to discourage and sanction those who would lead our youth into prostitution, a life which offers no hope, no future, and an inevitable crushing of the human spirit."

Mike Beauparlant, then the head of the juvenile task force of the Toronto Police Service, said: "This bill

would be a unique tool.... I can tell you that a frustration that I have experienced over the last 10 to 12 years is that I have seen children we were able to address who were 15. A week later they are 16 and I have to cringe and watch as they enter the car, unable to do anything."

Shelley Hallett, who is a legal counsel for the Ministry of the Attorney General, wrote to the Toronto Police Service back when there were Bill 18 hearings, and she said: "The Bartolucci bill attempts to address deficiencies in child welfare legislation in dealing with child and youth prostitution. If passed, it will have significant ramifications in terms of the powers of police and child welfare authorities to deal with youth who are presently, by law, out of the purview of these authorities. Many police officers who deal regularly with youth involved in prostitution, including members of the Toronto Police juvenile task force, have been calling for legislation that would allow them greater powers...."

Finally, Zonta, which is an international worldwide service organization of executives in business and the professions working together to advance the status of women, states in a letter dated March 1, 2000: "We note that the bill received the unanimous consent of all parties on first reading this session. We also noted that Premier Harris was reported in the press following the Premier's conference last summer to have stated that"—dealing with Alberta's similar legislation—"Ontario wants to move quickly to draw up new legislation in co-operation with other provinces to apprehend and protect juveniles who work as prostitutes."

I look forward to the debate that we will have over the course of the next 45 minutes, and I ask simply that you search yourselves and ask, is this legislation in the best interests of those children who are being sexually abused and exploited through prostitution?

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): Let me start off by answering that question and saying, yes, I do support the direction of this bill. I will be voting for it. I do have a lot of comments that I will make about it. I have some reservations. I think the bill can be improved, but I do think that most of us on this side of the House are very supportive of this legislation and commend the member opposite for bringing it forward.

Before I go further, I'd like to welcome to the House today some folks from the St Ann's Adult Learning Centre from my riding of Niagara Falls. Welcome, to the members from St Ann's.

I know there are other members on this side of the House who have spoken to the Solicitor General on this bill. I have spoken to the Attorney General. I have spoken to the good member from Ottawa, Judge Guzzo, who has a great deal of experience in this field. He has some thoughts on the bill. We all very much respect his views on all of these law-and-order issues, someone with his experience, and I look forward to continuing to talk to him about the details of the bill.

I'd also like to mention, and congratulate once again, the member from Cambridge, Mr Martiniuk. As everyone knows, we have a crime commission that he chairs; he

has for years. I think he's done more to help fight crime in the province of Ontario in the last couple of years than a lot of people. So I congratulate him.

I do want to say before I get into some detailed thoughts on the bill that the government really takes seriously the need to protect children. Our record is very clear on that. We proclaimed, and I believe all members of the Legislature, both the NDP and Liberal parties also supported, the new Child and Family Services Act, passed on March 31. These are the first major changes to that protection act in 10 years. We implemented a new risk assessment model which would help child protection workers better assess whether a child is at risk. We've developed a province-wide database to track high-risk families. We've improved the child protection training program.

Since December 1995—everyone should really pay attention to this—we have hired more than 790 new child protection workers, a 34% increase, and right now they are still hiring more. I think we'll get up to about 1,000 new workers in short order. In fact, in my own area our family and children's services are having difficulty finding good, qualified people to fill those roles. So that's a great record that we're very proud of and we'll wear that on our sleeve.

1110

In addition, reflecting the increase in workers, \$650 million is now spent on child protection in our CASs. That's an 80% increase since 1995. So I'm proud of that record, and I did want to get that on the record before I move forward with discussion on the bill.

I've read Mr Bartolucci's bill very thoroughly. I will be speaking with him in the near future on some of the details I have. I have a few questions I think we need to deal with. For instance, section 3 deals with warrants obtained via telephone. The idea is a great one, that they can get warrants more quickly and easily. I'm concerned, actually, that some of it might be a little too cumbersome, and I'd like to talk to the member opposite and find out how we can make it even less cumbersome so that when a child is in imminent danger and a police officer has reasonable grounds to believe that a child is in danger, they can more easily get a warrant to help out.

I notice that in section 4 the member quite rightly provides that a police officer can get in without a warrant when a child's life is "seriously and imminently endangered because the child is engaging in prostitution." Again, I'd like to talk to him about the test: "seriously and imminently in danger." Any child who is engaging in prostitution under the influence of a scumbag pimp who has taken a young child and influenced them or physically intimidated them to do this—I think it should be very easy for police officers to stop that and to intervene, and I want to make sure that we don't make a test that's too high. I want to talk to the member about that.

One of the concerns that I do have is under section 5 of the bill: "If a police officer apprehends a child under this act, the police officer shall notify a child protection

worker immediately that the child has been apprehended and inform the worker as to whether the child has been returned to the child's parent" or brought to a protective safe house. We may need to bring in the child protection worker sooner so that once the police officer intervenes and has the child, he then goes to the child protection worker and in conjunction with that child protection worker then decides what the appropriate place is for this person, rather than leaving it to the officer to make that decision.

So there are some concerns. I have several others. I have members on this side of the House who would like to talk to the bill. I've gone beyond the five minutes that I had allotted to talk to this, so I'm going to step aside now. I will support the bill. I will talk further to Mr Bartolucci about the concerns I've mentioned and a few others. I'd like to turn the floor over now to some of the other members.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I am very pleased to speak to this bill. My only disappointment with it is that this government did not enact it previously to this. I commend the member for Sudbury for hanging in and supporting what is a very necessary piece of legislation.

I bring to it a CAS perspective. I have been a member of the board of directors for 24 years, through some very difficult years. I recall 1995 when we laid off a substantial number of staff because of cutbacks from this government. I am pleased that in some ways they've recognized the error of their ways and are restoring the funding to bring some of the people back.

My wife and I have also served as foster parents. We're now in our 14th year. Many of the young people who have been dragged into prostitution are there as a reflection of things that are happening at home. When I was first on the board there was no such thing as sexual abuse. When there was an allegation of sexual involvement with a child, everything stopped at the agency, because it simply was not heard of. Now the cases number in the hundreds in our riding alone. Is that a reflection of better reporting or is it a reflection of more activity? I'm not sure. I tend to believe that it's a reflection of both, that there is more involvement of children in sexual activities. But if someone is involved in prostitution, there is an adult involvement somewhere with it.

I think I can reflect the statement of everyone in this House of how appalled they were at the BC court decision which said that possession of child pornography was legal. For there to be child pornography, there has to be a victim. I'm absolutely appalled that a court would condone the possession of material such as that.

The intriguing thing that has amazed me in dealing with children who have been sexually abused—we have fostered substantial numbers of them and are aware of children as young as two being involved in the production of pornographic movies—is that the children know it's wrong. Without exception, the children know that what they're doing is wrong. We were concerned, when

we first started to foster, that in dealing with children who had been sexually abused or involved in prostitution, they would bring discussions into our house that we really didn't want talked about at the family table with our natural children. The reality is, they don't want to talk about it. They're embarrassed, they're ashamed and they know that what has happened to them is wrong. Yet adults have involved them in an activity that adults are prepared to overlook and to ignore the moral approach to.

The real problem with children involved in prostitution, from a foster parent viewpoint, is their memories. When a child is led into a lifestyle such as that, when caught by this bill and when brought to a place of protection, which is what has to happen, for the rest of their life their life fabric has been altered by what they have experienced. It is impossible to erase that memory.

We have worked with children of 10 and 11 years of age who know things that they should not have to know, but they can't forget them. The effect of involving children in prostitution is to steal their childhood, it's to remove that wonderful part of life's experience that they are entitled to and should experience. But once that fabric has been torn and they are made part of this evil activity, it can't be erased, they can't forget it.

This bill does wonders to ensure that very quickly they're entitled to the protection that they are owed by us as adults and us as legislators. But it also introduces a responsibility on this government, and that is to provide support for these young people once they're in a place of protection. They invariably require counselling. They invariably require supports. They invariably require assistance from us as a society and as a province to ensure that, although they can't forget the experience they've had, they learn to deal with it, they learn to recognize that the adults who destroyed their childhood are not typical representatives of our society but are aberrations, and allow them to be able to move on and contribute positively to society and, more important, to be satisfied within themselves that they were victims, they were not doing something wrong, they were in a lifestyle that was introduced to them.

I'm pleased to support this bill to facilitate moving children into places of protection.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): I'm pleased to be able to speak to this bill today and to congratulate Mr Bartolucci for being so persistent in bringing this bill back before us, because I believe all members of the House support the intention of this bill and want it to move forward. The last two attempts, as Mr Bartolucci outlined, failed. As we know, that often happens in the House with private members' bills. Sometimes people give up and sometimes people are persistent in bringing back these very important bills that we would like to see the government move on. But sometimes private members, when they're really committed to a cause and are persistent and keep bringing the issue back before us, succeed. Hopefully, today, Mr Bartolucci, this will be your day that we will pass the bill and it will move forward, and the government will step in and do

the things that need to be done to make it happen. Obviously, some resources would be involved and I hope very much, particularly after a budget that is balanced and a tax cut given—\$8 billion, over \$5 billion of it to corporations and very wealthy people—that the government can find within the dollars, lots of dollars, that are coming in in revenue these days, the money and resources to put into this very important project.

1120

I guess we all cringe when we think about child prostitution, because for those of us with children and for those of us who don't have children, just to even think about it is so heartbreaking and almost unbearable to contemplate. When I was Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, one of the things I was responsible for was the Ontario Film Review Board. So much of what the board had to do was to review pornographic movies. They are legal but there are certain guidelines they have to follow, and one of the guidelines of course, the top one, is to look out for child pornography, or even anybody pretending to be a child in such a film.

I also dealt very extensively with Bob Matthews, whom many of you may have heard of. He's a hero. For years and years he's been heading up a project to go after—I believe somebody already called them the scumbags; I wouldn't normally use that word in this House but I think we would all agree here that it's appropriate—scumbags who exploit little children, young children, in the most despicable ways for profit.

I admired Bob Matthews's work so much and was quite concerned that we do everything we could as a government to support that cause, and I was on a tour of the building where their offices were. I saw some pictures, just very tiny snapshots, literally and figuratively, of what they were dealing with. I can't get the images out of my mind, the young children in these pictures. It's just unspeakable what was being done to them. Some of them looked as young as six, seven, nine years old. The look in their eyes was just unforgettable. After seeing that, I certainly would support anybody in any measure that they want to take to do everything we can as a government and as a society to eliminate child pornography and child prostitution.

Having said that—and I am supporting the bill and so is my caucus—I know that Marion Boyd spoke to the bill before and we expressed some concerns, not about the intent, and I believe there are a few changes made in the legislation to reflect some of the concerns that have been raised in the past. Some of those are still concerns and I believe those are concerns we can deal with and should deal with, but they need to be pointed out again.

I know that Ms Boyd, back in 1998, expressed concern with respect to the apprehension of a child without a warrant. Although the wording does seem to provide protection to police officers in that they can do that if a "child's life or safety is seriously and imminently endangered," it goes on after that to place some pretty onerous requirements on child protection workers to follow up after the police. So throughout we have been

concerned and are concerned with that enormous onus on the child protection worker to show cause why the confinement was necessary.

We also expressed concerns, and I will again today, that the legislation might conflict with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That's something we always have to look at to make sure that when we move forward with this kind of legislation, it won't be thrown out because of that. In particular, the concern is in regard to the confinement without a warrant of persons who may or may not have been involved in a criminal offence. Section 9 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms indicates that "everyone has the right not to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned."

Having raised those concerns again, we did then and still do support the intent of the legislation and many aspects of the legislation.

I would say that this is a good opportunity to discuss as well the issue around the government providing an opportunity, as we discuss these issues, to establish programs that are necessary to assist children in ending their involvement in prostitution and also to designate protective safe houses under the act.

I think that is incredibly important, and I think it's incredibly important to talk about the support systems that are in place to help children even before they go down that road, to help families cope with difficulties within their families, to have enough counsellors and social workers in the schools, to have enough licensed child care centres, to invest in early years programs, to make sure that we have programs to help those children when they are apprehended. We have to think about: What happens to them when they are finally released from that custody? What kinds of programs are out there? What kind of education opportunities, work opportunities, support systems are there for them, and in many cases their families, to help them cope with the problems that may have led the children there in the first place?

We very much support the intention of this legislation to find a way of intervening and apprehending the abused, and the welfare of children, but we also continue to have some concerns about certain sections, and we would look forward now to having the opportunity to propose some amendments.

We also welcome the opportunity the legislation presents to reflect on the pathetic underfunding of family and children's services. The government can get up and brag all they want about services they've put in place, but the reality is—and we cannot avoid talking about this, I would say to the members of the Tory government who are here today—we need to look very closely at where the cuts have been made and the kind of impact that is having on the supports that are so important to the children of our society.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Niagara Falls is not in his seat.

Ms Churley: The government members don't like to hear this, but we cannot talk about this legislation today

without talking about the proper supports being in place. For instance, the budget that just came out was a complete blow to child advocates. There was not one penny in that budget for early childhood years or to help poor families who need assistance.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Niagara Falls knows that he must be in his seat if he's to say anything. The next time, I will have to name him.

Ms Churley: Some of the government members are getting agitated here. I would say again that we cannot have this kind of discussion today without talking about resources. It's all very well to put a law in place that we agree with in principle and have nice chats about it here in the Legislature, and then not have a commitment to have the proper resources put in place. You can apprehend a child, but if the supports are not there to help that child afterwards, then that becomes a problem.

I say with the greatest respect that we should get away from the rhetoric and look at where there are holes in the system, where cuts have been made that are actually making it harder for families, particularly poor families, to get by and to get the help they need when they need it.

Despite the claims to the contrary, the government isn't spending a penny on early childhood, the early years. The \$30 million the government announced is a re-announcement of an old idea, and they're not even going to spend that \$30 million this year; they're waiting until the early years task group reports back in May of next year. I raise this because when we're talking about the protection of children, I think we in this place would agree, all of us, that early years intervention, early years development and education have been proven without a shadow of a doubt to be very important for the development of children later on in life. If you have good programs in place—good licensed child care, good early years programs—that can have a profound impact on the nature and the character of that child and that child's ability to learn and grow and flourish. That is absolutely necessary.

1130

I would suggest to the government today, when we talk about this issue, that we also talk about and think about the supports that need to be put in place.

I heard the member from the Tory caucus speak earlier about all the things the government has done. I presume that if the government uses this opportunity to talk about and brag about the things they feel good about, then I should have the opportunity to talk about the areas where I believe there are gaps and problems, where the cuts have hurt, where we have to invest more and where I saw holes and gaps in previous governments, including my own. What's unfortunate is that some of those holes and gaps have been widened under the watch of this government, so we do need to have that kind of discussion.

It's a fact that there are fewer police per capita on the street now, for instance, than when the NDP was in government, yet the government continues to brag about its law-and-order regime and agenda. At the same time,

we know that our police are still grossly underfunded. There are still, to this day, despite what they say, 818 fewer police per person on our streets than there were in 1995. That's a fact.

It is a fact that children's mental health has been severely underfunded and has been cut, and the waiting lists for children who are in dire need of help and support—and their families need that support—are just off the page. Thousands are having to wait. That does not bode well for the future of those children if they can't get the supports and the help they need when they're young and troubled and need some kind of intervention.

I support the legislation before us today and again congratulate the member for bringing it forward. I hope very much that the government will vote along with the Liberals and the NDP, as I believe they will, in support of this bill. Also, as they discuss it with the minister responsible, I hope they will look at where there are gaps in the system and talk about the kinds of resources that would be needed to make the act work, if passed, because an act passed without the resources to make it work is not worth the paper it's written on. It's nice to have it on the books but it won't really protect those children.

I don't believe a large amount of resources would be needed up front. Considering the revenues that we're enjoying these days, surely the government would be able to find the revenues and make this bill effective. It could go a long way in protecting those children who are being abused by some of the worst scumbags in our society. I would say that I'm very pleased about the fine and the jail sentence, because they're the ones we need to go after. I would even like to see that higher.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford):

I'm very pleased to join in the debate on Bill 6 with respect to child prostitution. Certainly our government is committed to protecting vulnerable children. Let's be clear: We are willing to listen to any meaningful ideas about how to address the issue of child prostitution.

I'm certain everyone in this House is disturbed by the knowledge that children in this province are being used and manipulated by drug dealers and pimps. I'm confident that everyone would agree that if there are good ideas about how we as a government and as a society can help free these children from the clutches of people like this, we should look at them.

On the surface, the spirit of this bill seems to be in the right place and I'm comfortable saying that I think a more careful examination in committee will certainly be worthwhile. The focus of that examination may, in part, involve this, because in Alberta they do have legislation, but there are some subtle differences between the Alberta legislation and Bill 6 with respect to the apprehension of the child, as to who does that, and confinement.

In Bill 6, on the basis of a warrant or a court order, the police officer would be able to forcibly enter a premises to search for a child and, if necessary, apprehend the child and take the child to his or her parents etc. In Alberta the apprehension is on the basis of a warrant or a court order, a police officer or a child protection worker.

That's the subtle difference between Bill 6 and Alberta's legislation with respect to the apprehension on a warrant or a court order.

Where there is no warrant or court order, a police officer, under Bill 6, would be able to forcibly search a premises and apprehend a child, whereas in Alberta, without a warrant or court order, a police officer or child protection worker would be able to forcibly search a premises, apprehend a child and convey the child to a protective safe house if he or she has reason to believe the life or safety of the child in need of protection is seriously and imminently endangered. The difference is, with or without warrant, under Bill 6 it's the police officer who apprehends; under the Alberta law, it's broader: the police officer or child protection worker.

With respect to detention, under Bill 6 a child may be detained in a protective safe house for three days, during which time the child protection worker may return the child to a parent or guardian, release the child if he or she can provide for self, or apply for a supervision or wardship order. Under the Alberta legislation, a child may be detained in a protective safe house for three days, during which time the child protection worker must either return the child to a parent or guardian, release the child if he or she is 16 years or older and can provide for self, or apply for a supervision or guardianship order. So there is an age distinction with respect to detention between Alberta and Ontario. Also, under Bill 6 a child protection worker could continue to confine a child to a protective safe house pending the outcome of a hearing for a supervision or wardship order, so it's subject to the process, whereas in Alberta there is no explicit authority to continue to confine a child in a protective safe house beyond three days.

Those are issues where there is a difference between Alberta and Ontario, and obviously the member will have to explain why he chose to draft it the way he did. A committee could also look at it and say whether what's being proposed under Bill 6 has more merit than what's being done in Alberta, and take a look at the history out there. I think that's something important that we should be looking at.

With respect to the preamble of the bill, certainly no one would question that. "The people of Ontario believe that, (a) the safety, security and well-being of children and families is of paramount concern for all residents of Ontario" certainly goes without saying.

In closing, because my time is limited, I just want to comment on some of the statements in terms of funding that were mentioned by the member for Broadview-Greenwood. It's my understanding that the funding for children's protective services has increased by 80% since 1995 and that the funding formula is based on caseloads. In other words, if the caseload increases, the funding automatically increases. I think this government has put together an approach that is in the best interests of the child and his or her protection.

1140

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): I am pleased to join this debate, pleased to support the Bartolucci bill, but I

am in very good company. It would appear that the Bartolucci bill has been endorsed by everybody from Mother Teresa to Chief Fantino, and it is my great pleasure to say that this bill has been endorsed by over 30 police organizations, that this bill has been endorsed by victims' groups, by community leaders and by everybody who understands the scourge of child prostitution and its effect on our society and on our province. My city, Toronto, is the place of origin of 53% of the prostitutes in this country. This is an issue for my riding of St Paul's, and the people of St Paul's expect this Legislature to do something about this scourge. The Bartolucci bill does just that.

As the member for Sudbury pointed out, child prostitution is not as it is depicted in Hollywood. This is not Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*. In fact, pimps control child prostitutes through battering, through drugs and through alcohol. Child prostitutes are victims of AIDS, of sexually transmitted diseases. They are prey for muggers, rapists and murderers. They have left our society, per se; they are not in it. They carry the stigma of being prostitutes. They carry the stigma of being outsiders.

Right now, the main response to it is the criminal justice system, and it's a punitive response. The Bartolucci bill is a way for our society and our province to reach out to these people who are being stigmatized and abused, and pull them back in. This is an opportunity for us as a society to literally rescue these people at the stage of them being children and pull them out of the hell they live in.

There may be some who question the constitutional status of this legislation, and we should always ensure that the legislation brought before this House meets with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and other constitutional obligations. That goes without saying. But I hope that that in no way gets in the way of us in this Legislature moving forward on this bill and passing it.

It has passed second reading before. What is important is that we see it come to fruition, that we see it happen. We all agree that it is a problem. We all agree that this is a solution, that this is a constructive response and a way to deal with it. The fact that there may be some charter issues is the case with just about any bill that affects the liberty of individuals. I hope that the principles of fundamental justice under the Charter of Rights will recognize that not only is the charter there to protect people's civil liberties against state intrusions, but it is also there to permit the state to reach out and rescue those who are in so desperate need of rescue.

For thousands of years prostitutes, child and otherwise, have been outcasts in our society and in our province. Many people will look and think, "Why did they make that choice?" But these children did not make any choice, at the very least. They made no choice at all. They were forced into this life through a history of abuse in their family or otherwise.

If there is a level of individual culpability, I can assure you that once they are brought back into our society through the Bartolucci bill, they'll be willing to accept

that. But here is an opportunity for us to support a bill that permits us to prevent the continued scourge of child prostitution, that can rescue these children from the horrible life they now are in. I'm very proud to sit on this side of the House with the member for Sudbury and support this bill.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I'm delighted to be able to stand up and debate this bill today. I'd like to compliment Rick Bartolucci, the member for Sudbury, for bringing forward this bill. I know he does it with a great deal of principle. He very strongly believes in protection for our children. He has, as well, an accompanying piece of legislation, Bill 32, which I know he would like to bring forward for second reading at some time as well.

But knowing his principle in this and his concern for the children, I would like to point out—I know he remembers this—that there was another piece of legislation which our government brought forward which dealt with safety of children. It was the Safe Streets Act. Mr Bartolucci, the member for Sudbury, mentioned that Julian Fantino supported Bill 6. Well, Julian Fantino, the chief of the Metro Toronto police force, also supported the Safe Streets Act. I would like to know how he justifies using Chief Fantino's support for Bill 6 when he would not accept Chief Fantino's support for the Safe Streets Act.

There is a factor that I think we might take into account here, and that is that the Liberals felt that they had to oppose the Safe Streets Act because they are Her Majesty's loyal opposition. I'm sure that is the only thing that entered into their minds, and Mr Bartolucci, the member for Sudbury, along with many other members of the opposition, felt that they were subjected to the whip of that party and that they must do the whip's bidding. I know the member for Sudbury did not speak against the Safe Streets Act, and I give him credit for that. However, he did not stand by his principles and vote for the Safe Streets Act. He actually came into this House and voted against the Safe Streets Act. I would like to say to the member for Sudbury that I know it went against your grain to do that but that you were whipped to do it. There is room on this side of the House for you at any time, because your principles are our principles in this respect.

Now, the NDP voted against the Safe Streets Act too, but we expect that of the NDP. We don't expect that of you.

I do want to say that this Bill 6 is a good piece of legislation. There are amendments that need to be made. There's one that I have concerns about, that the police or the safe house may "release the child if, in the opinion of the child protection worker, the child is capable of providing for the child's own needs and safety." Had the child been capable of providing for his or her own safety, I think he or she wouldn't have been taken off the streets by the police in the first place.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I rise today with a great deal of pride in speaking to this bill and also a great deal of pride and respect for the member for Sudbury, contrary

to what we just heard, which very much disappoints me, that we've turned child prostitution into a political agenda. I say to the member opposite that I'm very disappointed, extremely disappointed, and I know that the people in his riding would be disappointed that he took an opportunity to do such a thing. With the fact that we have children who are being affected on a daily basis and as we very well speak, it's disappointing to know that someone would take an opportunity to turn this into some type of agenda other than to protect those kids.

I would say very clearly that there are some members opposite who did take the time to offer constructive criticism, who did take the opportunity to express very clearly that they will be supporting the bill and that they would probably be making some recommendations at a later date at committee. I want to thank them for that, and I respect you for that. Yes, sir. You got it, Joe.

I want to make sure that people understand what we're talking about. A survey of youth conducted in 1998 by an outreach service organization that deals with child prostitutes gave us this information: regarding the age when they were first left at home alone, 45% of those 16 and over who were left alone have left home; 51% from the ages of 11 to 15 left home; those who have a life experience at home of serious conflicts, 63%; physical abuse, 45%; sexual abuse, 38%; those involved in CAS backgrounds, 48%; and the one that bothers me the most, 41% of those prostitutes had their first experience, their first trick, at 10 to 15 years of age, and 56% at 16 to 20. What does this point to? This points to the adults in our society who have made it their business to take advantage of and abuse our children. Mr Bartolucci's bill takes a step towards that—that we want to correct the problem.

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This is not the opportunity, this is not the moment, this is not the time in our history in this Legislature to try to win political points at the expense of our children. We must not, we cannot, the public doesn't want us to score political points on children. What we want to do is take the right action. This is the right action. Make the amendments, make the recommendations and move on with it.

As I stated in this House yesterday and this morning, the private member's bill needs to take on new life. We have to remove as much of the political party line as possible and move on to the legislation that speaks to the right thing.

The honourable member Mr Hastings made comment this morning, and we made those comments. I want to tell him very clearly that it was not a political issue. We spoke to the private member's bill in a way for it to move on. I want to say that yesterday, the historic moment when a committee put forward a bill, all members of this House moved as quickly as possible because it was the right thing to do.

This is the right thing to do. Our children must be protected. As the NDP member pointed out, and I agree with her, we must put our money where our mouth is. We must make the statement in this province of Ontario—and I would say further, in the country of Canada—that

we will not tolerate the abuse of our children in any way, shape or form. I would say to you that we must not politicize it. We must make it a priority. We must make the statement in law and in process and in finance that our children must be safe.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Sudbury has two minutes to respond.

Mr Bartolucci: I would like to thank all the members of the House who took part in the debate. Certainly it was a very controlled and meaningful debate, from my perspective, and I thank you for it.

In conclusion, I would like to read from a letter that Dr Fred Mathews, who works with the Central Toronto Youth Services, wrote in support of my Bill 32, which Mr Wettlaufer referred to. He says:

"I have spent my professional life as a psychologist and social scientist advocating for the needs of high-risk youth. Young people on the street are an especially vulnerable group. They are subject to all types of hardship and violence. They are often preyed upon by unscrupulous adults who exploit these desperate young people's need to survive...."

"I wholeheartedly support and endorse any and all actions that will help protect these young people and hold their abusers accountable. I believe it is up to us as a society, in the name of justice, to use any and every legal means at our disposal to protect vulnerable children and youth."

And so, my fellow parliamentarians, if you believe that children engaged in prostitution are victims of sexual abuse and require protection, and if you agree that it is the duty of the province to assist families and communities in providing that protection, and if you believe it is important for us to ensure, with unanimity, that the message to those poor, vulnerable children is loud and clear: "There is an avenue for you to explore in order to change your lifestyle and your life.—If you believe, I ask you to support this legislation.

E-COMMERCE ACT, 2000

LOI DE 2000 SUR LE COMMERCE ÉLECTRONIQUE

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): We will now deal with ballot item 23.

Mr Hastings has moved second reading of Bill 70, An Act with respect to Electronic Information, Documents and Payments. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Pursuant to the standing orders, this bill will be referred to the committee of the whole House.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): I'd like to refer Bill 70 to the standing committee on general government.

The Acting Speaker: Shall this bill be referred to the standing committee on general government? Agreed.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN INVOLVED
IN PROSTITUTION ACT, 1999

LOI DE 1999 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES ENFANTS QUI SE LIVRENT
À LA PROSTITUTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): We'll now deal with ballot item 24.

Mr Bartolucci has moved second reading of Bill 6, An Act to protect Children involved in Prostitution. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? The motion is carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, the bill is referred to the committee of the whole House.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I'd like this to be referred to the committee on general government as well.

The Acting Speaker: Shall this bill be referred to the standing committee on general government? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' business having now been completed, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1157 to 1330.

MEMBER'S STATEMENTS

HIGHWAY NOISE BARRIERS

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I'd like to bring up a concern that my constituents in Don Valley East, particularly in the Henry Farm community, have with the Minister of Transportation, Mr Turnbull, in his refusal to act upon the request for a much-needed sound barrier at Havenbrook Park.

The residents of Henry Farm have been subject to living with unacceptably high noise levels for far too long. Residents have repeatedly made requests to the minister to rectify the situation, and to this date absolutely nothing has come of it. The minister himself has admitted to me personally that the noise levels are well over the prescribed limits, and yet he continues to force the residents of the Henry Farm community to suffer under excessive noise pollution on a daily basis.

A simple solution can be sought. Extending the existing barrier will greatly reduce the noise emanating from the busy Highway 401, and yet the minister has refused to act because in his opinion the reduction is not enough to bring the noise down to acceptable levels. Instead he has chosen to let the members of the community have their voices drowned out by unacceptably high noise levels.

The minister claims it is too expensive and a waste of taxpayer's dollars. However, the taxpayers of Henry Farm disagree and see far greater waste in irresponsible government spending by Mike Harris and his government. The noise barrier would bring great relief to this community, and it is in dire need. I refuse to let the Henry Farm residents be drowned out by Minister

Turnbull and demand that the minister act to bring peace and quiet to this much-deserving community.

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): Next week is the 30th National Police Week. This is a week set aside to recognize the contributions of the brave and dedicated women and men who serve in law enforcement across this province.

This is an important week for the people of Ontario to get to know their local police officers. Community policing depends on a strong familiarity between civilians and the police officers who patrol our streets, and this week will provide Ontarians with a splendid opportunity to cement that relationship.

This year's Police Week will be especially poignant, with our new memorial to the 200 officers who gave their lives in the line of duty. The memorial stands right across the street from this Legislature. Do you know why? It is there to remind us that the laws we make as legislators will ultimately have to be enforced by our brave police women and men, sometimes at the ultimate cost of their lives.

I would like to take this opportunity to salute Chief Noel Catney and the women and men of the Peel Regional Police Service. Chief Catney has worked hard to make Peel Region one of the safest places in Ontario to work, live and raise our families. Through the chief's leadership, Peel police officers and members of my constituency have built a very positive relationship based on co-operation and trust.

I hope all members present will join with me in saluting all the members of the Peel Regional Police Service and all police forces across Ontario. I wish all our police officers a fantastic Police Week, and I am pleased to note that as the memorial to the fallen officers states, these women and men are indeed "Heroes in Life" to millions of Ontarians every day.

SULPHUR IN GASOLINE

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): With the Environment Ministry battered by yet another round of cuts in its budget, Ontario Environment Minister Dan Newman has made a desperate attempt to divert attention from the damage caused by the slashing of his budget.

The Minister, astonishingly, as environmental insiders would observe, is now desperately calling upon the federal government to do what the Harris government already has the power to do itself: move quickly to reduce the sulphur content of gasoline.

Everyone will recall that it was the Harris government that stood shoulder to shoulder with the big oil companies in trying to thwart attempts by the federal government to pass a regulation to require the oil giants to produce gas with an average sulphur content no greater than 30 parts per million.

With smog alerts already warning residents of Ontario's polluted air, and criticism of the Harris cuts of one third of the environment ministry staff and almost 40% of the budget ringing in their ears, the Harris Tories, full of newly acquired bluster are once again pointing the finger of blame elsewhere.

The government of British Columbia regulates the sulphur content of gas sold in its province. For years, Ontario has regulated volatile organic compounds in Ontario gas. If the Harris regime has genuinely reversed its previous pro-pollution position on sulphur in gas, I call upon the minister not to pass the buck, but to introduce a regulation requiring that by January 1, 2002, all gas sold in Ontario must have, on average, a sulphur content of no more than 30 parts per million. Your bluff, Minister, has been called.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I rise today in honour of the Ontario Special Olympics, which are being held in York region, starting today, May 11, and ending May 14. I have the privilege of attending the opening ceremonies this evening at the York region administration building.

York region is incredibly fortunate to have been given the opportunity to host these games. I have also been given the honour of being a presenter for the medal winners. With over 900 athletes and coaches, 1,500 volunteers and hundreds of sponsors, this weekend's games are sure to be a success for all participants.

Special Olympics provide athletes who have a mental disability with the opportunity to experience and succeed in sport. Special Olympians gain self-confidence and transfer their success from the playing field to other aspects of their lives.

The five provincial championship sport competitions are: five-pin bowling, which will be taking place at Stellar Lanes in Newmarket; 10-pin bowling, which will be taking place at Club 300 in Markham; powerlifting, at St Andrew's College in Aurora; swimming, at the Richvale pool in Richmond Hill; and floor hockey, at the Williams complex in Vaughan.

Events such as the Special Olympics would not be possible without the hundreds of volunteers and sponsors, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them. I would also like to congratulate all the participants in the games and to wish them the best of luck in their events.

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I rise today to request that the Minister of Health order her ministry officials to implement the Ontario Review Board's decision of November 8, 1999, to have a forensics patient moved from the St Thomas psychiatric hospital to Whitby mental health centre.

This issue is surrounded by tragic circumstances. Brian Crocker, a father and husband, was shot three times

at point-blank range at his home in December 1995. Through unbelievable odds, Mr Crocker fought to survive. This is not the only fight Mr Crocker has had. The Crockers were left out of previous review board hearings that allowed the patient to be transferred from Penetanguishene to St Thomas psychiatric hospital, less than five kilometres from Mr Crocker's home. The review board assessed these circumstances and agreed that the patient should be relocated because he posed a direct threat to Mr Crocker.

Mr Crocker is in fear of his life. The administrator of the psych hospital claims he does not know why the order has not been carried out. Is our mental health system in such disarray and so underfunded that the quality of life and safety of victims have to be jeopardized? Is this government concerned at all about victims' rights? The last line of the review board's judgment commands the psychiatric hospital, by order of Her Majesty, to execute the terms of the disposition. Mr Crocker and his family have waited five long months for the transfer and demand that this issue be resolved now, Minister of Health.

I am providing the minister with a package that will give her all the information that will apprise her fully of this situation so that she can move on this issue immediately.

MOTHER'S DAY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Mother's Day on May 7, 1982, will be remembered as the saddest day of my life. As everyone knows, this coming Sunday, May 14, is Mother's Day. While we have selected one day out of 365 to celebrate the contributions made by our mothers, the sentiments of this day really should be applied every day of our lives. Mothers are our teachers, our healers, our caregivers, our friends and our advisers. The contributions made by mothers make our society and the work we do important; they are immeasurable.

The origins of Mother's Day stretch back to the Greeks and Romans and to the Middle Ages, but the events we know today were originated in the United States by Anna Jarvis in the early 1900s. Ironically, Anna never became a mother herself. She began a letter-writing campaign shortly after her mother's death in 1905. Miss Jarvis believed that oftentimes children did not appreciate their mothers enough, and hoped that a Mother's Day would increase respect and strengthen the family bond. Over the next few years, Mother's Day was celebrated across Canada and many other countries.

This Sunday, I encourage all families to share with one another, respect their parents, buy them flowers, take them out for dinner and enjoy the day.

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EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): The crisis in hospital emergency rooms is happening again. In

fact, it's happening still. Tuesday afternoon, only two of Toronto's 25 emergency rooms were taking new patients. All the rest were on redirect or critical care bypass. There was no flu outbreak to blame it on this time, just a one-day heat wave.

It was a year ago that the Minister of Health assured the people of this province that she had fixed the emergency room problems once and for all. But not so. During the fall months and into December we had an emergency room crisis of unprecedented proportions. There were more emergency rooms on critical care bypass and redirect than ever before in Ontario's history, and this was true right across the province.

In December, the Minister of Health announced that she had a plan to relieve the crisis in Toronto, at least, but the Band-Aid isn't holding. Emergency rooms are still overcrowded and hospitals are stretched beyond their limits. They have no flexibility even to deal with a one-day heat wave. This was never just a flu season fluke and the situation is going to get worse, not better. The government has not put enough money into the budget to meet even existing hospital costs, let alone open up beds that have been closed because of past cuts.

So now emergency rooms are being closed sooner than planned so that hospitals can balance their budgets, as the minister has ordered. The emergency rooms at Branson and Women's College are both to close sooner than planned so that North York and Sunnybrook can balance their budgets. I understand that the Wellesley emergency will now close on October 1. The crisis we saw again this week will grow larger and larger as the summer days get hotter.

SAULT STE MARIE TEEN CENTRE

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): I rise today to share with this House and the province, and in particular my own community, those who don't already know, the wonderful work that is going on under the guise of the Sault Ste Marie Teen Centre.

It's an operation that has come to fruition over a long period of time, with effort put in by literally hundreds of people, volunteers, to see that there would be some place in Sault Ste Marie that teenagers, young people, could go, on a weekend particularly but also during the week, for various activities—cultural, educational and recreational—that were safe and positive re some opportunity for young people to explore relationships, build on some of the giftedness that's there already and, in that, to permeate the rest of the community with positive experiences and view and effort on behalf of young people and those who work with them.

They have identified and have been living in a home now, the old Sault Collegiate building on top of the hill. Those who know Sault Ste Marie will know of that as a very historic building, a school that has a long history in Sault Ste Marie that's very positive. The teen centre has claimed that as their own. They are struggling at the moment around the question of financing and how they

will continue that. They are appealing to the Algoma District School Board and the municipal council to continue to support them, and I encourage them to do the same.

YORK REGION ECONOMY

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): I'm honoured to rise today as the representative for the riding of Thornhill as well as a resident of York region. York region is in the midst of a period of tremendous growth. In fact, according to the community newspaper which serves the riding of Thornhill, the region currently "boasts the biggest residential construction boom in all of Canada, while maintaining the lowest level of unemployment in the entire greater Toronto area at just 4.1%. Almost 34,000 homes were either completed or started in 1999." Condominium development has increased throughout York region and a number of construction companies and their related suppliers report tremendous growth. This is a true testament to York region's strong economy and popularity for both business and the residents of the region.

York region's economy will only continue to get stronger. According to the same community newspaper: "There are 20 companies in the region which employ more than 500 workers. These jobs are not low-level, minimum wage jobs, either. York region offers the high-paying, high-technology jobs" that are required in today's global marketplace and that this Ontario government is proud to continue to promote.

Residential, commercial and industrial growth strongly suggest that York region, including my riding of Thornhill, will continue to be a great place to start a business, to work, to live and to raise a family.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Just before we begin with reports by committees, we have with us today in the members' east gallery Mr Brian Pallister, who is a former cabinet minister in the Manitoba Legislature. Will all members join in welcoming him.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker I have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding sittings of the justice and social policy committee.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Sterling: I move, notwithstanding the order of the House dated May 1, 2000, that the standing

committee on justice and social policy be authorized to meet for an additional two hours during the morning of Monday, May 15, 2000, to consider Bill 62, the Direct Democracy through Municipal Referendums Act, 2000; and

That the committee be authorized to meet for four days between May 17 and May 26, 2000, inclusively, for the consideration of Bill 69, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 in relation to the construction industry.

The Speaker: All those in favour? Agreed.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION REFORM

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): As you know, over the past five years the Ontario government has been working to improve the quality of education across the province.

Our goal is quite simple: better quality and more accountability. We are systematically working our way through the commitments we made to voters about how we would achieve these improvements. From more money in the classroom to a more rigorous curriculum, from more parental involvement to standardized testing, we are increasing quality and accountability standards in our schools.

This morning I announced another step in our plan for quality education, a step we told voters we would take, a step that will create a comprehensive teacher-testing program to raise the quality of teaching in Ontario, a step that will raise the quality of the education our students receive.

Every parent knows how important a teacher can be to his or her child's future. They know what a difference a teacher can make from year to year. Ontario has many excellent teachers in our classrooms who do make that difference, teachers who know their subject matter inside out, who have a range of teaching strategies that effectively communicate that information and the skills to inspire learning. That excellence should be recognized.

But every parent also knows that there are teachers who are not meeting these standards, teachers who have not worked to upgrade and update their skills and knowledge.

The system does not help. There are no consistent, province-wide standards for what a teacher should do to stay as up to date as possible; for the procedures boards and principals should use to evaluate teachers; for the support that new teachers need; for the procedures for dealing with an incompetent teacher. Equally important, there is no formal role for parents in the assessment of teachers.

We have looked at the best of what other professions and jurisdictions are doing to address this challenge. We

have listened carefully to what our education partners have advised.

The announcement I made this morning, the implementation framework for our new Ontario teacher testing program, is a made-in-Ontario approach that deals with all of these challenges. It sets new standards, new expectations and strikes a fair and reasonable balance between the assessment of knowledge and critical classroom skills. It will provide parents and students the assurance that teachers are as up to date as possible and doing the best job possible.

This far-reaching initiative, which will deal with new teachers entering the profession as well as established teachers, builds on the reforms already in place to improve student achievement and it responds to the concerns we've been hearing from parents and students. It will ensure that Ontario's students will receive the best possible education.

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This program has three key elements.

First, beginning next fall, all established teachers will have to be recertified every five years to ensure that they are as up to date in their knowledge and skills as possible. To be recertified, teachers will have to successfully complete a number of required courses, including written tests and/or other assessments, to do this. Many teachers, as we know, already undertake certain professional development activities or take extra courses that will allow them to teach additional grades and subjects, and these activities can also count towards recertification.

Second, in 2001, all new teachers will have to pass a qualifying test before they receive their certification to teach in Ontario. This will ensure that they have the knowledge and the skills required to enter our classrooms. We will also be designing an induction program, similar to an internship, that will help new teachers develop good classroom management and teaching skills through coaching and support from more experienced colleagues. Again, as we all know, many experienced teachers already provide this support, but much more needs to be done to make sure that those teachers get that good start in those crucial early years.

Third, by next fall we will establish new province-wide standards to ensure that all teachers are evaluated by boards and principals in the same consistent way across the province. This will include a role for parents. Standards will include strategies to ensure that low-performing teachers are given the time, supports and the opportunities needed to improve. But these strategies will also include a new review process to determine if teachers who are not meeting the standards should have their certification removed.

In addition, effective this June, we will require that all teachers new to Ontario who were trained in a language other than English or French must pass an oral and written language test in either of these languages before entering the teaching profession in Ontario.

Quality teaching is also about excellence and accountability. That is why we will be looking at ways to do quality assurance through a third-party process that includes parents, educators and experts, and respond to the recommendations of the Education Improvement Commission.

Finally, because we believe that excellence deserves recognition, we want to develop a system that does indeed recognize that teaching excellence. We will continue to work with all of our education partners to further design and implement these very important initiatives.

Teachers are not alone in facing the challenges to make all of their members as good as they can be. Whether it is the health, legal, engineering, accounting or other professions, they all have a variety of entry requirements, standards for professional development, ongoing assessment, accountability practices, and many are working to improve these strategies. Working with our education partners to implement this program will bring the teaching profession into line with what's happening in other countries and in other professions. This is an important step because it clearly recognizes that one of the foundations of quality education is quality teaching. It will help ensure that our students get the best education possible, and that is a win for everyone.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): It is passing strange that the minister would stand in this House two days in a row to announce how badly their education reforms are going, to show us again a government with an utter lack of direction when it comes to education. Minister, we have here, as you know, the cabinet submission on teacher testing. This document should be copied for all the teachers in the province so they can see just how political a ploy this minister is taking today, how little this is based on any reference to what's good for children, how instead this is a government looking to undermine—and the minister used the word “systematically.” The only thing that's systematic about this government's approach to education is undermining the professionalism of teachers every chance they can.

Nowhere in this document is to be found a teacher test. There is no document here that says whether people are teachers. Instead, during the election the government gave the electorate the impression that all teachers will be required to participate in testing programs. They talked about recertification examinations. They said they would do that. But what was it but a crass political ploy to attack teachers and try to gain some votes? A year later the minister still can't produce a test. Instead we have an immense mass of duplication. We have a language proficiency test which duplicates one that already exists. We have exit exams for new teachers that duplicate what is already in the colleges.

We wholeheartedly agree that there should be accountability. What we don't think is that it should be a political process controlled by this government. Instead, we challenge this government to treat teachers with the

respect they deserve, and allow teachers to regulate their professional behaviour through their college. But for some specific reason this government refuses to accord respect to our teachers. Then this government has the audacity to dwell on the shortcomings of some teachers when their shortcomings in education are so manifest and they want us to support a policy that is based on their misperceptions of what the system should be. Even at this late date, in an era where they've imposed all manner of changes on the quality of the teaching experience, they won't extend respect to teachers.

What is in this document is very instructive. What is in this document are conference calls with people in Tennessee. What is in this document is quality assurance teams that will be based on private sector input. What is based in this minister's mind, and I guess this government's direction, is the view of a school as a factory. This is the view of a school as producing widgets, to be done at the lowest cost and with the least amount of care and professionalism. That is the only consistent thread in what the minister is announcing today.

We could write this off as just another failed political promise, another thing where this government didn't know what they were doing. As Bill Davis said, when he looked down his glasses at the minister at the OISE awards of excellence—by the way, another duplication. The government will bring in its own awards of excellence. I guess they didn't like the Bill Davis award. But Bill Davis said to this minister, “Don't do a written test.” Today we find out that basically there really isn't an overall written test, because that's not possible; the government's position was untenable in the first place.

What we also find out in this big hullabaloo about teacher testing is that there won't be any examinations or in fact anything in this program for two years for experienced teachers. We find out that in June we can expect a photo op with some kind of demonstration test. What we don't find from this minister and from this government is any sincere interest in getting to the bottom of how to support teachers better and how to give kids in the classroom a better learning experience. If there were, there wouldn't be this obsession with centralized bureaucracy. Fifteen million dollars, which I guess all these members are supporting, for a new centralized bureaucracy, on top of \$53 million—new spending for the bureaucracy, taken away from the kids. Some \$1.6 billion has been taken away and nothing put back except more bureaucracy. That's not even a good version of the private sector.

We want to advise this minister that our view is to treat teachers with respect. The fact that you can't bring yourself to that today means that you shouldn't get any for this proposal.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I can see how the Minister of Education just relishes making fun of the opposition, and she'll continue to do that. I'm going to keep an eye on her as she does this.

Madame Ecker, I have a movie to recommend to you. I recently saw *The Gladiator*. Perhaps you haven't seen it

yet, but I recommend it to you. In this movie there is a well-known figure, Caesar, who of course knows the Romans are hungry for bread. But in order to satisfy another hunger—not for bread but the thirst for blood—he opens up the Colosseum again and opens up the games, so that the slaves could go into the Colosseum and die as man with honour. You would like that movie, Madame Ecker. It's right up your alley.

To move to another political figure I'm sure you know, Machiavelli, a countryman of mine—mind you that was 500 years ago or so—but I suspect you understand Machiavelli more than most of us. You guys are good. I don't think I need to explain who he is, because you know him well, and you are the best Machiavellians I have ever seen in my 10 years in this place. You are good, Madame Ecker. You're good. Not just you—all of you are good. You're among the best I've seen.

1400

Take Bill 160. Bill 160 was designed to squeeze money. Madame Ecker and the others say, "No, no, the reason we're controlling education is so we could give more money." She laughs and scoffs at the opposition when we say they've taken money out. She laughs and says: "Ha, ha, that's not true at all. We've given more money. Check your facts." You're good.

They divide classroom and non-classroom funding. "Classroom funding," she says, "has been increased. Non-classroom funding, which includes secretaries, heating, principals, vice-principals, caretakers—these people don't matter." So you take money out of that pot called non-classroom education, Monsieur Sampson, and then you say: "Ah, but we're increasing classroom funding. It's OK if we take it from some other source because they're not teachers and it's not part of the classroom. Therefore, we haven't decreased funding, have we?" It's very clever. It's Machiavellian, as you can see. "School closures are irrelevant. They had to be done, but we didn't do it as a government. The boards did it. Go after the boards," says Madame Ecker.

You're destroying the educational system, Ecker, you are. Your constant cuts remove any hope of providing quality education on a daily basis. We hear of dirty classrooms, schools with fewer maintenance workers and secretaries, schools sharing principals. The list goes on. People are fundraising till they drop. People are fundraising to make up for the underfunding of the education system, yet you continue to deny we've got a problem.

Just a couple of months ago you said: "We don't have a problem with special ed. Oh, no, there's no problem with special ed." All of a sudden she announces \$40 million. In the budget they announce \$100 million. To hear her say it, a couple of weeks ago, "We don't have a problem with special ed." Then magically \$140 million appears and, "We've solved the problem." But all along she denied that we had a problem. Poor teachers and poor victims and poor parents.

We had the code of conduct announced a couple of weeks ago. We had a code of behaviour in 1994, introduced by the New Democrats, a comprehensive docu-

ment that dealt well with discipline problems, including expulsion of students who commit serious problems in our school system. But that's not good enough. No, no, Madame Ecker has to introduce a code of behaviour, a code of conduct. Why? "Because it's going to be tougher than the previous one. So we disguise the previous code of behaviour and say, 'Not good, code of conduct better.'" You guys are good. Ecker, you are good.

Yesterday's announcements: "We make teachers teach longer. Why? Because the public believes teachers are underworked and overpaid. So what are we going to do? We're going to make them teach longer, save a couple of hundred million, put it back into the school system and say, 'We're putting up a couple of hundred million to make the education system better.'"

Today, it's teacher testing. "Oh, no, it's only Earl Manners who says teacher testing. This is not what it's about," she said today at the press conference. Yet the first line says, "To ensure Ontario students receive the highest quality education, teachers will be recertified every five years under the teacher testing program." That's what she wants the public to know, that teachers are incompetent and they're lazy, and that this minister and this government are going to fix that with a teacher testing program, which she denies is what is happening.

Minister, you are good. I can only hope that the parents and the teachers are well aware of what you're doing and will fight back, like in Nova Scotia.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO REALTY CORP

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is to the Chair of Management Board. My question is about the ongoing Tory public land scandal involving millions and millions of dollars of taxpayers' money in the province of Ontario. A very simple question, Minister: Have you ever attended board meetings of the Ontario Realty Corp, either in person or by conference call, where landfills were being discussed?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): In direct answer, I think it's on the record. I've mentioned in this House before that from time to time I've gone to board meetings of the Ontario Realty Corp. I'm not there when they discuss actual properties or the day-to-day operations. They're accountable for that. But they do report to me. Like all other boards that report to me, occasionally I drop in to see how they're doing.

Mr Agostino: Now we know for the record: The minister has confirmed he does attend board meetings. All along the minister has claimed he knows nothing about what is happening. Clearly he knows a lot more about the deals than he's willing to admit to. He's blamed the ORC board on numerous occasions. It doesn't seem consistent with the facts that a minister attends the

meetings either in person or by conference call, as he has confirmed today in the House, but is not there and is always missing in action when these deals are being discussed. Clearly, we're not getting the whole story here.

Minister, I have another question. It's very simple. Has your office or you ever received or asked for briefings prior to land sales being finalized?

Hon Mr Hodgson: From time to time the member of the opposition comes in and waves around pieces of paper. His facts usually aren't accurate. He knows that members of caucus can request information on the dealings of the Ontario Realty Corp. He's requested two such briefings himself. He's rejected them, but they've set them up for him. Other members of your caucus have requested information and the ORC has been more than willing to give that.

Mr Agostino: The minister clearly didn't answer the question. Let's clarify one thing. I have never asked, nor do I believe any members of my caucus have asked, for briefings in regard to specific land deals. General ORC practices; never to specific land deals. I'd like to make that clear.

Second, we have now confirmed that you had 10 board meetings. We know that you and your office receive briefings on land sales prior to these deals going through. We know that ultimately you are responsible. You can't blame the board for these screw-ups, Minister. You can't blame the staff. There's got to be a point where ministerial accountability takes precedence and someone has to say, "I am responsible, I am in charge and I will take whatever action is necessary," including your resignation, "if the system has failed." And clearly the system has failed the taxpayers of Ontario.

Minister, we know you were there. We know you knew what was going on and you did nothing to stop these deals. You cannot continue to pass the buck. You're in charge. You're responsible for this mess at the ORC. Will you today do the responsible thing? Hand in your resignation and let's get to the bottom of this scandal.

Hon Mr Hodgson: First of all, let's review the facts. You're talking about allegations that haven't been proven. The responsible thing to do is to find out if there's any evidence, and if there's evidence, to have an investigation with qualified people.

The board reviewed past sales. They noticed some irregularities. They called in the auditors. The auditors asked for outside forensic accountants to help. They noticed that yes, there are some things here in past transactions that warrant an investigation. They called in the police. The police have determined that they will investigate it. That's the proper thing to do: to find the evidence, get to the bottom of it, get the facts, go through the due process.

I don't know what the Liberal policy is. If you want to be the judge and jury and just make accusations, and then all of a sudden you've damaged hundreds of people's reputations needlessly when the proper steps are being taken—I think that's what really bothers the Liberal

Party. They know that the proper course is to allow the police to conduct their investigation, to ask people who are qualified—forensic accountants—to review these past sales to determine whether the taxpayers are well served or not, and why not.

1410

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I have a question for the Minister of Education. Minister, I want to ask you about the failure of some of your education reforms, particularly about the failure in your own home riding of two boards three years ago to reach a settlement that would serve teachers, students and the system well. Three years ago they failed to reach that kind of agreement. An arbitrator forced on them a particular formula. Rather than trying to find a way to fix that problem in your own backyard, we find you now, three years later, taking that very same formula for the use of teacher time and foisting it on the whole province.

Minister, isn't it simply true that this is the government's attempt to try and bring chaos and difficulty to the whole province because that's what you've found in your home riding? The Durham formula brings us the Durham disease, this discontent between teachers, this impossibility of working out arrangements. I want you to think carefully because people in your own home riding are not happy with the arrangements of the last two years. But 70 out of 72 boards did reach arrangements that serve kids well. That many boards would have been doing that this fall if it hadn't been for your intervention. Minister, how do you explain yourself?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): First of all, there's no difficulty explaining myself because I have the facts, which the honourable member clearly does not appear to have. There are many boards that have agreements that talk about 6.5 out of 8. He might want to check his research on that. It is not fair to say that the only reason the Durham region students have been denied by the union their extracurricular and co-instructional activities for two years is because of 6.5, because other boards have agreements that lay that out.

Secondly, it is also not accurate for this member to say that somehow or other the regulations and the legislation we've put in place are some sort of Durham formula. They are not. As a matter of fact, what we have done is significantly enhance the funding for boards through lower class size in elementary grades, through lower class size in high schools—with \$263 million to back that up—through extra remediation for \$25 million, and teacher adviser time. All of those things are improving the ability of boards to have good quality agreements.

Mr Kennedy: I didn't actually hear any facts from the Minister, except affirming the fact that Durham is a central consideration here, that Durham is why the rest of the province is being inflicted. For example, the \$1.6 billion that this government and these members all agree should be less from their share in the education system,

that happens in Durham too. Durham, it turns out, is the second-lowest funded per capita per student board.

In your own backyard you're underfunding the needs of your kids. In the time you've been in your office, have you actually been able to buckle down and solve that problem? No. Instead, you're passing on the problems from that riding to the rest of the province. You're doing it in a way that even the Sudbury Star says, "Start over." They say your current course is provocative and unnecessary. They want you to sit down with the Durham boards and find a solution that doesn't inflict problems on the rest of the province. But I suspect that the reason you won't do that is because you want the money, the \$1.6 billion you've taken out, and the money that you don't give to Durham to deal with its growth and for their needs. Instead, you want to see something else happen in the education system.

But this is your chance, Minister. Will you stand up today, withdraw the formula that you know is not going to be in the interests of students around the province and deal with the Durham problem where it should be dealt with, in Durham?

Hon Mrs Ecker: Again, let me correct the record since the honourable member keeps confusing it. First of all, we did not take that money out of education. As a matter of fact, there is more there than there was when we came in. He knows that. He's been briefed on it and the documents prove it.

Secondly, the board in Durham region repeatedly tried to solve this problem for two years. Both of those boards even put more money on the table, and the union refused. I've had teachers in my office in tears because they were afraid to do extracurricular activities because of the union. We have had students who have had opportunities for access to post-secondary institutions and scholarships denied to them because teachers were afraid to participate. "This is not acceptable," parents said, and we agree.

The other thing I would like to say to the honourable member is, one of the reasons we changed the funding formula was that boards like Durham could catch up with the building they needed for new classrooms. The portables in my riding are there because of those governments when they were there.

Mr Kennedy: I'll tell you what's not acceptable: that the minister is spending no money on capital to claim that they're doing something about school kids in Durham. The school kids in Durham are not going to be helped by your measures of yesterday. That's what we found out canvassing principals and people involved in education in Durham. Their advice to you, Minister, is to go back to the drawing board. Their advice to you is to look at the reason why they receive the second-lowest per student funding—in your own riding, Minister. They, like the rest of the province, want you to acknowledge that you've taken \$1.6 billion out of your share of funding. You're very happy to go after the federal government for their share of the health funding, but your share of education funding is down by 29% from what it was before.

Minister, I guess we want to ask you clearly on behalf of not just the people in Durham but the people in Sudbury and the people around the province whom you want to inflict with problems that wouldn't have been there this fall, is it worth it, and are you really up to something else? As your cabinet document shows, you are prepared to involve the private sector in the training of teachers, in quality assurance teams, in coming up with evaluations. Minister, don't you just want to not have public education at all?

Hon Mrs Ecker: The hyperbole, the hysterics, the fear-mongering from across the way really do get a little tiresome.

I would like the House to note, though, that this is a red-letter day. The critic has finally admitted that the efforts of this health minister and the Durham MPPs have meant more money for health care in Durham region.

The other thing is, the honourable member is asking me to make funding decisions in this province based on personal politics, that somehow or other because it's my riding I'm supposed to give Durham more money. That's the old way of funding education. We fund education based on a fair and equitable formula.

On one hand they say, "Every board gets the same," and now he's saying, "Some boards get more and some boards get less?" Yes, they do, because some boards have higher needs than other boards, and that is the basis of this formula.

We have seen the biggest building boom in schools in our region that we've seen in decades. We're finally catching up to the lack of work that they did.

VICTIMS OF ASBESTOS EXPOSURE

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): My question is to the Acting Premier. Some years ago, as you know, Ontario government inspectors studying asbestos levels at the Holmes facilities in Sarnia found levels more than 8,000 times higher than today's standards. In fact, one ministry report called it the highest levels ever recorded.

In the 1950s and 1960s, despite having this information, the Ontario government issued no orders. Years went by without a single visit to the plant, and when they finally did issue orders they were not enforced. We know this from Ministry of Labour documents released through freedom of information.

The failure of those governments to act meant that many workers would die. They would die from exposure to asbestos that the government of Ontario knew could kill them and in many cases would kill members of their families and their neighbours through exposure to substances brought home on clothes and airborne in the community.

Minister, will your government, on behalf of Ontario governments of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, acknowledge its responsibility, and will it formally apologize to these workers, their families and their descendants for that inaction?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr Speaker, I know the Minister of Labour wants to answer this.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I appreciate the question from the member opposite. It's an issue that I think everyone takes very seriously and understands the ramifications and concerns involved.

We as a government, have taken this issue seriously. We've dealt with this very directly with those people involved in the lion's share of the cases, and Sarnia is a good example, and other regions around this province.

I met personally with them. I met personally to ensure that a centre is in fact opened and funded on an ongoing basis to deal with the issues surrounding this terrible situation. We have asked the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to maintain a constant flow of financial dollars to the region, and we have asked that doctors be seconded and brought in to deal with those affected by this terrible situation.

If you're asking me if we are prepared to say that we have some responsibility as a government through the 1960s and 1970s with respect to this, the answer obviously is yes. We are the government. It is our important role to protect people in workplaces.

Was the technology there in those days that is here today? I'm not so sure that we can just cast aside the situation and claim a special status today. But what I can say to you is, if it's an apology you're looking for, there is no shortage of that. Certainly we are sorry. Certainly we are tragically sorry about what happened, and I would expect nothing less from anyone in this House in expressing those concerns.

Mr Christopherson: Let me say to you, Minister, when you mention that you take this seriously, I want to draw to your attention that on Monday, December 3, 1998, my leader and I both raised this very issue here in this place. On that day, as today, victims, widows and surviving family members were in the gallery waiting to hear from the government, and they're here again waiting to hear from you. Minister, some members on the government benches that day, including some cabinet ministers, laughed at our question and laughed at this issue. Today we seek a much more appropriate response.

We want your government to apologize for that unforgivable behaviour on December 3, 1998, and we want you to put things right by the victims, by committing today to provide compensation for the widows and children who are now denied compensation. Will you commit today to bring in legislation that will provide compensation for the secondary victims of the exposure, which your predecessors failed to act on, that has led to the deaths of workers and their families?

1420

Hon Mr Stockwell: With respect to December 3, I myself cannot believe that anyone in this caucus or in the cabinet would laugh at such a question; maybe it was something else that was being discussed that day. I don't know anyone in this room who would consider someone suffering from this fatal disease a laughing matter. I don't

think that is acceptable, nor do I believe that to be the case. I know everyone in this caucus personally; I don't know one of them who would consider that a laughing matter, because they're respecting and caring individuals.

Second, we are dealing with the cost implications and the resulting measures that would have to be taken with respect to dealing with family members and so on, and in respect of carrying home the particular difficulties from the plant that may have infected other members of the family. We don't deny that, but there's a measure of responsibility in addressing the situation and discovering how best to deal with it, and we at the WSIB and the Ministry of Labour do not take those requests without the seriousness they deserve.

I was in Sarnia with the local member. I met with them too. I talked to them. I committed to funding the clinic. I committed to funding their need. I committed to going and giving an undertaking to them that we would review these situations. This isn't political. This is a situation that happened two decades ago. No one wanted this to happen. It's terrible it did happen. To suggest that people in this caucus would laugh about it I don't think is appropriate to this Legislature.

Mr Christopherson: Obviously I was in that House, and if you want to talk about inappropriate activity and behaviour, that's exactly what happened. What they were laughing about is up to them to decide, but they indeed were laughing when we raised this issue, and those widows were in the gallery.

Interjections.

Mr Christopherson: Let me say that your heckling now shows the same level of respect today that you showed then. The fact of the matter is that we've got dead workers who ought not to have died, we have wives, husbands and children who have died who ought not to have died, and they're not receiving compensation.

Minister, the words aren't good enough. We need legislation. We need your commitment that those secondary victims are going to be compensated for their losses just as much as the workers who worked in the workplace, because those secondary victims died as a result of exposures in that workplace no differently than the workers who were there every day. We need your commitment that you'll bring in legislation to give those widows and their family members the compensation they're rightfully entitled to.

Hon Mr Stockwell: There has been a succession of governments in this province. Each and every person in this House has responsibility and concerns with this issue. We've all had a chance to deal with this. No one takes it any more seriously than any other. Because you belong to a certain party doesn't mean you've cornered the market on compassion. Compassion is also on this side of the House.

Mr Christopherson: Then commit to giving the money. Keep the word. Give us the money.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The minister waited quietly, as did the House, when the member asked a very difficult, very tough and very forceful question. I

would appreciate if the member would let the minister respond. Sorry for the interruption.

Hon Mr Stockwell: When we came to office, I came to this ministry and the first thing we did was increase the occupational exposure limits in this province so this kind of thing couldn't happen again. We had the chance to fix that, all of us. We went forward and fixed it. So if you're asking me today, will I continue to meet, am I prepared to make the commitment, are we going to investigate through medical evidence, use all advanced technology possible to ensure that the people are looked after in a proper, humane and acceptable way—

Mr Christopherson: What they want is the compensation, Chris.

The Speaker: Minister, take your seat. Unfortunately, I will have to warn the member; this is his last warning on this. I know it's an emotional issue. I know we have some friends in the gallery who want to hear the answer, and when you're shouting across at the minister they can't hear the answer as well. I know it's a very emotional issue, but we do need to hear the answer. Unfortunately, I have to give the member his last warning on this. If he shouts across again, unfortunately I will have to name him. I apologize again to the Minister of Labour. Sorry.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I've met with them. I plan on meeting again. I'm quite certain that in the future, with the technology, the medical evidence and the procedures we put in place, the amount of money we've committed to these areas, the openness of this government to meet with them and try and deal with the issue—yes, the apology, absolutely. In fact, members for Hamilton West and Beaches, I apologize not on behalf of this government; I apologize on behalf of the entire Legislature and the people of the province of Ontario. They will be helped, within the best abilities this government can use. We will be certain to ensure that they are in fact looked after as best as possible. At this time I can't continue—

Mr Christopherson: They need compensation. Words aren't going to do it.

The Speaker: I'm afraid, unfortunately, I have warned him plenty of times. I know it's an emotional issue, but I'm afraid I have no alternative but to name the member for Hamilton West, Mr Christopherson.

*Mr Christopherson was escorted from the House.
Interruption.*

The Speaker: We will have a 15-minute recess while they clear the galleries.

The House recessed from 1426 to 1442.

EDUCATION REFORM

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I believe we left off at a new question; the member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Minister of Education. I mentioned Machiavelli earlier on in my statement, but I forgot Bismarck. You recall Bismarck. I know it's an odd reference for you, but Bismarck was the fellow who used

to create a crisis and solve it in order to stay in government. Does that sound somewhat familiar to you folks? I think that's what you people are doing.

When asked this morning at the press conference what evidence you had that the quality of teachers in Ontario is substandard, you have no evidence. When asked what other jurisdictions Ontario's been compared to, you were initially somewhat vague and then you threw in a couple of countries. When asked how many teachers in Ontario are inadequate, you have no answer at all. Minister, I want to suggest to you that this is what you're doing. You're trying to make the public believe that teachers in this province are lazy and incompetent and that you are fixing the problem. That, I suggest to you, is the real agenda, isn't it?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): Obviously, our new history curriculum is working, given the honourable member's references.

First of all, I'd like to say I'm not interested in running down the education system in Ontario. I'm not interested in sitting here and saying, "How bad are we?" That's not a helpful discussion. What I am interested in doing is moving forward with recommendations from all-party committees like the Royal Commission on Learning, that said we needed a recertification process for our teachers; like the College of Teachers' recommendations about the appropriate written test, the language proficiency test, the induction for new teachers, their advice and input. I'm also very much interested in listening to the advice and the input we had from many, many parents and students and teachers, who said more needs to be done to improve the quality of teaching out there. That is the input and those are the recommendations we are listening to. Those are the recommendations we based our commitments to the voters on in 1999 when we said in Blueprint that we would bring in a good teacher testing program that would help improve the quality of teaching in this province.

Mr Marchese: They don't answer questions. This is question avoidance period, with this government. I've never seen a government that answered questions the way this government does.

There is no evidence to show that the teachers are operating in a substandard way. There is no evidence. Usually when you want to change a system you go for some evidence to show that we've got a problem. There is no problem. They've created a crisis in order to fix it, in order to be able to say to the public: "There's a big problem. We're fixing it." That's what it's about. I'm trying to tell her that I know the game, and some of the folks know the politics of your game too.

When the College of Teachers heard about your desire to have a teacher test they were horrified. It was nuts. It was a nutty idea. Then when you realized how stupid you were going to look with a number of people in society and in the profession, you changed the rules a little bit so now what you present today is a bit different.

What you have done today is no different than what's happening in the system already; 80% of elementary teachers already do professional development on their own time, at their own expense and paying for their own

child care, and now you are making professional development mandatory. They're doing it already; you're making it mandatory. You're trying to fix a problem where there is no crisis to be fixed, but that's the politics, I say to you. Why are you now, once again, ordering teachers to do something they already do?

Hon Mrs Ecker: First of all, I know what he and his friends in opposition and some of the union leaders have tried to say. I know what they said they thought teacher testing was all about. I'm not here to explain why we're not doing what Earl Manners and OSSTF said. I'm here to say what we're doing, which is exactly what we said we would do: bring in a teacher testing program, bring in recertification, bring in a process that would effectively assess knowledge, skills and abilities. I've been saying that for a year. We went out and asked advice on it, not just from the College of Teachers but from many other groups, and we are acting on that advice to help improve the quality of teaching in Ontario, based on an understanding and a recognition that we do have many excellent teachers out there.

But you know, he's had a very convenient memory lapse over there. If they didn't think there was a problem with education in this province, if they didn't think there was a problem with quality education, then why did they go out and do a Royal Commission on Learning that recommended precisely what we're doing, and they supported it?

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): My question is for the Minister of Education. A Ministry of Education document states that extracurricular activities are an important part of a student's education, especially in high school. It is indicated that parents have told the government they do not want their children denied important school-related activities. I am sure that the minister would agree that all students in the province should be treated equitably in this regard.

In my rural riding, there are secondary schools where over 80% of the student population is bused. As a result of your funding cuts, late buses that once provided the opportunity for students to stay after school have been cut. Your ministry indicates extracurricular activities are vital to a rich and fulfilling education. You are mandating school boards to provide these activities. You are mandating teachers to participate in these activities. Will you commit to the students in my riding that you will provide the additional resources to the school boards to reinstitute late school bus runs?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I really am having difficulty with Liberal research this month, I've got to tell you. First of all, when we started in 1995-96, the education budget was \$12.9 billion. Today it is well over \$13.4 billion. I have to tell you, math was not my strong point but that's more money, not \$1.6 billion less. Secondly, obviously the honourable member did not

read the budget that talked about more money for education. She obviously missed the reference to \$23 million more for boards for busing.

1450

Mrs Dombrowsky: The boards of education in my riding are underfunded in the area of transportation. For many years they have shared transportation routes and recently they've increased walking distances to achieve efficiencies. With increased enrolment, rural demographics and escalating fuel costs, school boards in my riding are hundreds of thousands of dollars over their transportation budget. Any increase they might have received in these transfers will not cover the transportation deficits they already have.

Bused kids in my riding have suffered long enough. Will you stop this unfairness? Minister, will you commit to provide additional funds for late buses in my riding?

Hon Mrs Ecker: First of all, if school boards have increasing enrolment, the funding formula is designed to increase with the number of students they have. If a school board is a rural school board or a smaller school board, they get considerable extra money to compensate and to recognize that there are indeed problems.

We recognize that one of the challenges in transportation funding is that some boards have taken steps to be very efficient and effective; other boards have not. We've been trying to get all of the boards to be as effective as they can.

We announced in March that there will be additional monies for information technology, which was one of the things boards said they needed in order to do this. We met that demand. The bus transportation industry said very clearly that they needed interim funding until we jointly come up with a new way to fund this, because we have all agreed that we need to do that. So we put in another \$23 million for funding for transportation for school boards.

I would really like the honourable member to pay attention to some of those things that have been announced in this House and to some of the things that we are actually doing.

LITHOTRIPSY

Mr Brian Coburn (Carleton-Gloucester): My question is for the Minister of Health. There has been considerable discussion with respect to the lithotripsy machine and its installation at the Ottawa Hospital. I would like to bring to your attention some new and more recent information on the need for lithotripsy service in the Ottawa Hospital.

Knowing that the minister and our government are always looking for the best possible solution and efficiencies in meeting a need before spending hard-earned taxpayers' dollars, I understand the Ottawa Hospital has now prepared a business case that shows there are savings to the health care system if a lithotripsy program were implemented.

This hospital serves a catchment area of 1.3 million people and there's a growing demand for lithotripsy

services. Based on more current information, I understand the recent data from the Ottawa Hospital illustrates the demand for lithotripsy services now increasing in eastern Ontario at approximately 4% per year. This new data estimates that by the end of the fiscal year 2001-02, approximately 1,000 patients from the greater Ottawa-Carleton region will require lithotripsy treatments.

Minister, you are correct that there is excess capacity and that London and Toronto could meet the earlier demands for lithotripsy services; however, I understand that this more recent data and expected utilization show the need and that the services now in Ottawa can be justified based on growing patient volumes, the number of patients travelling to Quebec and the increased number of patients opting for more expensive surgery.

Minister, given this new and current information, can you provide me with reassurance that you and ministry officials will review this new information and consider placing lithotripsy service in the eastern Ontario hospital of Ottawa-Carleton?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): In response to the question, as the member knows, we presently have two centres that provide lithotripsy in the province. One is in Toronto at the St Michael's Hospital Wellesley site and one is in London at the St Joseph's Hospital site. We have been very carefully monitoring those two centres on an annual basis in order to ensure that we can continue to respond to the needs of people in this province.

We haven't seen much increased utilization in the past, but I do understand that the Ottawa Hospital has now submitted to us some additional information regarding expansion of the volume of patients who are going to be requiring lithotripsy services in the future and certainly we are prepared to take a look at that information and consider the proposal for an additional lithotripter in Ottawa.

Mr Coburn: Thank you, Minister, for the encouraging answer. As you know from the many generous volunteers and organizations across Ontario, we too have very generous individuals, organizations and businesses in my riding of Carleton-Gloucester, and indeed the Ottawa area, who want to partner with our government in bringing the best possible health care equipment and facilities to our communities. Your encouragement and leadership in health care will help us pursue those numerous initiatives and ideas, which will only enhance our ability to work with our partners to continue improving the health care system.

I understand the ability to do these cases through the lithotripsy program would increase the quality and safety for these patients. Minister, will you ensure my constituency of Carleton-Gloucester and the surrounding Ottawa area that this issue will be reviewed, and reviewed quickly?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I can certainly assure the member that the proposal is being reviewed, and I can also assure the member that there will be a very quick response, since we have carefully analyzed the proposal.

PELEE ISLAND LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Minister, the strike against the Pelee Island transportation company is now in its 14th day. Talks have broken off and there are no more scheduled. The island economy is suffering irreparable damage and agriculture is a significant part of that island economy. As well, tourism is suffering on the island and island residents are virtually stranded in the middle of Lake Erie. I've received a number of letters from island residents. I've received letters from the Pelee Island Co-operative Association, from Pelee Seed, from County Contracting, from many residents and businesses on the island.

I've urged the Minister of Transportation, because he is responsible for this transportation system, to become involved, and he has refused. Minister, will you show the leadership that the Minister of Transportation has chosen not to show and use your office to get the Minister of Transportation to invite the parties to the table and settle this dispute?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I just want to suggest that I share the concern of the member opposite of what the impact is on the farming community on Pelee Island, particularly as it relates to the spring season that is upon us. They need to be able to get back and forth as best they can.

I would like to point out that there are labour negotiations presently ongoing under the transportation field and I personally do not intend to intervene in that, but I share your concerns and we will bring those concerns forward to the parties involved. As it relates to the labour issue, I would ask the member, in his supplementary, to ask someone who is involved in labour as opposed to agriculture that same question.

Mr Crozier: Minister, obviously you don't know what's going on, even though I've kept you apprised. There are no negotiations going on. There isn't anybody at the table. I'm asking that you use your office to help do that.

I have been in contact with labour constantly through this, I've been in contact with the minister and the with you, and with the Minister of Northern Development and anybody else who will listen. But you're not listening. We've got people stranded in the middle of Lake Erie, we've got visitors on the island and property owners on the mainland. We've got tourists coming to the Pelee Island transportation company who haven't even been told there's a strike—not even the courtesy to inform them.

What I'm saying is that the Minister of Transportation and you and the Minister of Tourism can get together, invite the parties to the table and give the budget the flexibility that's needed because they're less than 3% apart. Surely the strike can be settled on the basis that you and the Minister of Transportation can tell the Ontario Northland's marine division to get the strike

settled. It's a reasonable offer. Get it done, and let's get back to business on Pelee Island.

Hon Mr Hardeman: I refer the question to the Minister of Labour for comment.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I would just say to the member opposite that this is not a typical labour dispute in the province of Ontario for the simple reason that it's in federal jurisdiction.

1500

Mr Crozier: Get out.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Get out? Now listen, my friend opposite, the fact of the matter is, we have certain responsibilities. Once you get to the ferry situation at Pelee Island it becomes a federal issue, because they handle the negotiations and they deal with the issue involved.

Let me tell you, there are licensed employees, 11 officers of the ferry services, that have settled. The strike involves the unlicensed employees, about 40 labourers and ranks including deckhands and dockhands and ticket agents, and they are members of the Seafarers International Union. That Seafarers International Union then falls under the surveillance of the federal government. So the question is, while you're calling my friend the Minister of Agriculture in the provincial government, and the ministers in this area, you would be far better off to talk to your federal cousins, who are ripping us off from health care dollars, and they can probably get to the bottom of this more quickly. The fact remains that it's not a provincial issue; it's a federal labour issue.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. During private members' business this morning, the member for Broadview-Greenwood claimed that our government had cut funding for children's protective services. I am under the impression that this is incorrect and that in fact this government has increased funding in this area. Could you clarify this issue, Minister?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I too share the concern my colleague has. In fact, it was stated this morning that this government had somehow reduced funding for child protection in the province of Ontario, and I want to assure my colleague that nothing could be further from the truth.

Since this government was elected, funding for child welfare and child protection has increased by more than 80%, and that shows the strong commitment this government has given to children in need and child welfare and child protection. Why has that happened? We have had a committed government that has made this issue a priority. We had my predecessor, the member for Durham West, work hard on this during her time at the ministry. This government, for the first time, has a minister solely responsible for children's issues in the member for Mississauga South, and what an incredible difference that has made to the government's deliberations.

We have 760 new child protection workers, increased rates for foster care, improved training for new and existing staff, a common risk assessment system, a new information database and 3,000 new computers.

Mr Tascona: Minister, could you tell the House in which direction you believe future funding for children's services in Ontario is headed?

Hon Mr Baird: There is in the new legislation the tough new child protection measures passed by this House last year. For the first time, we have a funding formula for children's aid societies that is now volume sensitive. If more children are requiring or are in need of urgent protection, the formula now is sensitive to providing additional resources for our children's aid societies to ensure that they can be there for these vulnerable children.

There is both good and bad news, I would say. Bad in the sense that we're always concerned when more children need help; good in that at least this legislation is, for the first time, giving a whole new set of tools and standards so that the child protection workers can intervene to provide these important and needed child protection and child welfare services.

Regrettably, in the short term I see that the budgets will probably be required to go up to help these vulnerable children. In the long term, the hope is that we can reduce the number of children who are even needing these new protection services.

TOBACCO TAXES

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Deputy Premier. Last week Cancer Care Ontario released Ontario's cancer prevention blueprint. They estimate that about 50,000 Ontarians will be diagnosed with cancer this year and about 25,000 Ontarians will die from cancer. There's not one Ontarian whose life has not been touched by this terrible disease. What's more disturbing is that every year the number of new cases is increasing by 3%.

This morning, I read reports that the federal government and the provinces are nearing an agreement that would boost tobacco taxes. The revenues here could do a lot of good. Deputy Premier, will you commit today to put all of the funds generated from this tax increase into a dedicated fund for health promotion and illness prevention?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I know the Minister of Health wants to answer this important question.

Ms Lankin: It's a tax question.

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As the member already knows, our government has made a very strong commitment to the whole issue of reducing tobacco smoking in Ontario. We have, in particular, focused our efforts on young people, and we currently have ads on the TV that we hope will persuade young people not to embark on smoking. I can also tell you that we have increased our tobacco strategy

by \$10 million, from \$9 million to \$19 million. We certainly will continue to do everything we can.

When it comes to the issue of taxation, as the member knows, the Ontario tobacco tax rate is linked to the federal excise tax and duty rate. With regard to any proposed restoration of those tax levels, Ontario's tobacco rate will rise only if the federal government chooses to raise tobacco taxes. I know the finance minister has communicated that to Mr Martin.

Ms Lankin: I understand that, Minister. All previous governments, and your government as well, have dedicated resources to ending smoking. It's interesting that you talk about the increase of \$10 million to the tobacco strategy. Between 1995 and 1999, you dropped your health promotion budget by \$11.5 million, so you robbed one illness prevention budget line to support another.

If this proceeds and these new revenues from higher tobacco taxes come, what I'm asking you as health minister is to go to cabinet, to fight for that money, to have that money dedicated to a health promotion fund, to fill the gap. There are a lot of things you could be doing. We need more health promotion highlighting the links between diet, physical inactivity and cancer, as well as the effects of environmental carcinogens and occupational hazards. We need expanded screening programs. You need to establish a colorectal screening program. You've got a responsibility here as Minister of Health. Will you go to the cabinet table and will you fight to have those increased revenues from increased tobacco taxes put in a dedicated fund for health promotion?

Hon Mrs Witmer: As the member should understand, our government has contributed to increased health care spending in this province more than ever at any time in the history of Ontario. We have increased spending from \$17.4 billion to \$22 billion. We have shifted the focus from illness to wellness. We have invested in a breast cancer screening program. We will be announcing a cervical screening cancer program in June. We have introduced the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children initiative, where every child in this province is now screened to determine if they are at risk. We've invested \$67 million. We have the preschool speech and language program with a \$20-million investment. We recently announced in our budget that we would introduce an infant screening program.

The member certainly has not been listening carefully if she's not aware of the fact that this government has moved forward very aggressively on prevention and promotion of health.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I'm afraid the minister's time is up.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Chair of Management Board. It has to do with Highway 407. We in the Liberal Party believe the public has an absolute right to know what kind of deal you struck with the owners of the 407 around tolls.

Tolls have gone up for many users by over 50%. To date, you have refused to release that. The owner, I might say, is releasing that information to investors, but you've refused to release that. Yesterday, after we waited two and a half months, we got this document. It was 91 pages long and 27 of them are blank. We continue to be stonewalled on this. We think that is unacceptable. The public is owed the information on the deal that you reached representing them and their tolls. Will you agree today to release to the public the details of the toll agreement you've reached with the 407 owner?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The government, as you've been told before, fully supports releasing the contract publicly through the freedom of information act. As you're probably aware, or maybe you're not, a third party has challenged its release to the Information and Privacy Commissioner. The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act was passed by the Liberals back in 1987 and you wouldn't want us to break the law to release the document while this challenge is presently before the commissioner.

1510

Mr Phillips: The minister must know that the owner of the 407 has made that document public. The minister must know that investors are profiting on that information. The minister must know that the owner raised \$325 million and said, "Come out and take a look at that agreement." That document has been made public to the investors in the 407, but the poor users of the 407, for whom you've allowed the tolls to go up 50%—they now are paying almost \$200 million a year in tolls, which is going to go to \$500 million—have been denied access to that information. I say again, the owner has made it public. Why in the world are you denying the public the same information that investors who are making millions of dollars have had access to? It is inappropriate, unfair and I insist that you release those documents immediately so that the public has the same information the investors have had for months and are making millions of dollars on.

Hon Mr Hodgson: This member has been around this House for a long time. He knows that the Liberal government, when they were in power, in 1987 passed legislation called the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. We would be breaking the law if we were to release the document while this challenge is before the commissioner. I have stated before, and you've been told before in this House, that our government fully supports releasing the contract publicly through the FOI process. As you know, a third party has challenged its release to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and we need to wait until that process is completed.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock for a quick moment. I am pleased to inform members of the

Legislative Assembly that today we have members of Parliament from the British House of Commons environmental audit committee. We welcome our special guests.

YOUNG WORKER AWARENESS

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to the Minister of Labour. First, I would like to commend the Minister of Labour for his respectful and sensitive response to the question earlier today.

Minister, as you probably know, or at least I hope you do, I'm a parent of five children and three of them are home for the summer looking for a summer job. On a more serious note, though, as students are coming home from university and looking for that summer job, I can tell you that I, as a parent, and I know most of my constituents and the members here, would be very concerned that the students are entering the workplace for the first time.

Along with my constituents, I have concern for the potential dangers in the workplace. Safety in the workplace is a concern for each of us, especially as it pertains to our young people. You know that the Safe Communities Foundation founder, Mr Paul Kells, has contributed significantly—his son was tragically killed in the workplace. Minister, can you tell the House today what you're doing to protect the young workers and students in this province?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): Thank you for the question. Obviously, workplace safety is important to everybody in the House, but particularly when it comes to young people who are going out to work for the first time at summer jobs in situations that tend to be more dangerous than the typical work performed, say, around here.

The fact of the matter is that we are marking Monday as North American Occupational Health and Safety Week. The MOL, Ministry of Labour, along with WSIB and health and safety associations, are proud to host a week-long summit that brings Canada, Mexico and the United States together to highlight good health and safety practices.

Over the course of the week, organizers hope to offer the young worker awareness program to almost 5,000 high school students across the province. Programs teach young soon-to-be workers their rights and responsibilities regarding health and safety. This, in my opinion, is a great achievement for NAOHS week. Thanks to all those health and safety systems that have come together to make it possible. I understand this situation we have today. We are working hard to make sure that there are no accidents and no deaths in the workplace, particularly in the summer, and I think all members would agree with that as a noble cause.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much, Minister, for that response. It's encouraging to see the leadership you provide for that ministry.

I'm also pleased to hear, during this time, the amount of time that you're spending looking after the needs of injured workers. However, a week is simply not enough, Minister, as you know, to properly educate the people in the workplace today. What other steps are you taking to make sure the workplace is safe for everyone?

Hon Mr Stockwell: We are committed to creating an Ontario where young people are free from workplace injury and illness. The NAOHS initiative is only one aspect of our commitment.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: January 2000, as the member for St Catharines knows—it was endorsed in his previous life when he was in government those many years ago—MOL facilitated a young worker health and safety stakeholders meeting, with 40 stakeholders.

This is a non-partisan issue. I know the member for Peterborough is very active in this with respect to young worker awareness. I know the member for Thunder Bay is also extremely interested. Not to leave anybody out, there have been many calls to my offices from many people around this province, of course including Mr Hoy. The fact remains, we all are committed to making workplaces safer for the young people involved. I know first-hand that if it matters and we've got to travel the globe to find out what needs to be done to effect the changes, the member for St Catharines will be the first on the trip.

AGRICULTURAL FUNDING

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture. Since my election I've demanded a fair share for agriculture from both levels of government, yet you took credit for the additional federal money that was announced. In fact, Ontario MPs lobbied for that money, the farmers of Ontario lobbied for that money and so did I.

Even with your supposed increases, agriculture still receives only one half of 1% of total Ontario spending. You want more money from the feds, but they have enhanced their AIDA program to include a fair evaluation on inventory that will give \$30,000 to \$40,000 more per farmer on average. You refuse to do the same, and the federal government says your rules stand in the way of Ontario farmers getting the federal money. Will you promise today that nothing in the terms of your whole farm relief program will limit farmers from their access to the full federal share of monies?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I very much appreciate and I would agree with the member opposite that it was not I alone who was able to get the fair share for Ontario's farmers. In fact, it was every farmer, every commodity group and every farm organization in this province that helped us do that, standing up to the federal government and suggesting that we in Ontario deserved a fair share.

I would take one exception: I'll take the member's word for it, but it was after we got the federal money that

we had the first opportunity of hearing that the member opposite was standing up on behalf of Ontario farmers. It came out after we received the money that he said, "I have been speaking to the federal minister behind the scenes and that may have had some impact on why we got the money." That may or may not be true, and we will take the member's word for it.

I want to point out to the member opposite, on the issue of the inventory levels as it applies to the whole farm relief program, that the federal government has announced that this is going to be part of their share of the package, but at this point in time we are still waiting for confirmation from the federal government that would allow us to implement that on behalf of the whole farm—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. I'm afraid the minister's time is up. Supplementary.

Mr Hoy: Minister, your answer was full of technical dicker and posturing. This may be highly technical information, but you're not fooling me and you're not fooling the farmers of Ontario. They need every dollar of that federal money.

Minister, I contend that you got more money from the feds than you bargained for and you can't afford to put your money where your mouth is. Will you promise that your rules will not jeopardize one cent of that federal money flowing to the farmers of Ontario?

1520

Hon Mr Hardeman: Very much so. I want to assure you that the farmers of Ontario will receive all the money that's available from the federal government, and every federal government dollar will be matched by 40 cents from the Ontario government. Not to be grandstanding and not to be pointing out things that would be less than totally true, I would point out that the federal government has recently been telling us that the announcement they made—

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): Point of order.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, I missed that. Was there a point of order?

Mr Duncan: I know you were distracted for a moment, Mr Speaker, but the minister alleged that a statement my colleague made was less than true.

The Speaker: I should know better than to turn my back even for a second. I did do that and I apologize. But the member is an honourable member, and I'm sure that if he did he would withdraw it. I apologize for not being right on top of it. I believe the minister was wrapping up. If he did say anything, he could withdraw it.

Hon Mr Hardeman: If indeed I said anything unparliamentary, I totally withdraw it. I was just pointing out that the facts, as they were being stated—I presume on behalf of his federal colleagues—were different than the truth would portray. If that means I was saying something less than parliamentary, I withdraw that.

I would point out that we have had correspondence from the federal government that the program they are putting in place—

The Speaker: I'm afraid the minister's time is up. The time for oral questions is over.

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas essential health care and educational services have been deprived of government funding because the Conservative government of Mike Harris has diverted these funds to self-serving propaganda in the form of pamphlets delivered to homes, newspaper advertisements and radio and TV commercials;

"Whereas the Harris government advertising blitz is a blatant abuse of public office and a shameful waste of taxpayers' dollars;

"Whereas the Harris Conservatives ran on a platform of eliminating what it referred to as 'government waste and unnecessary expenditures,' while it squanders well over \$100 million on clearly partisan advertising;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the Conservative government and Mike Harris to immediately end their abuse of public office and terminate any further expenditure on political advertising."

I affix my signature as I am in complete agreement with this petition.

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Broadview-Greenwood): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas existing adoption secrecy legislation is outdated and unjust;

"Whereas Canada has ratified standards of civil and human rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; those rights are denied to persons affected by secrecy provisions in adoption laws of the Child and Family Services Act and other acts in Ontario;

"Whereas 20% of persons in Ontario are directly or indirectly affected by restricted rights to personal information available to other citizens;

"Whereas the adopted person's right to his or her birth identity is rooted in a basic and fundamental human need;

"Whereas most birth parents did not ask for lifelong confidentiality; it was imposed on them involuntarily;

"Whereas research shows that not knowing basic personal information has harmed adopted persons, birth parents, adoptive parents and other birth relatives;

"Whereas research shows that access to adoption information does not cause harm;

"Whereas research shows that unqualified access to information in adoption satisfies the overwhelming majority of the parties involved;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to enact revision of the Child and Family Services Act and other acts to:

"Permit unrestricted access to full personal identifying birth information to adopted persons and adult children

of adopted persons; and unrestricted access to the adopted person's amended birth certificate to birth parents, birth grandparents and siblings and other birth relatives, when the adopted person reaches 18;

"Permit unrestricted access to identifying information to adoptive parents of minor children, emancipated minor adoptees and individuals with legal guardianship for an adopted person in special circumstances;

"Allow adopted persons and birth relatives to file a notice stating their wish for no contact;

"Replace mandatory reunion counselling with optional counselling;

"Permit access to agency and court files when original statistical information is insufficient for identification of and contact with birth relatives;

"Recognize open adoptions in the legislation."

I will affix my signature to this petition, as I fully support it.

KARLA HOMOLKA

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo were responsible for terrorizing entire communities in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario government of the day made a deal with the devil with Karla Homolka resulting in a sentence that does not truly make her pay for her crimes; and

"Whereas our communities have not yet fully recovered from the trauma and sadness caused by Karla Homolka; and

"Whereas Karla Homolka believes that she should be entitled to pass to leave prison with an escort; and

"Whereas the people of Ontario believe that criminals should be forced to serve sentences that reflect the seriousness of their crimes;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario will:

"Do everything within its power to ensure that Karla Homolka serves her full sentence;

"Continue to reform parole and make it more difficult for serious offenders to return to our streets;

"Fight the federal government's plan to release up to 1,600 more convicted criminals on to Ontario streets; and

"Ensure that the Ontario government's sex offender registry is functioning as quickly as possible."

I am pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

PRIX D'ESSENCE GASOLINE PRICES

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): J'ai ici une pétition adressée à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

« Attendu que le prix des produits pétroliers a augmenté significativement dans les derniers six mois ;

"Whereas the Mike Harris government has done nothing to protect consumers and is afraid to take on the big oil companies;

« Attendu que le marché de vente en gros pour les produits pétroliers est contrôlé par un oligopole d'huile qui gère 85 % du marché de vente en gros ;

"Whereas the long-term increase in the price is mostly due to taxes that have doubled in the past decade;

« Attendu que le ministre fédéral des Finances, Paul Martin, est prêt à discuter avec les provinces afin de baisser les taxes sur l'essence ;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows: that Mike Harris take initiative and lower provincial taxes on petroleum products."

I add my signature to it.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I have a petition signed by 85 people. It's an honour to present it during Hospice Palliative Care Week.

"Whereas most Ontario residents require adequate access to effective hospice palliative care in time of need;

"Whereas meeting the needs of Ontarians of all ages for relief of preventable pain and suffering as well as the provision of emotional and spiritual support needs to be a priority in our health care system;

"Whereas the Legislative Assembly of Ontario unanimously passed a resolution supporting the right to hospice and palliative care on October 15, 1998, as presented by Bob Wood, MPP, which called for a task force to be appointed to fully implement an effective hospice palliative care bill of rights;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to fulfill the resolution, as approved by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, by appointing the hospice palliative task force and giving it a suitable mandate to fulfill the requirements of the resolution.

"Hospice palliative care is care which aims to relieve suffering and improve the quality of life of people who are living with or dying from advanced illness, or those who are bereaved."

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

Mr Joseph Cordiano (York South-Weston): I have a petition regarding the arbitrarily imposed \$925 head tax on international adoptions.

"Whereas the Conservative government has arbitrarily imposed a \$925 head tax on international adoptions; and

"Whereas the cost to the government for processing international adoptions is no greater than that for domestic adoptions, which are not subject to the head tax; and

“Whereas in the United States parents are offered a tax credit of \$5,000 to offset the enormous costs of international adoption; and

“Whereas the cost for an international adoption can range from \$20,000 to \$30,000;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows, and demand that this head tax be immediately revoked.”

I affix my signature to this petition.

1530

DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): Mr Speaker, I have a little preamble here. I’m presenting this petition on behalf of the Honourable Dan Newman, MPP for Scarborough Southwest. As you would know, as a minister of the crown he’s unable to present petitions, so I’ll be presenting it on his behalf.

The lead petitioner here is Cay Shedden, a resident of Scarborough. I shall read:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians with a developmental disability are in growing danger of inadequate support because compensation to staff of not-for-profit agencies is, based on a recent survey, on average, 20% to 25% less than compensation for others doing the same work in provincial institutions or similar work in other settings;

“Whereas there are hundreds of senior parents in Ontario who saved the Ontario government millions of dollars by keeping their child with a developmental disability at home, and who are still caring for their adult child;

“Whereas there is no place for most of these adults with a developmental disability to go when the parents are no longer able to provide care;

“Whereas these parents live with constant anxiety and despair;

“Whereas these adult children will end up in Ontario nursing homes and hospitals if there is no appropriate place to provide care,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To significantly increase compensation for workers in not-for-profit agencies so it is comparable to the compensation of government-funded workers in identical or similar occupations; and

“To provide the resources necessary to give appropriate support to Ontarians with a developmental disability who at present have no place to go when their parents are no longer able to care for them.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this petition myself.

HUNTING IN WILDERNESS PARKS

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I have a petition. It’s actually a very short petition, but it’s a very important one, from members of the community of Don Valley East. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources is proposing Ontario’s Living Legacy proposed land use strategy permits hunting in designated wilderness parks which are currently used for vacationing and recreation for the general public; and

“Whereas we believe this change in policy would endanger the serenity, ecology and remoteness of these existing wilderness parks. The Legislative Assembly does not have to wait until one innocent vacationer is shot in error until reconsidering the danger of allowing hunters into our precious wilderness parks;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

“To continue the prohibition of hunting in wilderness parks in order to ensure the preservation of safety, tranquility and environmental well-being.”

I will affix my signature to this petition.

DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): The petitions just keep coming in relentlessly. Again I should give some explanation. The Honourable Dan Newman, the Minister of the Environment, is unable to present this petition, so respectfully and diligently on behalf of him and his constituent Judy Patterson, I will submit the following petition:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians with a developmental disability are in growing danger of inadequate support because compensation to staff of not-for-profit agencies is, based on a recent survey, on average 20% to 25% less than compensation for others doing the same work in provincial institutions or similar work in other settings;

“Whereas there are hundreds of senior parents in Ontario who saved the Ontario government millions of dollars by keeping their child with a developmental disability at home, and who are still caring for their adult child;

“Whereas there is no place for most of these adults with a developmental disability to go when the parents are no longer able to provide care;

“Whereas these parents live with constant anxiety and despair;

“Whereas these adult children will end up in Ontario nursing homes and hospitals if there is no appropriate place to provide care,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To significantly increase compensation for workers in not-for-profit agencies so it is comparable to the compensation of government-funded workers in identical or similar occupations; and

“To provide the resources necessary to give appropriate support to Ontarians with a developmental disability who at present have no place to go when their parents are no longer able to care for them.”

I’m pleased to sign, support and present this petition.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I have a petition, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 13 people died during the first seven months of 1999 on Highway 401 between London and Windsor; and

“Whereas traffic levels on all sections of Highway 401 continue to increase;”—that’s certainly true in Don Valley East—“and

“Whereas Canada’s number one trade and travel route was designed in the 1950s for fewer vehicles and lighter trucks; and

“Whereas road funding is almost completely paid through vehicle permit and driving licence fees; and

“Whereas Ontario road users pay 28 cents per litre of tax on gasoline, adding up to \$2.7 billion in provincial gas taxes and over \$2.3 billion in federal gas taxes;

“We, the undersigned members of the Canadian Automobile Association and other residents of Ontario, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately upgrade Highway 401 to at least a six-lane highway with full paved shoulders and rumble strips; and

“We respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario place firm pressure on the federal government to invest its gasoline tax revenue in road safety improvements in Ontario.”

I have affixed my signature to the petition.

DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I have a very important petition from members of my riding in Don Valley East. It reads:

“To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians with a developmental disability are in growing danger of inadequate support because compensation to their workers is, based on a recent survey, on average 20% to 25% less than compensation for others doing the same work in provincial institutions or similar work in other settings;

“Whereas there are hundreds of senior parents in Ontario who have saved the Ontario government millions of dollars by keeping their child with a developmental disability at home, and who are still caring for their adult child;

“Whereas there is no place for most of these adults with a developmental disability to go when the parents are no longer able to provide care;

“Whereas these parents live with constant anxiety and despair;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

“To significantly increase compensation for workers in the developmental services sectors so it is comparable to the compensation of government-funded workers in identical or similar occupations; and

“To provide the resources necessary to give appropriate support to Ontarians with a developmental disability who have no support when their parents are no longer able to care for them.”

I too have affixed my signature to this petition.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon Dan Newman (Minister of the Environment): I have a statement of business of the House for next week.

On Monday afternoon, we will continue with Bill 72, the Taxpayer Dividend Act.

On Monday evening, we will debate a resolution by the Attorney General.

On Tuesday afternoon, we will continue debate on Bill 55, the Parental Responsibility Act.

On Tuesday evening, we expect to debate Bill 74, the Education Accountability Act.

Wednesday afternoon is to be determined.

On Wednesday evening, we will continue to debate Bill 74, the Education Accountability Act.

Thursday morning, during private members’ public business, we will discuss ballot items 25 and 26.

On Thursday afternoon, we expect to do Bill 74, the Education Accountability Act.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TAXPAYER DIVIDEND ACT, 2000

LOI DE 2000 SUR LE VERSEMENT

D’UN DIVIDENDE AUX CONTRIBUABLES

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 10, 2000, on the motion for second reading of Bill 72, An Act to pay a dividend to Ontario taxpayers, cut taxes, create jobs and implement the Budget / Projet de loi 72, Loi visant à verser un dividende aux contribuables de l’Ontario, à réduire les impôts, à créer des emplois et à mettre en oeuvre le budget.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It’s good to have the opportunity to speak to this bill. Mercifully, we have 20 minutes. It gives us some time to be able to raise some issues contained in this bill.

Of course, much of this connects to the budget announcement they made—good God, when was it? Last week? Two weeks ago? It seems like so long ago. You recall that in that budget the government had a whole lot of goodies to give out. They were so proud of their surplus that they decided to give most of that surplus away to the business sector. They know who their friends are. I’ve got to tell you, we New Democrats, when we were in power, didn’t know who our friends were sometimes. But the Tories don’t forget their friends. The Tories have the wealthy beside them, with them, under them, above them, around them, around their necks, on their backs, and they love it. They love it to such an extent that they have decided to give them a large gift of

about \$4.5 billion over the next couple of years. Not bad, if you can get it. Sometimes one would wish that we were all so lucky to be such rich business people to be able to enjoy some of the benefits that flow from being connected to this kind of government. Of course, some of us are unlucky not to be so well connected and so we lose out.

1540

Four billion to five billion bucks going out to wealthy corporations—it's almost obscene. It's theatre of the grotesque. But of course you'll hear Tories, the new Alliance people, defend what they have done. They say, "By giving more tax breaks to the wealthy, we will create more jobs." My argument to the general public watching is this: If the corporate sector has done so well in the last five years without Mike Harris dishing out the tax breaks, why would they give them an additional \$4 billion to \$5 billion in tax breaks? If they created such a good economy without them, why do they need the Tories to give our dollars, our taxpayers' money, back to the wealthy people who don't need it, who presumably created a great deal of wealth on their own without Mike Harris? And now they want Mike Harris to give them back \$4 billion or \$5 billion? No, they don't. It's a corporate giveaway. It's a corporate gift. It's a corporate welfare Tory-Alliance society we're living in.

These people love to give money away. They love to give my money away. They love to give the taxpayers' money away. They're not giving it to us. They're giving it to corporations, four to five billion bucks' worth. Were they screaming for those dollars? I don't think they were screaming for that money. So why in heaven's name would you give it to them? Why would you give my money away to them? There is absolutely no evidence that giving \$4 billion to \$5 billion worth of taxpayers' money in tax breaks to these corporations is going to create jobs. That's what the corporate sector says, but there's absolutely no evidence to prove that that money will create more jobs. In fact, where do you think that money's going to go? That money's going to go into the pockets of the very wealthy, who don't need it. Instead of giving the people who have been whacked by this government just a couple of dollars back—I'm going to speak to the couple of dollars they have given them back, though—but in terms of giving a couple of dollars back by way of services, the services they are losing and have lost under them. Instead of doing that, they give my money and your money, good taxpayer, away to the wealthy. Think about it. Isn't that theatre of the grotesque? I know there's theatre of the absurd. To be truthful, I'm not sure there's theatre of the grotesque. But that's what it amounts to.

So how brilliant they have become. How Machiavellian they are. What good politicians they have become as disciples of Machiavelli, because what they have decided to do, given that the income tax cut hasn't worked so very well in the past because they haven't seen any—they said: "We've got a bright idea. We're going to send them a cheque. We're going to send them

\$200 in the mail and when they get it they're going to say, 'Good God, Santa Claus came early.' They're going to say, 'Finally Mike Harris has given me something that I can see.'" They are bright. They are as good as they come. But I've got to tell you, giving \$200 away to what, four or five million people, amounts to one billion bucks. I get \$200, but in total it means giving away \$1 billion of our money to individuals.

So the government says: "Well, if they get \$200, they can decide what to do with it. It's not my money. It's your money." Did they ever give the public a choice as to how they want to see their money being spent? No. They decided to give them back their money by fiat, because they're good people and they know that that hard-earned money is theirs. They gave them no choice about how else it could have been spent, but they're going to send it in the mail in the next couple of months.

The good thing about this politics is that it's crass, it's visceral. It's placebo politics; it's making people feel good. Does getting 200 bucks make people feel good? Yeah, sure it does, because the working class, the one New Democrats tend to support, says, "Better me getting the 200 bucks than somebody else," right? The workers, who should be supporting the NDP but end up supporting these people, say, "Better me than somebody else," because they know that if they didn't get the 200 bucks, the corporations would get that one billion bucks.

Mr David Young (Willowdale): Are you saying the workers aren't smart enough?

Mr Marchese: Monsieur Young, I want to address this point to you.

Mr Young: Through the Speaker.

Mr Marchese: Through the Speaker, always. The corporate sector is getting four billion bucks. The worker says, "Hmm, I know that's always the case," and so the worker reasons out, "If the corporations are going to get that extra billion and move from \$4 billion to \$5 billion, better I get the 200 bucks." They're not dumb, are they, mon ami David Young from Willowdale? No, the workers are smart; they're not stupid. They're not going to say, "Don't give it to me," because they know that if they don't get the 200 bucks, the corporate sector is going to get it. They're no fools. Four billion gone to the corporate sector; one billion gone so that every individual who pays income tax gets 200 bucks back in the mail.

Do you know what \$1 billion could do? It could do so much to fix, to patch up the problems these people have created. It could do so much. To hear these Tories say, "Ha, as if somehow only socialists have the preserve of a social conscience." "Tories do too," admits the Minister of Finance. It's oxymoronic, but I suspect more moronic than oxy. There is no social conscience that comes from the other side, the government side; otherwise \$1 billion that's just gone would have been put back into essential areas. Otherwise, the \$4 billion that the corporate sector doesn't need would have been put back to the social service areas that have been cut, to health that has been cut, to education that has been cut.

I say to the Reformers out there, the new Alliance people: If Mike Harris doesn't want to put \$1 billion out of the \$5 billion—the other \$4 billion he has given away to the corporate sector—into education and social services or health, why doesn't he take that money and reduce the debt? After all, the debt is a load we all carry, socialists and non-socialists alike. We all carry that debt load, and the children of New Democrats and Liberals and Tories are going to carry the burden of the debt load. So why didn't they, as good Alliance people, put that \$1 billion to reducing the debt, and in so doing, help all of our children and their children's children for the future? You hear these Tories often talk about the debt load and the future problem our children will have to bear. If they speak that way, surely you would think the Tories would say, "It would be in all of our interests to reduce the debt," instead of wasting it away, \$1 billion away to about five million people, but that's not the game.

The game of these people is to make sure they do politics well; that they do placebo politics in a way that makes them feel good. Don't give them the medicine they need. Give them the medicine that they actually do not need, but tell them this is what will cure their illness. It's grotesque. They've got \$700 million going out to people, the money managers, the people who manage your RRSP, good taxpayers of Ontario watching this program. Do you know what these Tories are doing? The first \$100,000 these money managers make, these paper pushers who say, "I'm going to invest some money here," and a couple of minutes later they're monitoring the screen and move their couple of dollars to some other place—it's all paper transactions, paper money, the new paper economy, the new millionaires.

1550

Mike Harris says the first \$100,000 will not be taxed. Do you know what that amounts to? A \$700-million giveaway to people who play in the paper economy. Do these people work? That's corporate welfare, in my view, people pushing paper money around. In my view, those people don't work. Everybody else works hard, but these people earn millions of dollars. They're not the real workers, yet this government says, "Up to \$100,000 we're not going to tax your money." Can you believe it? People have loads of money, and Harris says to them, "Don't worry, your first \$100,000 doesn't get taxed." It's obscene welfare for the corporate individual who is sucking our money from us, sucking money away from the taxpayer, and we're throwing it back to those individuals.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: That's welfare. That's corporate welfare. We give paper pushers, people who monitor economic transactions and the stock options of one company or another, up to \$700 million just for the fun of playing with our money as they become millionaires, and we say, "This is good; we're not going to tax their money." It's obscene. It's stupid; it's downright stupid.

That \$1 billion could do so much for housing. The federal government, those so-good Liberals at the federal

level, abandoned this field. These Tories at the provincial level—this new Alliance party—are now building. They have a plan. What plan? The plan isn't working, but they say they have a plan to build housing. The private sector is not building, the federal government is not building and these fine Tories are not building. Talk about a boondoggle. This budget is a boondoggle. But to have people homeless and to have people who are renting on the verge of becoming homeless, that, to these fine Alliance people, is a boondoggle. It's hurtful. It makes you want to cry at times.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Mrs Elliott—I've got to find her name. Where is she from? Guelph-Wellington. She's yapping away over there. She yaps and yaps and yaps. I'm going to enjoy her two-minute intervention.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: But you can. Urge somebody else not to speak so I can listen to your remarks. I'm sure you have a lot to say; you are yapping so much in response to what I'm saying. Please, two minutes.

No money for housing. What about tuition fees? My daughter is in university, my other daughter is going to university this year and my son in a couple of years. Four years of university is the equivalent of a debt of \$20,000 to \$25,000, assuming you do nothing else and assuming you are in the arts program. And this government says: "Not a problem. Access is not a problem. If you need a loan, we'll give it to you. So access is not an issue." But a debt of \$20,000 to \$30,000 is a heavy debt, a heavy load to carry. A lot of young people who have to carry \$20,000 to \$30,000 with wages going down in a good economy know they won't be able to pay that back very soon. So instead of increasing the contribution of government so we can make tuition fees lower so people can afford to go to university or college, we have no money for it. But we can blow \$1 billion so you can have \$200 and we can blow \$4 billion so we can give it away to the corporate sector that has been doing well without that money. They'll pocket that money. There is no evidence it will produce jobs. Yet there is so much to be done, so much that could be done with \$4 billion given away to people who don't need it.

You have these kinds of figures that I want to put on the record and that I need to speak to. There is over \$1.3 billion in new tax giveaways this year and \$4 billion by 2004. This tax budget is a gift to corporate Ontario. Out of this year's 67 tax cuts, 42 go to profitable corporations and businesses; 27% of the new income tax breaks go to 5% of income earners at a cost of \$733 million. Things Ontarians name as top priorities, such as health and education, take a back seat to the tax cuts that go to the wealthy.

People have heard me say I am not a fan of tax cuts. I don't support the tax cuts from the federal Liberals. I don't support the tax cuts that New Democrats are engaged in in other provinces, because I think they are wrong. I think we need to save the money to provide basic infrastructure, and I say we need to save the money

because when the next recession comes and your coffers are empty, we as Ontarians are going to be in serious trouble. So I don't support the Tories in it and I don't support the Liberals, and I don't support the New Democrats either, engaging in tax cuts in other provinces because they feel they need to do it. They feel they need to jump on the bandwagon and not be left out of the fact that Liberals and Tories have given tax cuts. I think it's profoundly wrong for New Democrats to have done that as well.

I know there is public pressure. The rich people who own the ideological media, the ones who own the press, the television, any kind of media that communicate a message to people—these are the people who have put pressure on governments and the public to say, first of all, that inflation has to go down, which cut thousands of jobs in the early years. Interest rates went up, which cut thousands of jobs in those early years. Then they went on the bandwagon saying that deficits were the real problem, and they changed that. Now they say tax cuts. After the tax cuts, what's next? I don't know.

What I know is that real people are hurting and real wages are going down. In a good economy, wages are going down. Forty percent of new jobs go to self-employed individuals who have been fired by governments and the private sector, 25% are contractual, 25% are part-time and only 6.6% of the new jobs are full-time. What does that tell you? That a whole lot of people at the bottom are earning poor wages, not enough to keep up with the kind of economy we have.

A whole heap of people up here making a whole lot of money don't need it. Yet these fine Alliance individuals say, "We have to take care of our corporate friends; they need money," without any economic evidence from any serious economists who say that will create jobs. But evidence is irrelevant, because what these people are engaged in is politics. Make people feel good, give them 200 bucks, waste a whole \$1 billion in that regard, make the corporations happy so they continue to give them the corporate donations they need to run their million-dollar campaigns. That's what it's about. It saddens me. It is theatre of the grotesque.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Tony Martin): Comments and questions?

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): I always enjoy listening to the remarks of the member for Trinity-Spadina, in which he holds out the hard core mantra of socialism. We know where he is coming from.

It is to be noted that, good gracious, the Manitoba NDP actually introduced some modest tax relief in their budget. As the member says, he doesn't agree with that. He is dead wrong when he says there are no economists out there who promote, not only practically but in the theory, in the literature, that jobs, tax reduction and lower expenditures stimulate the economy. I challenged the finance critic of the NDP the other night to name a jurisdiction in North America, Europe or anywhere in the world actually, whether it's a country, a state or a province, where the premise is that if you have higher

taxes, whatever their source, you end up having greater prosperity. There isn't one, because if you use Sweden, even the Swedish government, over the last few years, has introduced the concept of tax relief at whatever level.

I find it also strange that the member for Trinity-Spadina is so dismissive of work. We over here value work. Whether it's hard work, going out when—I can remember, as a kid, my first job was delivering the Toronto Telegram—200 papers—hunting golf balls and cutting asparagus. Hard work. Today we have people in the new economy who work just as hard with their brains. To dismiss them or anybody who is involved in the work world demonstrates how far out the member for Trinity-Spadina has gotten, unfortunately.

1600

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): I'd like to congratulate the member for Trinity-Spadina on his remarks. He's made some very good points. It was the finance minister, Mr Eves, who said the measure of a truly just society is the way it treats the less fortunate, the least fortunate in the community.

If you look at what is actually in the budget, those who are doing very well do very well by this budget. Of that there is no dispute. But those who are the most vulnerable, those who are the least fortunate, there's nothing for them in here. I think Mr Eves really should assess and evaluate whether or not he believes the statement he made that you don't have to be a socialist to have a social conscience, because this budget has no social conscience.

In fact, in the areas of housing and public transit, I agree with the mayor of Toronto, who said it very well; that some citizens are going to do very well by this but there is nothing in this budget for the city of Toronto. We saw yesterday a continuation of the boorish behaviour of our Premier, of the leader of this province, to blindside our mayor, to send a letter, frankly, which is so divorced from reality out to the media to try to sell a position that is just simply incorrect. The mayor has it right.

The people who have read this budget know what the facts are. We know we're losing our competitive edge when it comes to post-secondary education. We are spending less money in this province on post-secondary education than we did in 1995. That's the legacy of the Harris government: deinvestment in the areas which are most critical and in most need. In fact, they haven't replaced the money they've cut from the property tax portion of education. A cut to education, a cut to post-secondary, no money for the most vulnerable—the member from Trinity-Spadina said it very well.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I want to take this opportunity to comment on a few of the points that were made by the member for Trinity-Spadina. I first want to say it's always interesting to listen to my colleague on these issues.

First of all to the issue of the tax cut, I frankly believe that if you ask anybody up front, "Do you want a tax cut?" the answer's going to be yes. I want a tax cut. My neighbour wants a tax cut. Everybody wants a tax cut.

Corporations want tax cuts. The poor want tax cuts. The rich want tax cuts. Everybody would like to have one. That's not the issue. It's like saying, "Do children like candy?" Of course kids like candy, but do we as parents—well, let's not even go there. The point is, everybody wants to have a tax cut. The issue is, what does it cost us in the long run?

There are a couple of things. First of all, the choice by this government to give the tax cuts that it did in this particular budget means we're not going to have the money to pay for health care. We're not going to have the money to reinvest and pay down our debt. This government gives a tax cut, but yet our debt keeps on increasing, something they don't seem to get into their heads when it comes to trying to deal with the real issue, which is the indebtedness of Ontario. They ran a whole campaign on trying to deal with bringing down the deficit, but we hear they're totally absent on the issue of dealing with the debt. These guys borrowed money during the time they were in a deficit situation to give people tax cuts, which event not only prolonged us balancing our budget, it increased the debt. I think the member makes a very good point.

It's not a question that people don't want tax cuts. I want a tax cut. But the question is, are they prudent and wise in providing tax cuts in the way this government did? I would say no, because what they've managed to do quite frankly is indebt us more as a province. They shouldn't have dealt with this kind of tax cut in the way that they have. I think it was wrong.

Mr Young: I listened with interest to the remarks made by the member for Trinity-Spadina. I should say at the outset that I have great respect for the member as an individual and I certainly respect his skills as an orator, but I was sincerely disappointed by a couple of the underlying and very clear themes in his presentation.

First, we heard the member talk about the fact that the workers of this province, the people of this province, were somehow being deceived, or bought is what he was intimating, by reason of the fact that they were going to be getting a tax cut. We heard the member opposite say very clearly that there are other factors that account for the reason that they had to increase debt. He looks to the United States, as the does the Liberal Party, for reasons for our economic success over the last number of years.

I am offended by this because I know for a fact that it's the hard work of the people of this province that have led to the growth and the success that we have achieved. I don't look beyond our borders for the answer. I know that the answer lies right here in Ontario. I know that the people of this province understood the issues. I know they understood, come election time, that it was their prerogative to say very clearly, as they did, no to higher taxes, no to spiralling debt. They said they didn't want any more deficits. They said they were tired of the continued high unemployment that came with the Liberal and the NDP governments that preceded us. They said very clearly that they did not wish to mortgage their children's future any further. It was for that reason in

1995 and once again in 1999 that the people of this province, after considering the platforms put forward by all three parties and the debates that surrounded those platforms, decided to vote in the way they did, and I respect them for that.

The Acting Speaker: Two-minute reply.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate the interventions. I just want to say that often the Tories make the absurd, unsubstantiated claim that their income tax cuts are the ones that have created 700,000 or 800,000 jobs. They make that claim on an ongoing basis, never substantiated. I have dared these members on a regular basis to bring forth one economist who would say that 700,000 jobs have been created as a result of the income tax cuts, which many claim has happened. Then, of course, when you engage them, they say, "No, no, perhaps it's not 700,000, but it has created this boom of jobs." The point is that it doesn't and it hasn't. The point is, a whole lot of money is going out for the few jobs that it probably does create. The few jobs that it may be creating doesn't warrant the billions and billions of dollars that are going out. That's why I say it's obscene and theatre of the grotesque when they say that.

I don't say that I dismiss workers. I said that the people-pushers of the people-economy, the ones who manage our money, the ones who make millions of dollars—it is obscene that they should get a tax break of the kind that they're giving, that the first \$100,000 of the \$1 million doesn't get taxed. It's obscene. I'm saying that's corporate welfare. I'm saying that if there is any welfare that should be attacked, it's that kind of welfare. That's what I said in my remarks.

When we talk about mortgaging our children's future, then spend the \$1 billion you wasted on the \$200 you're giving me and reduce the debt, if you're not going to patch up the other services. That's what I said. So I say it's wrong what they've done. No, I don't say, "You've got the 200 bucks; give it the way you want." I'm telling you, you should have reduced the debt if that's what concerns you.

The Acting Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Essex has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Labour concerning the Pelee Island ferry labour dispute. This matter will be debated today at 6 pm.

Further debate?

Mrs Brenda Elliott (Guelph-Wellington): At the outset, I would just like to indicate that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Mississauga East.

I'm very pleased to be able to speak to this bill in the House today called the Taxpayer Dividend Act. This is a legislative bill whose purpose is to implement the various ideas that were suggested in the budget. It speaks to five acts and I'll list them. They are: the Corporations Tax Act, the Income Tax Act, the Land Transfer Tax Act, the Mining Tax Act and the Retail Sales Tax Act.

1610

I have a lot of things in my mind today about this bill. I am enticed to respond immediately to my colleagues

across the way, because they have said so many things that I so disagree with, but I will first of all indicate that the budget we are responding to in this act is probably one of the most promising budgets we've seen in Ontario for decades. We have finally arrived at the point where we have a balanced budget, and not only this year but in fact it turns out we've had a balanced budget for a whole year now with a surplus of \$654 million, which has been already allocated towards our debt.

This is wonderful news for the province of Ontario, because for the first time we're not going to be spending money we don't have. This has been a practice in the past for former governments, and a government we are very proud to be part of now has finally got that \$11-billion deficit wrestled to the ground, and we're now beginning to see an opportunity to attack the debt, which all of us are very pleased about.

It's no secret how we started upon this road to success. We reduced spending, we implemented tax cuts, we prioritized our spending and we did everything we could to encourage Ontario to become a thriving economic climate that would encourage investment in this province. We have seen the beginnings of the turnaround that was so desperately needed in this province: 701,000 jobs being created; unemployment rates that are lower than other jurisdictions across Canada, and that certainly holds true for my riding of Guelph-Wellington.

We have been diligent and we have been balanced in our approach, and I think this has been the key to our success. But we also recognize that there is an awful lot more to do, for two reasons. Number one, we do not have the economic prosperity all across the province that we would like. Certainly my riding is doing very well, as are many in southwestern Ontario and other parts of the province. But there are some areas that do need more attention. We recognize that and want to see every Ontarian with the opportunities that are deserved and owed to them. But we also recognize that Ontario, like all other jurisdictions, is now part of a very challenging global economy. Speaker, just as you and I can instantly talk to someone around the world—I spoke to my daughter today at lunch. It was her birthday. She's going to school in England. It was like talking to someone in the next office tower. We are connected to the world in so many ways that we've never been in the past, and that's no less true for business. They can choose where they're going to invest, and they look very carefully at the economic advantages or disadvantages of certain jurisdictions.

If Ontario is going to continue to grow and to remain strong and prosperous, we have to be very cognizant of what has been happening around us. So we have five strategies in mind for future success. We're going to continue on the plan of lowering personal income tax because we know that creates high domestic demand and boosts incentive for creativity and hard work. When people have money in their pockets they will spend it, they will invest it, they will save it, and hopefully that will make Ontario grow. We are going to lower corporate

income taxes to attain and retain those globally mobile investments I was speaking about. We are going to do everything we can to encourage innovation and small business entrepreneurship. We are going to invest heavily in our provincial infrastructure, whether it be highways or telecommunications. We are going to continue to ensure that fiscal balance and attacking the debt is a priority for this government.

I heard my colleagues across the way speak a great deal about corporate tax cuts as though they were a very bad thing. I think it's important for people to understand how mobile companies are. One of the countries most recently in the news has been the small country of Ireland. They have had a very significant economic turnaround in the last while. They've done a number of things, but one of the key things that they have done to build their very phenomenal success has been to lower their corporate income tax rate. Corporate income tax rates are quite varied. I have an interesting chart here. They range anywhere from 24% in Ireland to, interestingly enough, in Ontario in 1999, before this legislation hopefully passes, 44.6%, almost double. This is a tremendous difference, and this does not encourage investments to come to this province. Countries like Norway, the United Kingdom, Korea, Denmark, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Australia, France, the US and Japan all are ahead of us. If we want the opportunities and growth and prosperity for our children, for our students who are now working to be excellent in their field, we have to be very cognizant of that. That is why you are seeing our government making a very bold move in this budget through this act to lower the corporate income tax rate.

What we are specifically planning to do is to cut the general corporate income tax rate immediately by 1% to 14.5% and decline that right down to 8% when fully implemented in 2005. In addition to that, the manufacturing and processing rate will be cut immediately by 1% to 12.5%, also declining to 8% when fully implemented in 2005. As well, not forgetting that the majority of our growth here in Ontario, actually 80% of the growth, has been due to domestic demand—and I would challenge my colleague across the way and say that tax cuts have played a key part in this activity—we are also going to cut the small business rate immediately by 1% to 7%, also declining to 4% when fully implemented in 2005.

What we are doing here is making a very strategic investment in long-term investment. We are sending very clear signals to decision-makers all around the world that Ontario not only is open for business but wants their business and is going to make very bold movements to make sure their business comes here. That means opportunities, make no mistake.

The other thing that is very predominant in this particular bill is again an emphasis on personal income tax. When we were elected in 1995, we said we were going to cut personal income taxes by 30%, and a lot of people were shocked by that because it's very unusual for

governments to reduce personal income tax or reduce taxes in general. We did it; we did it ahead of time. We promised in 1999 that we would reduce personal income taxes by a further 20%. In this budget we're continuing to move forward with that, in fact again ahead of time. So Ontario's lowest income tax rate will be cut by 5% to 6.2% effective July 1, 2000; the middle income tax rate is going to be cut by 9.4% effective also on July 1. To my colleague across the way, the first \$100,000 of taxable employee benefits arising from designated stock options and capital gains granted by eligible research and development firms would also be exempt.

My colleague across the way who was talking about it being "obscene," I think was the word he used, obviously mustn't know what's happening around him. My son Daniel goes to the University of Waterloo, and he's in a program of science and business. At the University of Waterloo, perhaps my colleague across the way doesn't realize that Bill Gates from Microsoft sends up teams of people on a regular basis to headhunt the brightest and the best. They go down to Washington state just as quickly as they're picked, and they are encouraged and coaxed to be part of an American team—And it's not just Bill Gates; it's so many other companies, because they know we have bright students. They are looking for the finest minds.

As a government, we have an obligation to find ways to make it attractive for those young people to stay here in our communities. If they are part of a new and innovative company and that company can help get up and running through stock options to employees, that is exactly the right thing to do, and I believe our government is very wise in encouraging this sort of thing.

These are the kinds of companies that are going to build the jobs of the future here in this province and across Canada. Ontario, being the vibrant economy that it is, must rely on these kinds of individuals. Tax rates are an important decision. We can't compete with the US when it comes to weather, make no mistake, particularly states like California. We have to find ways to keep these people here so they will make our economy grow.

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Time is limited and I want to share my time with my colleague from across the way. There are just a few other things that jumped out at me. There are so many more things to talk about, but there are a few little things in the budget that we've hardly heard anything about. For instance, this bill makes an exemption of retail sales tax for gifts to schools, colleges and universities. The 5% tax payable on automobile insurance premiums will be reduced to zero. The land transfer tax will no longer have a limitation on time for first-time homebuyers. That tax, on a newly constructed home, will be removed.

This is a very important one to many constituents in my riding: The annual Ontario child care supplement for working families available to single parents is going to be increased by \$210 for each child under seven years of age, beginning July 1. We're helping families that really need help.

Qualifying environmental trusts, for instance, that currently pay income tax will see that reduced.

The last point, the taxpayer dividend that will be returned to any Ontario resident who has paid \$200 in taxes, is going to be implemented as a result of this bill. I've heard so many people dismiss this dividend as a giveaway, as a political plum, as a crass ploy to gain support. I look at it in this way: Ontario is made up of a lot of people who dearly love this province and are proud of the contributions they make. If you think of it in terms of a large group of people working together, shoulder to shoulder in terms of business, when that enterprise is doing well, they need to feel some sense of specific benefit from that. This is the first time, in my memory at any rate, that a government has actually given people back some of their own money. That's the key.

Whether you want to invest that in your local school, whether you want to donate it to the hospital, whether you want to invest it, whether you want to spend it in someone's enterprise, you're reinvesting that in Ontario, and you get to choose. Obviously, taxpayers choose how their governments are going to spend their money for the most part when they make an election. In the case of the former government, we paid a heavy price for that by having the debt doubled in four years, and it's been quite a struggle to get that under control.

For the first time we're going to give Ontarians an opportunity to make some very clear decisions on how to spend that dividend, just as we have done with all the tax cuts they've received over the past four years that have created those 703,000 jobs.

This is a wonderful bill. It will enact the suggestions in the budget. I'm more than pleased to support it and I encourage all members of the House to do so.

Mr Carl DeFaria (Mississauga East): I'm pleased to join in this debate on the budget, and I'll focus my discussion on the Taxpayer Dividend Act. But before I go into it I'd like to indicate that this is the first time I have seen any government introducing balanced budget legislation. Probably the government, if they had rushed into it, would have been able to introduce it before the election and get some credit for it during the election. Probably other governments that rushed into that kind of mode tried to indicate that they balanced the budget before an election and later on it was found out that their budget was not balanced.

Had our government, for example, before the election handed out \$200 to every taxpayer in Ontario it would have been criticized as buying votes. We didn't do it before the election. We're doing it after the election because it's being done as a matter of principle and as a matter of something we feel the taxpayers deserve—a break. They are being overtaxed and that's why it's being done.

Out of all the tax cuts—there are 67 proposed tax cuts for the 2000 budget—the Taxpayer Dividend Act, the \$200 rebate to taxpayers, is the only one that applies to everyone, all taxpayers of Ontario. Even people who paid only \$200 in tax will get that \$200 back, and if you paid less than \$200, you will get back whatever you paid.

I support this dividend and believe that this rebate will be of benefit not only to individual working men and women in Ontario but also to the province. Tax cuts have been shown to be beneficial in terms of a stronger economy and jobs in Ontario. The lowering of personal income tax is part of a larger strategy that all governments have employed in order to reverse the trend of decreasing GDP, which this province had been experiencing in the period from 1988 to 1995. Increased incentives for productivity, creativity and domestic demand have followed the lowering of personal income tax.

The turnaround this province has experienced in terms of job creation since 1995 can be attributed in part to Ontario's tax policy changes. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Ontarians were experiencing increased taxes at considerably higher rates than anywhere else in Canada. We know that revenue decreased, as did the spirit and morale of hard-working people who felt that rates were unconscionable. This resulted in fewer people working, fewer jobs and fewer people paying taxes. Since 1995 the Ontario economy has created over 700,000 new jobs and reversed the plaguing trend of unemployment that by no coincidence coincided with the increases in tax rates by previous governments. With our decrease in tax rates, the job rate increased.

The Ontario government's tax cuts have restored confidence in our economy, resulting in the Ontario economy being the leading growing economy anywhere in Canada. Since this government began cutting taxes, real disposable incomes of Ontarians have increased 11.6%, more than double the 5.7% growth experienced in the rest of Canada. So when you talk about the booming economy mainly depending on the American economy, I don't know how you can explain that the increase in Ontario is double the growth experienced in the rest of Canada.

The introduction of the tax dividend, put simply, will translate into more money in people's pockets, and this is in everyone's pockets. It's in the pockets of a factory worker, a construction worker, whether you are a cleaner or a struggling student. These are all things I have been in the past. Mr Speaker, you will notice that you will be getting this \$200 in your pocket, and I'm sure the people getting it will be putting it to good use.

Personal income tax cuts have in the past have both boosted spending and have been an incentive to work hard and to earn more money. This promotes entrepreneurial initiative and translates into a stronger supply and consumer demand and a more dynamic economy.

It's very difficult to stand here and always hear people against every policy of the government. There are things the government can be criticized for. For example, I think a member across the floor referred to the problem with housing, which is something our government has to deal with and is trying to deal with. There is a problem with homeless people, and that's something our government has to keep working at. But when you criticize the Taxpayer Dividend Act, when you criticize returning

money to the people who paid it, I think that goes beyond what should be taking place in this House. I hope people will see that that's not a genuine criticism.

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The Acting Speaker: Comments and questions?

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I'd like to help the member from Mississauga East out on the mystery of why the opposition isn't as effusive in its praise of the government as possible. There are two basic reasons. One is, that's why you have government members. All government members have a third hand to pat themselves on the back, no matter who the government is; government members have a third hand to pat themselves on the back. When, for instance, a local radio station or newspaper contacts Bart Maves, the member for Niagara Falls, and I, he's going to give the government position and there's a recognition that I will give the opposition position. Now, he may concede some small point the opposition has. I may concede some small point in a budget that I think is good. But basically, our role—and it's unfortunate, but in a partisan House our role is to give our point of view. So that's the mystery there.

The second reason is that as soon as you praise the government, you read it in government pamphlets after. First of all, the whiz kids back there take note of it and then the member for Willowdale gets up and reads that I've praised the government on some issue. That's difficult, you see, when that happens. Second, I remember that Morley Kells, my good friend from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, in one of his constituency newsletters quoted some great things I said about him. I would still say them today, whether he's going to quote them or not, because I have an admiration for Mr Kells and he's a popular member of the Legislature. Even now, he is even more popular, and he's written some excellent articles for the Toronto Star from time to time talking about the hierarchy of the Harris administration.

That is why we're not as effusive with the praise. We know that you will compliment the government on all aspects of the budget. We understand that and accept that. I hope that you will understand that we in the opposition may find something that we don't entirely agree with in the budget from time to time. When I deliver my speech a little later on, don't wait too long in the House for me to be very effusive in my praise of the government budget.

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): The member for Guelph-Wellington said that there are some people who have criticized the \$200 tax dividend of the government, referring to it as being a cynical exercise. In fact, the majority of people are criticizing the government for that.

I just want to scan some of the comments that have been appearing in newspapers as people have been writing in on their own, letters to the editor.

Leslie Etteienne said, "It should have been spent elsewhere, especially in health care."

Michael Stewart said, "What they should have done is spent the money to prevent tuition fees from going up."

Moira Carriere said, "I'll probably put it towards my student loan, but I really think it should be put toward education and health care."

Will Bohm said: "In my view, Ernie Eves' budget gave us an example of pure political cynicism.... How many of the poor hit with a 22% cut in welfare benefits will be getting a tax dividend cheque?... How will the tax dividend, even at the maximum \$200, help seniors recoup their losses when the Tories imposed user fees ... on prescription drugs?"

Jim and Chris Griffin said: "The \$200 rebate coming from the Harris government shows utter contempt towards the electorate. In the government's view we will overlook its continued cutbacks and attacks on our social system—from health care and education to social services."

Leonard Desroches said: "Briefly put, I do not have a large income. Yet even I recognize that the \$200 cheque being given back to me (without my consultation) by the Ontario Conservative government does not go very far in my own personal finances. I also know that collectively that money would go far in offering support structures for the most vulnerable in our culture."

Letter after letter after letter criticizing the government, saying the collective power of the billion dollars could do so much good.

Douglas Graydon: "Shame on Mike Harris! What a cheap buyoff: \$200 per taxpayer, millions in total! It's enough to end homelessness; enough to feed all of the hungry."

Anne McEwen said, "Sorry, Mike Harris and Ernie Eves. You're not buying my vote."

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): I want to congratulate the member from Guelph and Mr DeFaria, the member for Mississauga East, on their comments. I also commend the member from St Catharines, who gave a very good explanation of the opposition's role in the parliamentary process. By and large, I largely accept that role.

I would like to point out in terms of tax cuts that Mike Harris did take a very bold initiative with cutting taxes while at the same time reducing spending and trying to balance the budget, and all of that would increase jobs. We've led the G7 nations in economic growth, in job growth. We've led the United States the last few years in economic growth. We've led the country of Canada in economic growth—every single province. It has very much paid off.

Tax cuts now are the rule rather than the exception. You have to understand that Mike Harris has totally changed the way governments are looking at budgets. It used to be that everyone would hold on to their wallet at budget time. There'd be a new tax. It would always happen—whatever the stripe of the government, by the way. Now what's happening is that even, I noted in the newspaper, "NDP Cuts Taxes by \$102 million in Manitoba." That's right. The Manitoba NDP government

tabled its first budget yesterday, offering \$102 million in personal tax cuts.

The article goes on to talk about how traditional supporters of the New Democrats were quick to decry the budget. These were the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, the Manitoba Federation of Labour, Choices—A Coalition for Social Justice, and on and on, similar to the groups that decry tax cuts in Ontario. I think they need to come out of the Dark Ages. I commend the Manitoba NDP for cutting taxes, like the Saskatchewan NDP did before them. I commend them for following Mike Harris's instructional moves here in Ontario.

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell) : Je peux comprendre pourquoi la députée de Guelph-Wellington doit parler en faveur du contenu total de ce projet de loi. C'est bien simple. Si elle ne parlait pas en faveur, elle ne pourrait pas détenir les positions qu'elle a avec le gouvernement.

Mais il faut dire que le gouvernement, lorsqu'il a fait l'annonce sur le projet de loi 72, a donné les grandes lignes ; il n'est pas entré dans les détails, tous les gens ont été sous l'impression, comme dans le point de la loi sur les droits de cession immobilière. C'est seulement la première fois que la maison est vendue ou l'établissement est vendu ; le "first-time buyer", c'est seulement sur des nouvelles propriétés.

Nous regardons aussi la réduction d'impôt personnel, qui va coûter aux payeurs de taxes au-delà de 4,5 \$ milliards. Lorsque nous parlons aux grosses compagnies, aux corporations, ils nous disent, « Mais pourquoi n'avons-nous pas appliqué l'argent, ces montants-là, vers la dette ? » Les gens d'affaires reconnaissent l'importance de réduire la dette accumulée, qui est au-delà de 114 \$ milliards. Depuis l'élection du gouvernement actuel, nous avons fait augmenter la dette de 24 \$ milliards. Le seul gouvernement qui était capable de balancer son budget dans les derniers 10 ans est bel et bien le gouvernement libéral sous la direction de David Peterson, dont nous avons fini un an record, cette année-là, avec \$ 90 millions de surplus. Même si ce gouvernement-ci ne voulait pas le mentionner, en toujours nous disant que ce n'était pas le cas, cette fois-ci dans le budget de la province nous avons bel et bien vu que le gouvernement Peterson avait fini avec un surplus de \$ 90 millions.

Mais une partie qu'ils auraient dû regarder, c'est les soins à domicile. Dans le secteur rural, nous avons procédé à des coupures d'au-delà de 50 % dans les soins à domicile.

J'aimerais bien continuer à parler sur ce point, mais je crois que mon temps est maintenant terminé. Je vous en remercie.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Response?

Mrs Elliott: I'm very pleased to respond to and thank my colleagues from Mississauga East, St Catharines, Beaches-East York, Niagara Falls and Glengarry-Prescott-Russell for their comments.

I sit in this House day after day and I listen to my colleagues across the way. It doesn't seem to matter what we do on this side of this House; it's wrong. I'm one of those people who came here in 1995 because I was out of government, I was in small business, and I saw first-hand the horrible effects of unconscionable deficits being run up year after year. I think the last one under the NDP was \$11.3 billion. I want everybody at home to understand that a deficit is what you spend more than you have, and at the end of the year it becomes debt. Folks, the debt that's out there wasn't created by this government. We're trying to manage it and get a handle on it, and I find it just incomprehensible how my colleagues across the way conveniently forget that they were the architects, for the most part, of the problem we've been struggling with.

My colleague over here criticized us because we were slow to work on the debt. She contrasted us with Saskatchewan, that we were way, way far behind the eight ball as compared to Saskatchewan. And they forget the other key thing. We've been struggling through a very balanced approach to get our deficit under control, to begin to pay down the debt, but we've also been very cognizant that if we had immediately gone from \$11.3 billion annual deficit down to zero within, say, a year, we would have put Ontario's economy into a real tailspin, and that would have been a disaster. We have done it methodically. We have done it through measured approaches, more of which you're seeing in this budget today, and we created in the process a climate that created 703,000 jobs. That's hope and opportunity for Ontario, and I'm very proud to be a part of the government.

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Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I am delighted to have an opportunity this afternoon to speak to Bill 72, the budget bill. This gives me an opportunity to address the Ontario budget for the year 2000. I want to, perhaps in a more ecumenical spirit than some of my colleagues on this side of the aisle, observe that these are indeed very good times, and the budget presented by our friend from Parry Sound-Muskoka 10 days ago reflects that. It was an extraordinary presentation that the Minister of Finance laid before the assembly and before the province at 4 o'clock on May 2.

The budget, like all budgets, is replete with statistical data. I thought the most telling statistic in the 2000 Ontario budget was the statistic early in the presentation that in the fiscal year 1999-2000, the Ontario government's revenues were up \$5.3 billion above projections. Let me repeat that: The Treasurer told us on May 2 when he presented the 2000 budget that in the year just ended March 31, our revenues were \$5.3 billion above projections. Who could not sing a Te Deum of praise to that kind of good news? I can't remember a time when previous finance minister was able to report such dramatically improved revenue as was the case on May 2.

I looked at the budget papers and I was struck by not just the revenue line—and it is extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary, how robust are the revenues, and I'm not

going to argue that Her Majesty's provincial government ought not to get some credit for that. The last time revenues were even remotely this good was at a time 12 or 14 years ago when it was my pleasure to serve in the then Peterson government. I don't believe that our revenues were ever quite as good as the revenues reported for the fiscal year just ended March 31, but I can tell you from having been there, particularly in 1986, 1987 and 1988, that we had some very good times with respect to revenue growth. It is true, as has been observed by several people in the New Democratic and particularly in the current Conservative caucus, that the Peterson government spent money very liberally. Looking back a decade, it's quite clear and it is a fair criticism for members of this assembly and the general public to say that the Peterson government spent too liberally in light of what was just around the corner. That is, in my view, a fair criticism.

But let us look at the spending that is presented in this budget. I want to just take a moment to turn to Budget Paper B contained in the minister's presentation. I want to observe something, based on government data, that I think would be, as they would say in Mississauga South, counterintuitive, because the brand that Mike Harris has been able to effect with great impact is not just as a tax cutter but as a program cutter.

It is very interesting, if you look at pages 56 and 57 of Budget Paper B, the Ten-Year Review of Selected Financial and Economic Statistics. If you look at the line for program expenditures—and I'm just interested in program expenditures—what do we find? We find that in the five-year period between 1991 and 1995, the Rae government saw program spending increase by \$2.5 billion, approximately, from \$43.6 billion to \$46.16 billion. That's an increase, by my quick calculation, over that four- or five-year period, of \$2.5 billion in program spending. If I look at the Harris period from 1996 to 2000, I see program spending going up from \$45 billion to \$49.5 billion. Isn't it remarkable that the Harris government will have, in that four- or five-year period, increased program spending by almost double what the Rae government increased spending by, according to this chart? And it is quite clear that this current Ontario government, despite its branding, despite its rhetoric, is very much a spending government. I repeat, program spending in the period from 1996-97 has gone from \$45 billion to \$49.5 billion, an increase of \$4.5 billion.

I just wanted to make that observation, because the night before the budget was presented I happened to be in the library reading the Wall Street Journal, and I was struck by an editorial in the Monday, May 1, edition of the Wall Street Journal. In it there was an editorial entitled "State Spending Machine." The Wall Street Journal, not exactly a Liberal journal, was observing that these are truly the best of times in America. In the United States, according to the Wall Street Journal—and it's very bipartisan; in fact the Republicans appear to be more guilty of this than the Democrats—whether it's Pataki in New York, Thompson in Wisconsin, Engler in Michigan,

Ridge in Pennsylvania, Leavitt in Utah or Hull in Arizona, boy, are they spending money. Year over year, spending is up by 7%, 8%, 9%. Why is it possible? The journal observes, as did the New York Times a couple of weeks earlier in a front-page story entitled "A Resurgent Michigan Leads Newly Flush State"—it goes on to talk about what's going on in Michigan. There's so much money coming in—

Mr Hastings: The low tax disease.

Mr Conway: My friend from Etobicoke says, "The low tax disease." I'm not here to quarrel with that in the short term because, in this case quoting Gary Olsen, the director of Michigan's non-partisan Senate fiscal agency: "It's an ideal situation. Michigan has never been able to reduce taxes and raise spending at the same time."

I'm not here to complain. I am not going to be some nattering nabob of predictable opposition politics. As I say, who could curse the sunshine, this kind of sunshine? I repeat, our friend from Parry Sound told us revenues were up \$5.3 billion over plan. If you go to Charlie MacNaughton—well, Charlie MacNaughton is no longer with us. You can't find a treasurer in Ontario's history, I think, who has ever had such a cornucopia with which to deal and from which he could distribute largesse.

I also make the observation, and I'd make the point again: Spend? Boy, I would be interested to see the Wall Street Journal's observation of the Harris budget, because there's much more here in terms of spending than there is in terms of debt retirement. It is hard to imagine that this is not the mountaintop. I hope I'm wrong. I can't imagine that when we look back from a vantage point 10 years hence, we're not going to say, "You know, 1998, 1999, 2000—boy, that was good." In the fourth quarter of 1999, the US economy grew by 7.1%. That is phenomenal. It is unprecedented. We are told by the economic think-tanks that in 1989 the Ontario GDP derived something like 29% of itself, its benefit, from our trade with America. Ten years later, fully 54% of Ontario's GDP relates to international trade, for which you can read, for purposes of this equation, "American trade."

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Let me repeat those numbers. In 1989 Ontario's GDP was 29% dependent on our trade outside of Canada, mostly with the United States; 10 years later, that figure's gone from 29% to 54%. I say to my friend from Mississauga who spoke earlier, I'm not here to say that all of the benefit derives from our American trading relationship, but any fair-minded person would have to conclude, looking at those numbers, that our relationship with America has a lot to do with the vibrant health of the American economy.

Why is British Columbia having relatively less success? Obviously there are some issues in terms of their domestic politics, but let's not be unfair. When we were in the tank seven and eight years ago, British Columbia was riding a crest. Why? Because their regional and provincial economy is tied to the Asian tiger. Eight and nine years ago the Asian tiger was roaring. The Asian tiger has had a very protracted case of the flu and eco-

nomie pneumonia that seems to be coming to something of an end.

Mr Maves: BC was in decline before Japan.

Mr Conway: I just say to my friend from Niagara Falls, he might want to go back and actually look at the reality. But I make the point that these are phenomenal times for Ontario. I hope they continue. I hope there are no black clouds on the horizon. I'm happy to see the Minister of Correctional Services here, the former investment banker of considerable renown, because when I look at the horizon, quite frankly I see reason to be fairly optimistic.

But there is one cloud on the horizon, for which Her Majesty's provincial government has very substantial responsibility that I think portends very real difficulty. It's called Hydro. I hope I'm wrong. I hope what I'm hearing from big and small business is absolutely misdirected, but I keep hearing from big, medium and small-sized business that they are being told, in some cases by Ontario Hydro's successor company in the generation business, that rates are about to go up 10%, 15% and 20% when the market opens this November, if it indeed opens in November.

Let me tell you, if that happens, we are certainly going to be in for some interesting times. Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, who are the architects of the current electricity deregulation, as set out and passed in Bill 35, will have a very important accounting to give to millions of residential, farm, business, commercial and industrial electricity consumers in this province. I repeat: As recently as last night, I was told by some of the biggest industrial electricity consumers in Ontario that their rates, they are being told by people in the know, are to go up by anywhere from 10% to 20% almost immediately upon the market opening up this fall.

I'm quickly using up my time. There are a couple of things I wanted to mention very quickly. One of them has to do with gasoline revenues. I noticed shortly after the budget that the Canadian Automobile Association, in its very helpful way, reminded us—and to be fair to them, they gave credit to the government for reducing or eliminating a couple of motorist-related taxes and fees, and I support the government in that. I am reminded by the CAA that when you look at the 2000 Ontario budget we are accordingly going to take in, in terms of road-related revenues, gasoline tax, diesel tax and vehicle and driver licensing fees in this fiscal year, \$3.84 billion. If you just take the gasoline tax alone, we're going to be taking in \$2.26 billion. The Minister of Transportation beats his breast proudly and says, "And we are spending \$1 billion on highway improvements." Good. Where is the other 60% of the gasoline tax revenue? On behalf of my rural constituents, who don't have the TTC, who don't have OC Transpo, who don't have any kind of public transit, they know that fully 20% of what they pay on a per-litre charge for gasoline is a provincial gasoline tax.

I find it interesting that we're willing to cut corporate taxes of all sorts, we're interested in cutting income tax

rates, but we are not, in this large and diverse province, even willing to think about cutting the gasoline tax, and we are using over 50% of its revenue to support non-transportation-related programs. Isn't that an interesting tax policy? You tax geography to pay for general programs. On behalf of people who live in places like Wilno and La Passe and Bissett Creek and Calabogie and Griffith, I stand here as their member to say they don't consider this fair and just. If there is to be a gasoline tax, they're willing to pay it, but they want to see the vast majority of those monies applied to road improvements or transportation improvements.

Mr Maves: They are.

Mr Conway: They're not. I'm saying to my friend from Niagara Falls, your own budget is what I'm using as my database. I agree \$1 billion is a lot of money. It represents 40% of what you're taking in on the gas tax and I'm not even counting the diesel tax or the registration fee income.

A final word, because my time is running down, has to do with education. I see in the budget that we're going to be spending more money on early childhood initiatives and I say, with Mrs Marland present, I support that. I bet you we are reinstating cuts made some years ago to those initiatives, but that might be a little indelicate of me to suggest. But I have to say there is much else going on in education that troubles me deeply.

I see in the most recent initiatives announced this week more and more concentration of power here at Queen's Park, in the Mowat Block at head office central, and less and less real decision-making being allowed to local communities and local school boards. Apparently 900 Bay Street knows more and knows better how to deliver these programs in Emo in the Rainy River district, in Vankleek Hill down in Prescott-Russell, up in Pembroke in the Ottawa Valley, or in many other communities I could mention. This week's announcements represent yet more concentration of decision-making in our educational programming and policy-making in this province at 900 Bay Street at the Ministry of Education, and that troubles me deeply.

Even more concerning is that the war continues. Mike Harris is apparently not happy unless he is fighting with and attacking the teachers. I know the neo-conservative politics where you have to have an enemy—cops are good, teachers are bad; business is good, people on social assistance are bad—and we must be constantly at war with our enemy. Well, amidst this cornucopia, amidst this prosperity, and given the first-order importance of what education will mean to our economic future and our social well-being, I submit to the Premier that this is madness and that this is truly counterproductive. How do we suppose that we are going to get the kind of curriculum improvement, the kind of other initiatives we all want if we constantly attack the whole teaching profession, all 120,000 at the elementary and secondary levels?

Mandatory volunteerism: Oh, it makes for a good headline and it will certainly appeal to a certain core

constituency that obviously has to be appealed to for the neo-conservative diet of the day. But I tell you that what Premier Mike Harris is doing to and saying about our schoolteachers is despicable, and more importantly, it is going to set back the cause that I believe every member in this Legislature would want to see accomplished.

1700

I'm going to just conclude with this observation. I'm concluding a new biography about Abraham Lincoln, and I was thinking last night as I was reading of Lincoln's second inaugural. He's speaking a month before his own martyrdom. He's speaking to a bloody and broken country, and what does he say? Those famous words: "With malice toward none, with charity for all let us go forward to build a better world."

Well, I say to Mike Harris, you would do well to go and think about what you're doing and what you're saying to the teachers of Ontario and the destructive and negative impact that will have on the objective that I believe we all share in this Legislature—a better educational program for the 1.5 million students who go to school in publicly funded education in Ontario today.

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: With regard to my request for a late show under standing order 37(a), although I still disagree with the answer, my instinct tells me that I should withdraw it.

The Speaker: I thank the member for informing us and letting us know. Questions and comments?

Ms Lankin: I had the opportunity—I was in the members' gallery at the back here—to listen to the member from Renfrew. I've said this on a number of occasions in this Legislature: I am always tremendously moved by his passion, his conviction, and always impressed by his oratorical skills and the parliamentarian that he is. I wish there were more of us among the ranks who understood the history of this place and understood the importance that this place should play in debate of major public policy, such as the government's current budget and the direction they have chosen to take.

While I was out there I was making a phone call to a family in Peterborough. It was a very disturbing call. This is a family with a medically fragile child who are just at this point in time beyond being able to hold it together any more. The support they receive in terms of nursing care through the community care access centre, together with special services at home from Community and Social Services, leaves them without enough support even to have a six-hour period of time at night to sleep. One of them must be up every night all night long with the child. They can't get the hours they need, they can't get the support they need.

They worry about their other child, their three-year-old—this is a year-and-a-half-old baby who is so very ill—and being able to provide a normal family life and support, and the stress that's on the family, a family that, like so many others in this province, is struggling.

We were just talking about the \$200 tax dividend and how the cumulative amount of that of \$1 billion could provide the services for the 2,000 families on waiting

lists to receive the services for medically fragile children, and so much else. I appreciate the member's contribution and I support what he has to say. I wish the government would listen.

Mr Maves: It's a pleasure to rise and respond to the member opposite. He challenged us to look at pages 56 and 57, and I did that with him. Right off the bat, he talked about how the minister's budget comments were that the revenue projections were \$5.3 billion above what we had projected earlier in the year. Why? What were the reasons for that? Let's talk about that. First of all, this government has had a practice from the beginning of having conservative economic predictions about economic growth and also about tax revenues; also about deficit reduction. We've exceeded those almost every year, and that shouldn't be a surprise to him.

Second, why do we have extra revenues? Because of the phenomenal economic growth in Ontario. What has led to that economic growth? Consumption, consumer spending in the province of Ontario was in the dumps for many years. We gave money back to people. Consumer spending has led a great deal of the economic growth in Ontario. As a result of that—more people working, more people paying taxes, less money going out in social programs—it brings in more revenues.

Furthermore, economic reform: We froze hydro rates. They had gone up 11% in consecutive years under the NDP. We reduced WCB rate premiums by 20% on average. We reduced property taxes, personal income taxes, the employer health tax. Labour law reform. As a result, what happened? Businesses invested dramatically in this province: an 80% increase in business investment, new capital stock, which means new plants, new jobs, more people paying taxes. Revenues are up.

What have we done with those revenues? He chastised us because our expenditures are up. Where did the money go? Health care. Almost all the \$5.7 billion in extra revenues went into health care. That's what the Liberals say they support. That's where we put the money; that's what we supported.

M. Lalonde : Il est toujours intéressant d'écouter mon collègue le député de Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, surtout lorsqu'il vient le temps de défendre les intérêts des Ontariens et des Ontariennes. Il a bien mentionné aussi que l'autre député du parti au pouvoir vient de mentionner que la raison d'être d'avoir de la production où nos revenus ont été plus élevés que prévus, c'était bien simple, taux d'intérêt, et on devrait dire merci au gouvernement fédéral d'avoir gardé notre taux d'intérêt aussi bas qu'il est aujourd'hui—aussi le taux d'échange, mais je me rappelle que le premier ministre a toujours dit qu'il faudrait regarder à augmenter la valeur de notre argent. Chaque fois que nous allons monter d'un sou, ça représente plusieurs milliards de dollars en revenus au Canada.

Je voudrais surtout toucher le point des 200 \$ que les citoyens et citoyennes, les payeurs de taxes, doivent recevoir. Il ne faudra pas influencer le public dans l'erreur que c'est jusqu'à un maximum de 200 \$. Mais la

chose dont j'ai bien peur dans tout ça, la chose qui m'épeure un peu, c'est que lorsqu'on va faire parvenir cet argent-là, peut-être 25 \$, peut-être \$35, peut-être qu'il sera accompagné par une lettre qui va inviter les gens recevant ce montant de 25 \$ et un peu plus, qui va demander aux citoyennes et citoyens s'ils veulent adhérer au Parti conservateur de l'Ontario. Nous avons vu cette tactique dans le passé, et j'espère que cette fois-ci quelqu'un va regarder ça de très près avant de faire parvenir ces chèques.

Il est facile de balancer un budget. J'aurais pu faire la même chose lorsque j'ai été maire d'une municipalité. Nous n'avions qu'à vendre des propriétés pour essayer de balancer notre budget. Mais à la longue, c'est la jeunesse de demain qui va payer la note, puisque nous devons racheter ces propriétés, ce qui va coûter beaucoup plus cher à nos jeunes de demain.

Mr Young: As one who has been in this assembly for a relatively short period of time, I certainly want to comment upon the fact that the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has skills and talents that many of us would be served well to emulate. I do appreciate not only the manner in which he presented his arguments this afternoon but also, at least for the first portion thereof, the non-partisan approach that he attempted to take. I think he deviated from that as time went on, but I do appreciate the fact that he invited us to look at history, and I think that is always a worthwhile endeavour. He invited us to look at history and to consider not only the actions of the government in which he had the privilege to be a minister but also prior and subsequent governments.

I will accept that challenge in the brief time I have here today. As the member for St Catharines indicated earlier, I do on occasion look back and look at what the media had to say. That is one way of measuring reactions of people in this assembly. I have looked back and I looked at an article that was in the Toronto Star on April 25, 1990, authored by Thomas Walkom. Thomas Walkom at that juncture was commenting on the budget that was tabled by Mr Nixon, who was the Treasurer under Mr Peterson, the last Liberal Premier of this province.

He said the following: "In 1986," so he was reflecting back, "for instance, the government promised"—this is the Liberal government—"850 million for new hospital beds. After the Liberals won the 1987 election, the beds were scrapped." That was most unfortunate then. "Promises made, promises kept" is a credo that this side of the Legislature has abided by, and I think that was undoubtedly in the minds of the voters when they cast their ballots in 1995 and 1999.

1710

Mr Conway: I can tell you what's on the minds of voters of 1999 in Pembroke who now look at a closed Pembroke Civic Hospital. Look at an analysis done by the Harris government that said, "You can close the one hospital and renovate the other one for \$5 million bucks," and find out now, two years later, that the \$5-million

renovation bill is \$24 million. I'm not going to talk about the similar stories in Kingston and Sudbury and Sarnia. I'm not saying there weren't some tough decisions to be made, but let me just make the point. Hospital restructuring costs, we are told now by the auditor, are minimally going to be \$2 billion or \$3 billion above the estimate. And we haven't really started to spend those monies yet. There have been some allocations but, let me tell you, we've got sins for which atonement is due, let me be the first to admit.

I'm not complaining about some of the spending. I'm a Liberal. I say honestly, if I were a Tory looking at this budget, I'd say, "It may be the best year of a quarter century." With \$5.5 billion of excess revenue and a government that ran up another \$20 billion of debt, for whatever good reason, in the last four years, how much was paid down against that debt? If I were a Tory, I might say that \$500 million or \$900 million is a pittance.

My final observation would be simply this: If you had Frank Miller or Darcy McKeough or Floyd Laughren in this room, they would tell you that the hemorrhage comes when you don't have excess revenue by the billions or the hundreds of millions; it's when revenues collapse, for reasons that often have nothing to do with you. Then what? I hope I live long enough to be here to see the day—and it will happen—when the Minister of Finance is going to get up and say, "Instead of revenues being up by a couple of billion, they were down by a couple of billion." Given the new tax environment, where we've got rates, that is going to be a day when we are really going to find out something about the pain tolerance of the neo-cons.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I would like to discuss a novel concept, the concept that many in this province likely did not think they would see in their lifetime, a concept that I consider very simple but many across the way have trouble understanding.

In this debate over Bill 72, the Taxpayer Dividend Act, we've heard opposition member after opposition member tell us that giving money to taxpayers is not a good idea, that it doesn't make sense, that there are better uses for it. I can't think of a better place to have taxpayers' money than right back in taxpayers' pockets. What members opposite have so clearly failed to realize is that the money does not belong to the government, it belongs to taxpayers. Those words have been said time and time again by members on this side of the House, but it bears repeating. They are not just buzzwords or a catchy phrase; it's the truth. Government has no money of its own, only what it collects from hard-working taxpayers.

Taxpayers do work hard for their money. They work 40 hours, 50 hours, 60 hours a week, and many continue to tell us that they are still having problems making ends meet. What else are they telling us? They're saying that the past five years have finally helped to improve their lot in life. They're starting to enjoy the prosperity they should be enjoying.

I feel what this issue comes down to really is the philosophy of government. It comes down to how one treats tax dollars and it comes down to sustainability for our economic growth. To better understand, let's look back at this province under Liberal and NDP leadership when Ontarians faced 65 new and increased taxes in 10 years. We were hit with a total of \$7.5 billion in new or increased taxes under the Liberal-NDP accord in 1985. In these 10 years, personal income per capita increased by 54%. That's the good news. But the burden of provincial taxes per capita increased by 73%, more than eroding any pay increases. During that last decade, freewheeling government spending, in combination with relentless tax hikes and failed job creation schemes contributed to Ontario's fiscal crisis, which we faced on coming into office.

During the same 10-year period, government spending almost doubled, from \$29 billion to \$54 billion, and the deficit grew to an estimated over \$11 billion in the final days of the NDP. The debt more than doubled under that government, from \$42 billion to over \$100 billion by 1995. Now, after five years of hard work and sacrifice, we have finally wrested the deficit under control and are starting to pay down our debt.

What did the last decade mean for Ontario taxpayers? Quite simply, a lot of money was taken out of people's pockets. The economy slowed and consumers, businesses and investors all lost confidence. Once confidence was lost, the drag on the economy contributed to the 1990s recession. I would ask those present to contrast this with what we're seeing now: consumer confidence, jobs and a booming economy. People are off welfare. Companies want to come and invest in our province. As the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke said, we are in very good times.

Our latest budget will build on this prosperity. A strong economy is no accident. It takes careful decision-making by government in order to keep the economy rolling and, perhaps more importantly, strong leadership must keep government out of the way, rather than acting as a high tax roadblock.

We've heard opposition members tell us that the government should keep the \$200 we're giving back. "Look at what you could with it," they say. "Totalled up, it's an awful lot of money," they contend. And of course it is; it's \$1 billion. It doesn't surprise me that both the Liberals and the NDP think it should be in the government's hands. We know their history. We know their philosophy. They think the government can spend taxpayers' money better than the people who have earned it in the first place can. We disagree with that. We've been down that road. We've endured crippling tax rates and double-digit unemployment. We've watched governments try to spend their way to prosperity and it doesn't work. All that's left is a mountain of debt for us and our children.

I would ask the members opposite to consider this very carefully, because keeping our economy strong is what sending \$200 back to taxpayers is all about. If you

disagree with sending back \$200 and you think government could spend it better, then what about \$400 or \$1,000 or \$10,000? If the government should keep \$200 that is not their own, where does it stop? The answer is that both opposition parties don't know where it should stop. If they had their chance again, their answer to everything is to increase taxes.

What it comes down to is choice. We see this in our society, in the choice between more consumer products; we can choose our own phone company. Today's Ontario demands choice and it demands options. I would like to acknowledge my colleague the member for Willowdale for speaking of choice the other day in discussing this bill. He said that if people don't want their \$200 back, they can let the government keep it. But by giving the money back to people, the government is giving people options. People can pay down their credit cards; donate to charity. My wife is a strong supporter of Ducks Unlimited. We support a number of organizations. I can choose to spend that money on my children. On weekends, when I get the chance, I have breakfast with my son at our local Dover Dairy Bar or the 18 Wheeler restaurant that's just up the road from my farm. It would probably be cheaper to cook the eggs at home, but I have the option to spend this on my children.

As much as it hurts the members opposite, Ontarians are tired of tax-and-spend government. They want lower taxes and they want government to stay out of their way and out of their pocketbook. For example, farmers of my riding got a big surprise this morning from the tax-and-spend Liberals in Ottawa. On the front page of a number of national newspapers today there are reports that the federal government is calling the provinces to Ottawa to discuss their proposal to jack up tobacco taxes anywhere from \$10 to \$20 a carton. This is another route we've been down before that didn't work. Yearly tobacco tax hikes were the norm under previous governments, and all they led to was increased smuggling, contraband tobacco, lower income for Ontario's farmers and essentially less money for government coffers, not more.

Needless to say, farmers in my riding are upset. They feel like they're under attack from Allan Rock and Paul Martin, under attack from tax hikes that always seem to come outside of the federal budget. After being given good news in our recent budget—personal and business tax rates going down, the deficit eliminated and new programs to boost development in rural Ontario—farmers are now being hit with terrible news from the Liberals. High taxes cost them money, it's that simple.

1720

But back to the good news; budget support from the Ontario Trucking Association, for example. I mentioned the 18 Wheeler truck stop earlier. Trucking is a very important industry in Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant. Truckers haul gypsum, tobacco, steel. Companies like Laidlaw, McBurney, Verspeeten, Smith, are all involved in trucking; families like the Ronkwright family, the Slack family.

I wish to quote from the Toronto Sun:

"The Ontario Trucking Association says this week's Ontario budget contains the first reduction in road-related taxes in history."

"A balanced budget, plus the combined tax cuts and infrastructure investment commitments contained in this budget represent a landmark achievement," says OTA president, David Bradley.

OTA, the Ontario Truckers' Association "is hailing the announcement that the provincial government will be phasing out the 5% retail sales tax on automobile insurance premiums by one percentage point per year until it is finally eliminated in the year 2004.

"Also being killed is the 8% provincial sales tax on warranty repairs and replacements. It will be reduced to 6% starting this week and completely gone by the year 2004."

Just to wrap up, our government and the members opposite have very different ideas towards taxation. They believe that government, starting by keeping an extra \$200 a person and increasing this to untold levels, can be all things to all people. Our belief is different. We believe that if government takes too much taxpayers' money it should be given back, and next time the government should take less of it in the first place. This bill, Bill 72, will help make that a reality.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Caplan: I'm pleased to comment on the remarks from the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant. The member makes an interesting comment about his constituents, the agricultural community. I'm from a large urban riding but I can tell you that our caucus and our members from agricultural communities received outraged comments from rural Ontarians finding out that the agricultural offices of the province of Ontario were closed. You would think that if there was going to be some help and some assistance, that all were going to benefit from prosperity, those offices would be sustained, they would be funded, they would be part of the community—a key element that is not contained in this budget. I would look for the member to comment on that to ask why he isn't standing up for his particular constituents who rely on those kinds of services and rely on agricultural offices being available, being a resource and being a support to the hard-working farmers of the province of Ontario.

I would say as well, I stand up and speak for the residents of Don Valley East, people in the city of Toronto. I know that our mayor has and I'm shocked that government members from the city of Toronto—the members from Scarborough Centre, Scarborough Southwest, Willowdale—the mayor of the city of Toronto, in fact, endorsed some of the members opposite in the last election. The mayor of the city of Toronto was very clear: This budget does nothing for the city of Toronto and I would expect that the members opposite who represent this great city would want to stand up and would want to stand shoulder to shoulder with the mayor of the city of Toronto to demand that the provincial government, the Harris government, lives up to its commit-

ment to treat the city of Toronto fairly. It is shocking that we have not had any of those kinds of admissions from members opposite.

Ms Lankin: I was interested that the member claimed that Ontarians all wanted this reduction in tax and this \$200 dividend back. I would hope that he would at least admit that there is in fact a debate out there.

Earlier today I read into the record comments of a number of individual Ontarians who'd written in to newspapers. I didn't solicit these; they were just picked from different newspaper editorial pages. A lot of people are saying there's something better we could do with the collective billion dollars and those are choices that government has to make. So perhaps you could at least admit that there are debates and that there are choices.

A billion dollars adds up. A billion dollars could kick off an innovative early years education and child care program that would be affordable and accessible to all parents. The total cost after six years of phasing in such a program would be \$4 billion. That's the exact amount of money that this government is giving away in corporate taxes.

A billion dollars could restore all but \$7 million in real per capita funding of public schools that this government has stripped from Ontario classrooms since 1995. The other \$7 million could come, by the way, with the \$3 million-plus you spent on TV ads that criticized your federal Liberal friends, and the \$3.5 million it's going to cost you to mail out the \$200 cheques to all those Ontarians.

A billion dollars could restore the cuts this government has made to hospital budgets, where you have passed the deficit on down to them and collectively they're facing \$1.8 billion in deficits.

It wouldn't even take \$1 billion for you to get back into the business of affordable housing. It would cost \$780 million to create thousands of affordable homes for homeless people.

It would only take \$600 million to expand on Ontario's home care program, to help families like the family from Peterborough I was speaking to on the phone earlier who are desperately trying to care for their medically fragile child.

These are about choices. There are people who disagree with you. Not all Ontarians agree with this approach. It is up for debate.

I really wanted the opportunity to stand and address some of the comments made by the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, because he said something there that was absolutely brilliant. He said, "A strong economy is no accident." When we had the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke go on and make his 20-minute speech, in my response I said that the economic growth we've had may be because of the fact that we were reducing taxes. It was no accident. The strong economy that we have is no accident. The member from Haldimand just hit it beautifully right on the head.

We deliberately said we would put more money back into consumers' pockets. They will spend the money and

it will make the consumption portion of our economy grow. That's what had been lagging behind for so many years in Ontario. It should be no surprise. It is no accident. Sure, there are outside elements that impact on our economy, there's no doubt of that, but about 80% of our economic growth has been attributable to consumption within the Ontario economy. That is tremendous growth.

He also talked about the Ontario Trucking Association liking the budget because we're finally giving motorists a break. It reminded me that the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke talked about gas taxes and said that the CAA and other people and motorists who talked to him want more money spent on roads, and he endorses that—the flavour of the month. A long time ago, all those gas taxes and taxes on motorists were put into general revenues and got spent on other things like health care and education. His government did it, the NDP did it and we continue to do it. If he wants us to take all that money and spend it on roads, then he's got to tell us that he wants us to take it out of health care.

I want to go on about his 15 minutes later on, because everything he said in the first 15 minutes of his speech made a mockery of everything the NDP and Liberals have said in the past four years.

Mr Bradley: I would like to deal with the theory the government has on prosperity and provide a slightly different theory on prosperity in this province. I agree with my friend from Niagara Falls that indeed it isn't an accident when you have a good economy, although Ernie Eves, when he was on television the other night, said it was partially good luck, and I suppose that's part of it. There's no question that the policies of Bill Clinton and the Democratic administration in the United States have had a major impact on Canada. By and large, the booming economy in Ontario is because of the booming economy in the United States. We export an awful lot to the United States and we're delighted to be able to do that at this time. That booming economy, the low interest rates in the United States and the consumer demand have been extremely beneficial to those of us in Ontario.

I could tell you, it was that way as well when the Liberal government was in power from 1985 to 1990; not to the same degree because there wasn't quite as much trade then, but certainly a good deal of the prosperity we experienced then was because of the United States economy doing well.

1730

Second, it's low interest rates, something we didn't have under your good friend Brian Mulroney. I know you're all strong supporters of Brian Mulroney, particularly when he had a huge increase in interest rates. That was very detrimental to the economy. There's no question about that. But we've had low interest rates now. Surely if you're going to criticize the federal government all the time, one thing you can say is that their low interest rate policy is beneficial.

Last, and this one is a bit fortunate in one respect, and that is the low dollar. There's no question that our dollar

where it is now gives us a very strong competitive advantage for the auto industry, the resource industries and many other industries, and that's to what we can attribute the prosperity in this province.

The Speaker: Response?

Mr Barrett: I wish to thank the members for Don Valley East, Beaches-East York, Niagara Falls, St Catharines—different views. It's not an urban-rural issue. I am a rural member, but I have worked in downtown Toronto for 12 years, and that's much the reality for people living in rural areas.

Ms Lankin: I grew up in rural Ontario.

Mr Barrett: I appreciate that.

I wish to focus on the Liberals. When they took office in 1985, the first thing they did, with the support of their coalition NDP colleagues, was raise the maximum personal income tax rate from 48% to 50%. We see the trend, and I mentioned the federal Liberal tax hike proposed this morning in the media. Provincially, the Liberals also raised tobacco taxes in 1985, and alcohol taxes. That government began a tax-and-spend rampage that saw Ontario taxpayers gouged with 32 new and increased taxes over five years. I feel it's very important that people not forget what happened.

In 1988, the Liberals gained a majority government. They ended that partnership, and the new Liberal government's budget imposed \$1.3 billion in new tax increases—a far different philosophy, a far different approach from what we're seeing in the province of Ontario today. These increases were particularly hard on low- and middle-income earners. To ensure that the Liberal tax grab snagged everyone, they hiked the maximum personal income tax rate to 51% in 1988 and 52% in 1989. They increased the retail sales tax to 8% from 7% and its application was broadened. Gasoline taxes were increased. Alcohol and tobacco taxes were then increased again.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Bradley: The parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and I had the opportunity to meet just a while ago, for an hour, with a delegation from Great Britain. The parliamentary assistant, along with the minister, is going to be able to return that visit now. I don't know whether they're going to be inviting any opposition critics, but I'm told that may be in the works. That will not temper my remarks at this time in the House.

Seriously, though, I do want to say that one of the areas I'm very disappointed in—because I am the environment critic and a former environment minister. Environment ministers, despite the fact that when we're on opposite sides of the House we have criticisms for one another, have some empathy. Having been an environment minister, I understand the need for resources and for staff; the same with the Minister of Natural Resources at the present time. I've seen their budgets cut respectively by 9% and 17%, I think, in natural resources. This is at the time of a booming economy. I'm not suggesting that this government is about drastically increasing, but I'm concerned when I see that the Minister of the Envi-

ronment of the day is asked to carry out his responsibilities with an operating budget which is about 40% less than when his government came into power and with one third of the staff gone. I know that's going to be difficult for him. I know he's going to have to put a good face on it. That's what happens when you're in government.

But I appeal to the Premier and to the Treasurer to provide more funding and resources to the Minister of the Environment so that he is able to carry out his responsibilities. I also hope they will give the environment ministry more power within government, because there are a lot of competing forces within government and I want to see the Minister of the Environment have the kind of clout necessary to elbow aside some of the others who may not be quite so environmentally inclined.

I'm here to help out the Minister of Natural Resources, as well. He needs those resources to do his job appropriately. I'm sure he would agree, though in the House now he is not nodding or anything—if he is, he's nodding off, not nodding in agreement—because he's a good cabinet team player and will make his pitch at the appropriate time within the confines of cabinet.

There's another area I want to look at. That is the whole area of taxation. I don't think there's a quarrel. The member for Niagara Falls, in one of his responses today, mentioned that governments of various political stripes today are invoking specific tax cuts. When you have a balanced budget there's justification for that, without a doubt. We face some pretty unique circumstances, however, in many provinces, certainly in Ontario, and that is the burden of a heavy debt. I guess what small-c conservatives would find wrong with this budget, or with the budgets over the last five years, is that an insufficient amount of money has gone to the retirement of the debt or keeping the debt down. During the term of office of this government, the debt of this province has increased by \$24 billion. Do I attribute that all to the fault of the government? I'm a fair-minded person. I don't. I think the government made a mistake, and I agreed with those on the government side who said, "We should invoke our tax cuts at a time when we have a balanced budget." In fact, I think the member for Oakville was one of the recommenders of that particular course of action at one time. I think that would have been prudent. I would attribute the tax cut you gave to probably \$13 billion of the accumulated \$24-billion debt. I know those of us in the opposition want to hit you with the \$24-billion figure, and we will, to simply state the debt went up by that much. But I think to the premature tax cut you could probably attribute about \$12 billion or \$13 billion. It was timing. Small-c conservatives said to me, "I don't think we should borrow to give a tax cut." Some of those people would make the same argument today, because if the government had delayed the tax cut until such time as the budget was balanced, they probably could have avoided the accumulation of \$12 billion to \$13 billion in debt.

Members of the chamber of commerce, the taxpayers' coalition and the National Citizens' Coalition, all

independent-minded organizations interested in protecting the taxpayers, have said over the years that the accumulation of the debt is important as an issue to address, and it's for this reason: It's because the first thing you have to do in a budget is pay interest on the debt. That takes a lot of money out of circulation that could either go back for tax cuts or could be applied to various government programs. So I quarrel with the timing.

The Minister of the Environment is here, and he will know I've been critical of some of the tax cuts that have happened. I remember he suggested one day, in a resolution or a bill in the House, something I thought was a good tax cut. I mention it to him because it was a tax cut which was targeted and would be directly beneficial to people. I thought that was good, and that's the approach government should take. I'm not convinced that the people who play the stock market need a lot of tax relief. I'm not convinced that the corporate sector needs as much tax relief as the government has given it. I understand you're in a competitive market. I understand you can't have corporate taxes way above everybody else's. But it's a game that's endless. We put ours down; the next jurisdiction puts its down. You have to find the funding somewhere to finance government projects and investment in the public sector. I believe the corporate sector continues to play less and less of a role in producing that revenue directly for governments. Should we drastically increase those taxes? No, of course not. But I think the government has been overly generous in its concessions to the corporate sector, something in the neighbourhood of—somebody will correct me if I'm wrong—\$5 billion being given to that corporate sector.

I also want to say that I'm concerned about public transit. One of the things the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant and I talked about with the group from Britain was the issue of public transit. I think it's important for the provincial government to get into that field and invest in public transit. It's so very important. I know the government is going to spend a lot of money on widening highways and building new highways, and there are places for those kinds of expenditures, but I think it's important to get back into such things as GO Transit. I would compliment the government if it were back in that field. I compliment Bill Davis and his government, and John Robarts, I believe it was, where GO Transit started. We had the government of Ontario investing in public transportation. First of all, it helps the environment, and second, it gets rid of some of the congestion on the roads. It's better for safety. There are a lot of factors that militate in favour of a good government investment there.

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There are areas where governments belong. Governments shouldn't build cars. Governments shouldn't be involved in other areas that the private sector is in, they way are in some countries in the world. But there are areas where the government should intervene. The protection of the environment is one and certainly health

care is another that is very important and continues to be important. I think there is going to have to be an increasing investment in the field of health care. Education is another situation, all levels of education, but post-secondary education is very important.

Hon John Snobelen (Minister of Natural Resources): And fishing.

Mr Bradley: And fishing, as well. The Minister of Natural Resources points out that fishing and fish resources are important, and they are. They're good for tourism, they're good for the natural environment and I would certainly support his desire to see an increase in that area.

Not everything in the budget is bad. As I explained previously to the member for Mississauga East, we have government members who will defend the budget, who will tell us why the budget is good, and that's a fair role for government members to play. As an opposition member, I'll concede that ground to the government, although there are, as I say, some tax changes in here, some expenditure changes that have been made with which I am in agreement. If I had the 20 minutes we used to have for speeches, or the 30 minutes even before the rules were changed before that, I would probably have time to find some areas of the budget with which I was in agreement, but the limitation of time allows me only to deal with those matters which one would expect the opposition to deal with in these circumstances.

I am concerned about what happens when a recession comes along, that there is not going to be the revenue to maintain the kind of public services we will need for the people of this province. That's why I think it's dangerous for governments at all levels to constantly be eroding those revenue sources, because when the economy is not booming, those unanticipated and additional resources are simply not there.

I was not particularly pleased with the federal budget, I must say, for that very reason. I thought that the federal budget went much heavier into tax cuts than was necessary and that we should have seen an investment elsewhere. I guess they were listening to the commercials before the budget that the Conservative Party ran, urging the federal government to cut taxes drastically. There were no advertisements asking the federal government to spend more money on health care; they came after the budget. So I would have preferred that. Given the choice, I would prefer those kinds of investments in the economy.

The last thing I want to say, because I am on my feet—I say this in a very nice way—I was disappointed that my friend Mr Klees is not in the race for the National Alliance. I would have preferred him as a candidate over Tom Long, and I'm resentful of Tom Long elbowing Frank Klees out of that race, because I think he would have been a better candidate.

The Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Lankin: It's a pleasure to respond to the member. He mentioned, as he was talking about the reduction in corporate taxes, that he didn't think perhaps as much was

necessary. He acknowledged the need to be competitive, and I acknowledge that need too. What I would like to say to the member, having spent some time as the Minister of Economic Development and having looked at the tax competitive reports that the ministry produces on an ongoing basis, is that we are competitive as a jurisdiction, before these corporate tax cuts.

One of the things the government members never talk about is the additional things that US corporations have to pay on top of the corporate income tax; for example, health care costs, health insurance costs, which are dramatically more expensive in the US than the support for our public medicare system here.

I remember meeting with the head of Chrysler, of the international organization before it joined with Daimler, and being told that the major investments that were being made in Canadian auto in Windsor, for example, in the minivan plant, were a result of our competitive structure here. He pointed out that the cost per unit of production of a vehicle in the US contained in it about \$4,000 per unit of health care costs that they had to pay. The comparative figure here in Canada was about \$700. The members opposite never add those figures in when they're talking about competitiveness.

The other thing we haven't hear from government members—as they talk about all the additional monies and revenues and that it's all going to spending in health, for example—are the cuts that were contained in this budget.

The Minister of the Environment is here. Another 8% or 9% cut to his ministry's budget was announced in this budget. The Minister of Natural Resources is here. There was about an 18% cut to his budget. Where is the capacity to protect our natural resources and our environment? Those are things we are going to pay big for in the long run.

I say to the members opposite: You may have some good points to make, but you seem to neglect all the bad points.

Hon Dan Newman (Minister of the Environment):

It is my pleasure to respond to the member for St Catharines. I always enjoy his speeches in the House, and he has provoked me to speak today. He mentioned my ministry, and I want to bring him up to date on a few items in the Ministry of the Environment.

First off, this year we're not going to spend \$6 million on the Y2K problem because it's been solved. There are \$2 million in relocation costs and \$1 million in salary awards from last year that aren't being covered this year. I suggest to the member for St Catharines that those are some of the dollar figures he might want to look at with respect to the Ministry of the Environment in this budget.

He also touched on a resolution I had before this House a few years ago. In fact, it was a common sense resolution and he actually supported it. That resolution was that the rebate program for first-time buyers of newly constructed homes be extended to include first-time buyers of resale homes, for people who choose to live in my community, where there isn't space to build

new homes. I hope, one day, we'll see that extended so that people can continue to live in my riding and not have to move to the 905 area.

With respect to the budget, we have over 700,000 net new jobs created in this province since September 1995 and 167 tax cuts—99 to date and 66 more included in this budget, for a total of 166 tax cuts actually.

Our philosophy on this side of the House is that we'd rather see more people paying less tax, and what the other side wants is less people paying more tax.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I am pleased to respond to my colleague from St Catharines. As I listened to his speech, he dealt with the cuts to the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources and public transit, and framed them in the context of our strong and growing economy and the causes of that, which go well beyond what this government does, in and of itself, and stretch well beyond the boundaries of this province.

Indeed it is fair to say that our revenues have grown—there's no question about that—just as they have grown in virtually every other jurisdiction in the western world, as a result of a whole variety of things. But I'm glad my colleague reminded the government that this boom period we are experiencing—the rapid growth in government revenues has to do with the productivity of the men and women who run this economy: workers in auto plants in St Catharines and Windsor, workers in high-tech. It's a shame that the government won't take a moment, as have other governments, I might add, and give credit to those people. It's a real shame that they won't acknowledge those productivity improvements. They don't want to do that because the messaging gurus want to take all the credit for it. They don't want to give credit to the auto industry and the auto workers. They just want to talk about their tax cuts, and that's unfortunate.

When my colleague from St Catharines tells the Minister of the Environment of the cuts he has inflicted on his ministry and that his government has inflicted, I say the current Minister of the Environment should listen to what he has to say, because in my view he has demonstrated what a real Minister of the Environment can be and should be.

I'm pleased to say to my colleague: Good words, and keep them honest over there.

Mr Young: I am privileged to have an opportunity to comment on the remarks by the member for St Catharines. I will take a few of my brief moments to also comment upon the remarks by the last speaker, the member for Windsor-St Clair. I would ask, Mr Speaker, if in due course you could perhaps check out the public address system within this chamber to ensure that the voices of people on this side are heard by the people sitting on the other side, because clearly there is some problem. If the public address system was working properly and if the member for Windsor-St Clair did listen as the members on this side were speaking, he would have heard us go on at some length about the fact that we were applauding the men and women of this

province who have sacrificed a great deal to right this economy. We spent a great deal of time doing that, and I'm prepared to acknowledge yet again how important the contributions of those workers have been to this economic miracle.

I also want to talk about the member for St Catharines and the fact that he is quick at every opportunity, and today was no exception, to credit the economic boom in the United States of America for the success that occurred in this province. Of course he fails to comment on the fact that the real GDP, the growth rate in this province, far outstrips that of any of the border states, and frankly far outstrips all of the United States.

I do like the member for St Catharines. I think he's a fair parliamentarian and a good local representative. But it's puzzling to me why, when it comes to interest rates, he has credit exclusively for his federal cousins. That's the one area where he believes the United States of America and their economic and fiscal decisions have absolutely no effect on this country. With respect, I think that a balanced and fair view would appreciate that the United States does have some effect there, as they do with the economic turnaround. But it is the sound fiscal management this government has delivered that is primarily responsible.

The Speaker: Responses?

Mr Bradley: I want to thank all my colleagues for their contributions this afternoon. I found something in the budget that I agree with, because I didn't want to be totally negative. I agree with the March 31, 2000, limitation on the land transfer tax refund to first-time buyers being repealed, with a projected cost to the treasury of \$28 million. I agree with that. So I don't find everything

in the budget negative. I'm very ecumenical. I had to look through the whole budget to find something and finally found something, and with the limited time I have, I want to show how positive I can be. I'm glad you accepted the recommendation of the Liberal opposition to do this, and I congratulate you for listening on that occasion.

Again I look at my colleague the Minister of the Environment, and I understand he has to get up and say certain things about the budget. What I want to get back from him is that 40% cut that has been made and the 33% cut to staff. I'm going to work on it. I'm going to speak to the Treasurer. If the Premier is speaking to anybody on this side, I'll even speak to the Premier about this. Of course, I'm going to try to help out the Minister of Natural Resources as well, because I think it's important to do so.

Interjection.

Mr Bradley: I'm glad the member mentioned that. I'm supposed to mention that the Grantham High School reunion is to be held on the long weekend in May at Governor Simcoe Secondary School on Friday night and on Saturday at the Rex Stimers Arena and the Jack Gatecliff Arena combined. There were some members' staff here who went to Grantham High School. It's only \$30 to register—you can still register—and it's going to be a great time for all those who want to take part. I'll even invite members of the Legislature to join us on that occasion.

The Speaker: I thank the members. It being almost 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Monday.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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