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of Ontario**

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**Assemblée législative
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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 20 November 2000

Lundi 20 novembre 2000

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 20 November 2000

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 20 novembre 2000

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SOCIAL HOUSING

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): Today we begin hearings on the Harris government's housing downloading legislation, Bill 128. A grand total of five hours has been allotted to gather input and hear deputants. In other words, out of the hundreds of individuals and organizations that wish to comment on Bill 128, only 19 are going to have an opportunity to do so.

It's no surprise to me, because no one supports Bill 128—not public housing tenants, not public housing providers, not municipalities, not even Mike Harris's own hand-picked adviser, David Crombie. I'm certain that Minister Clement did not even send this legislation to the Red Tape Commission, because Bill 128 contains enough red tape to choke even the biggest Tory dinosaur. Bill 128 is a disaster. It will hand municipalities a ticking time bomb, leaving local ratepayers to face enormous property tax increases.

The Social Housing Reform Act ensures that no new housing will be built. This is especially reprehensible at a time when we have a housing crisis in Ontario and—get ready for it, Speaker—we will now face an Ontario-style ethnic cleansing of the poor. If Mike Harris and Tony Clement are serious about ensuring that Ontarians have safe, decent and affordable housing, they will do the proper thing and withdraw Bill 128, the Social Housing Reform Act, today.

PARALYMPICS

Mr Brian Coburn (Ottawa-Orléans): I rise today to congratulate three extraordinary athletes living in my riding of Ottawa-Orléans. Jason Lachance, Chantal Benoit and Caitlin Renneson have just returned from Sydney, Australia, where they took part in the Paralympics. In fact, they didn't simply take part; Jason, Chantal and Caitlin were outstanding in each of their events. After capturing gold in the 100-metre sprint, Jason climbed the podium two more times for silver medals in the 200-metre and 400-metres sprints. Jason is also the defending world champion in the 400-metre sprint. Chantal and her basketball teammates took home

the gold medal, their third straight Paralympics first-place finish. Caitlin captured a bronze medal in the 400-metre. Caitlin set a 1,500-metre world record back in 1998 and has set the Canadian records in 800-metre and 1,500-metre.

Caitlin, Chantal and Jason exhibit some of the true spirit of the sport. The Paralympics are not brought to the world stage the same way as the Olympics are. It is unfortunate that there is a lack of television cameras there to broadcast all the glory. Paralympians compete with the same desire and determination and as hard as any other athlete in the world, and they are all champions.

I congratulate all three in their accomplishments and I wish them the best of luck in future competitions. I know they'll succeed on and off the court and the track.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr John C. Cleary (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): In the spirit of National Child Day, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about our children. I'm sure every member, even the members across the aisle, will agree that our children are the future of the province. I believe it is our responsibility to ensure that every child is given the essential tools to make their future as bright as it can be.

Numerous studies, including the Fraser Mustard report commissioned by Mike Harris in 1998, have stated that a child's early years, especially the first three years, set the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health. The government's answer to the Mustard report is the early years challenge fund. The government allocated \$30 million to spend on early childhood development, but there are strings attached. In order to qualify for the provincial funds, a pre-school program has to raise half the money it needs from private sources. So far, no school has been able to do that, and the money is still sitting at Queen's Park.

In large urban areas and in other larger areas in the province, the childhood program could become much easier because they have a larger population to draw from, but communities like mine in smaller rural Ontario are already stretched to the limit with fundraising initiatives. In my riding the community is already being asked to raise millions of dollars for hospital restructuring and other infrastructure programs. Why should communities be forced to foot every part of the bill for another Mike Harris scheme?

Children in my riding and other small and rural ridings deserve access to the same advantages as children in big cities, but apparently the Ontario government feels differently. This is just another example of the government ignoring the people of rural Ontario. It's programs like this that make the people of Ontario question the commitment to children of the Mike Harris government.

LONDON POLICE SERVICE

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): I rise in the House today to congratulate members of the London Police Service. Last week I recognized sworn members of the London Police Service. Today I wish to recognize civilian members of that service.

During constituency week I attended the awards ceremony for the London Police Service. I attended the ceremony as parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General and as one of the area MPPs. Thus, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate the long-standing members of the London Police Service:

With 40 years of service: Arthur Springett.

With 30 years of service: John Marcin and Frances Melville.

With 20 years of service: Eldon Amoroso, Catherine Brennan, William Butler, Judith Campbell, Jeffrey Craigmile, Debra Dodds, Verna Fleuelling, Randolph Forsythe, Laurie Gassewitz, Judith Graybill, Angela Haggerty, Barbara Hornick, Linda Johnson, Catharina Jones, Diane Lansdowne, Paul Lasenby, Lorraine McDonald, Lori Nosko, Kathryn O'Flynn, Catherine Porter, Avril Potts, James Rae, Gloria Rogers, Christina Ross, Brian Sharpe, Catherine Sharratt, Penelope Stallan, Suanne Thompson, Willem VanWelzen, Dianne Whitelaw, Robert Wilson and Susan Wood.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating these long-standing members of the London community. Without the contribution of this police personnel, my riding of London-Fanshawe and the city of London would not be the safe and beautiful community that we live in.

COMMENTS OF CANADIAN ALLIANCE CANDIDATE

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I want to register on behalf of my leader Dalton McGuinty, my Liberal caucus colleagues and I hope all members of the Legislature our profound distress about the comments made by a federal Alliance candidate about new Canadians of Chinese and Tamil background.

Canada has been built over its history by immigrants from around the world joining our aboriginal community in a spirit of enormous mutual respect. This now-former candidate made several comments that are offensive to all of us and while this is strong language, they were racist comments. Canada has been blessed to attract enormously talented people who want to come our country from Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China,

Taiwan and Sri Lanka. We invited them, they came and they are doing great things for Canada. It is my fervent hope that the voices of all Canadians—all of whose roots, except for our aboriginal community, trace to other countries—will in a deafening roar drown out the racist comments of a few so our Chinese and Tamil communities clearly hear that, like everyone else in this country, they are welcome, they are at home, we want them, they are respected citizens of this country and racist comments will not be tolerated by anyone in our land.

RESTRAINT OF HOSPITAL PATIENTS

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): I'm rising today to speak to members of the Legislative Assembly about a private member's bill I have coming forward on Thursday, Bill 135. It's a bill that would stop the physical restraint of the confused elderly in our acute care hospitals, older people who are not being tied up for any medical treatment purposes but simply because they are old and because they're confused.

I've sent every member of the Legislative Assembly a copy of the bill and some background information, research information about the medical problems with the use of restraint, as well as some of the other jurisdictions that have moved to prohibit this.

1340

I want to draw your attention to an article this weekend that was written by Star columnist Helen Henderson. Helen did a profile of some of the cases over the years that you should be aware of.

For example, at a Toronto-area hospital, Marion Post, described as a confused elderly woman, became the second patient in five years to strangle while trying to escape restraints in which she had been confined.

Lau Szeto, who spoke only Cantonese, burned to death when she tried to free herself by setting fire to her restraints. She had been placed in them because she was bothering people, trying to speak to them in a language that none of them understood.

In British Columbia, Lily Lee, who had been forgotten by staff, choked to death on her own vomit when she had been restrained to a toilet. As she struggled to get up, the restraints got tighter and tighter.

Geriatricians, the Geriatricians' Alliance, the psycho-geriatric association, many seniors' organizations and the Alzheimer Society are all supporting this bill. I urge every member of the Legislature to do the same.

PARALYMPICS

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): My colleague in the riding of Ottawa-Orléans just brought your attention to the Year 2000 Paralympics in Australia. I too rise today to pay tribute to all the athletes who represented Canada at these games, but I rise specifically to talk about one of my constituents who had the honour and privilege of competing at the Paralympics.

The athlete that I speak of is Kyle Pettey. Kyle Pettey returned home from Australia a champion. His outstanding performance, energy, and remarkable drive to succeed earned him a silver medal in the discus competition, and another silver in the men's shot put. Kyle's experience at these games is something I'm sure he'll remember for the rest of his life.

But while I'm particularly struck by Kyle's tenacity, hard work and devotion, I admire too the dedication of his coach, John Potts. A wise philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, once said, "We all need someone who can help us do what we already can." Therefore I believe it was John Potts's winning, committed and visionary style of coaching that aided Kyle in his pursuit of an Olympic dream.

Speaker, I know that you join with me and thousands of others, particularly in the town of Campbellford and Seymour, as we congratulate both Kyle Pettey and his coach, John Potts, for their outstanding success at the Year 2000 Paralympics.

CHILD POVERTY

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): Today is National Child Day. We are encouraged to celebrate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Times are good in Ontario, according to some. The economy is booming. So why is it we hear that there are more poor children than ever in Ontario?

This is the second report this month that has indicated that Ontario's children, those who need us the most, are being left behind by the Harris government. The Early Years Study has given very clear recommendations to the government about how to support children in Ontario. A report issued today by Campaign 2000 indicates that the number of poor children in Ontario has increased by over 90% since 1989, and the number of poor children with parents who work has increased by 50%.

It is time for the Premier to act. Campaign 2000 urges the government to increase parental leave, ensure that parents have access to quality child care, support and build more affordable housing, and ensure that parents receive a living wage.

Child poverty has increased under Mike Harris's watch. The statistics speak for themselves. Mike Harris is obviously not a leader or an advocate for Ontario's children.

DIALYSIS

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): I recently attended the opening of the Scarborough Hospital satellite dialysis unit in my riding of Scarborough Centre. This satellite will serve over 400 additional new patients in the east Toronto area.

A lot of hard work and planning went into creating this unit. A number of dedicated people and organizations must be thanked, but I especially want to commend

the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Honourable Elizabeth Witmer, for her interest and financial support.

In 1998-99, this government allocated more than \$7.6 million to treat dialysis patients at Scarborough Hospital. In 1999-2000, an additional \$10.7 million was allocated. In 2000-01, we've projected an expenditure of a further \$13.2 million to the program.

Health Minister Witmer's announcement of an additional \$22 million to expand dialysis treatment around the province will also have a positive impact for the many people who require dialysis treatment in east Toronto. The Scarborough Hospital will assist the Toronto East General Hospital in its establishment of a new dialysis treatment facility at the hospital in the near future.

I am proud to be a member of a government that is committed to improving the quality of health care in this great province of Ontario.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Standing order 62(a) provides that "The standing committee on estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 59 and 61 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year."

The House not having received a report from the standing committee on estimates for certain ministries on Thursday, November 16, 2000, as required by the standing orders of this House, pursuant to standing order 62(b) the supplementary estimates before the committee of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Standing order 62(a) also provides that "The standing committee on estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 59 and 61 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year."

The House not having received a report from the standing committee on estimates for certain ministries on Thursday, November 16, 2000, as required by the standing orders of the House, pursuant to standing order 62(b) the estimates before the committee of the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Labour, the Management Board Secretariat, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, the Ministry of the Solicitor General and the Ministry of Correctional Services are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE
AND SOCIAL POLICY

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice and social policy and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Ms Lisa Freedman): Mrs Mushinski from the standing committee on justice and social policy presents the committee's report as follows and moves its adoption:

Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 69, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 in relation to the construction industry / Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail en ce qui a trait à l'industrie de la construction.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All those in favour of the report will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1348 to 1353.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion for the adoption of the report of the standing committee on justice and social policy please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Spina, Joseph
Baird, John R.	Johnson, Bert	Sterling, Norman W.
Beaubien, Marcel	Klees, Frank	Stewart, R. Gary
Chudleigh, Ted	Marland, Margaret	Stockwell, Chris
Clark, Brad	Mazzilli, Frank	Tilson, David
Coburn, Brian	Molinari, Tina R.	Tsubouchi, David H.
Cunningham, Dianne	Munro, Julia	Turnbull, David
Ecker, Janet	Mushinski, Marilyn	Wettauer, Wayne
Galt, Doug	O'Toole, John	Wilson, Jim
Gilchrist, Steve	Palladini, Al	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gill, Raminder	Runciman, Robert W.	Wood, Bob
Hardeman, Ernie	Sampson, Rob	Young, David
Hodgson, Chris	Snobelen, John	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Crozier, Bruce	Levac, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Curling, Alvin	Martel, Shelley
Bountrogianni, Marie	Di Cocco, Caroline	McLeod, Lyn
Boyer, Claudette	Dombrowsky, Leona	McMeekin, Ted
Bradley, James J.	Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie
Bryant, Michael	Gravelle, Michael	Patten, Richard
Caplan, David	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Christopherson, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Ramsay, David
Cleary, John C.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Colle, Mike	Lankin, Frances	Sergio, Mario
Conway, Sean G.		

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 38; the nays are 34.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Tuesday, November 14, 2000, the bill is ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CORRECTIONS ACCOUNTABILITY
ACT, 2000

LOI DE 2000 SUR
LA RESPONSABILISATION
EN MATIÈRE DE SERVICES
CORRECTIONNELS

Mr Sampson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 144, An Act to establish accountability in correctional services, to make offenders demonstrate that they are drug-free, to set rules for offenders to earn their release, to give the Board of Parole a say in earned release decisions, and to change the name of the Board of Parole / Projet de loi 144, Loi visant à instituer la responsabilisation au sein des services correctionnels, à obliger les délinquants à démontrer qu'ils ne font pas usage de substances intoxicantes, à fixer les règles que doivent suivre les délinquants pour mériter leur libération, à permettre à la Commission des libérations conditionnelles d'intervenir dans les décisions en matière de libération méritée et à changer le nom de la Commission des libérations conditionnelles.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The minister for a short statement?

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister of Correctional Services): I'll wait for ministers' statements.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I move that pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Monday, November 20, Tuesday, November 21 and Wednesday, November 22, 2000, for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

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

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon Frank Klees (Minister without Portfolio): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Klees: I move that notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list for private members' public business: that Mr Patten and Mr Levac exchange places in order of precedence, such that Mr Patten assumes ballot item number 74 and Mr Levac assumes ballot item number 54.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

1400

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister of Correctional Services): In 1867, the Fathers of Confederation believed that the principles of peace, order and good government would offer a new nation its best hope for growth, prosperity and civility. Crime was different then. In fact, a review of the logs at the Don Jail in Toronto reveals that offenders were arrested for offences such as stealing horses, committing high treason and owing debts. Needless to say, times have changed. Or have they?

It may surprise Ontarians to know that when this government was elected in 1995, fully one third of all jails operating in this province were older than this country itself. In many ways those jails stand as crumbling relics of an age when governments were content to ignore the challenges of correctional services.

Since 1995, this government has committed to spend more than half a billion dollars to construct new and modern jails, to retrofit other jails with security upgrades and to begin the process of mothballing jails that predate Confederation.

But it's not enough to simply replace bricks and mortar. By ignoring the realities of criminal behaviour we would be short-sighted and self-defeating. Approximately 80% of adult inmates and 60% of those who have been sentenced to community sentences have some form of drug or alcohol dependency. You cannot hold down a job and be fully functional as a member of society if you are shackled by drug and alcohol addictions.

To combat the scourge of drugs that plagues our institutions and our communities, this bill will establish a program of random and regular drug and alcohol testing for all offenders. If an offender fails to demonstrate that he or she is drug-free, then the response would be swift and sure. That offender would find himself losing his earned remission or he would be back in jail if he was serving his sentence in the community.

Drug use, especially in institutions, is a serious matter. Inmates who are high on drugs and alcohol pose a danger to correctional staff and other inmates. Drugs and alcohol destroy the will of offenders to break the cycle of criminal behaviour. Drugs and alcohol will only serve to sink an offender deeper into despair.

We will help. We will offer our treatment programs so that offenders can re-enter society with confidence that they can conquer their addictions. These measures will go a long way to holding offenders accountable for their actions, but we will go further.

This government has been calling on the federal Liberal government to follow Ontario's lead to stop coddling criminals and to finally get tough on crime. We have joined our voice to the cries of victims and the outrage of Canadians. The responses from the federal Liberals are a dismissive shrug and a deaf ear.

This government has urged the federal Liberals to scrap their statutory release law, or "discount law," as it has come to be known fondly to criminals. Federal legislation generously offers criminals one third off their sentence as if to be rewarded for going to jail. This reduction is known as "earned remission." Currently, earned remission is only taken away for bad behaviour.

The Ontario government believes that its generosity of spirit should be shared with the victims of crime and not the criminals. We can no longer wait for weak-kneed Liberals to embrace common sense. We warned the Liberal government not to doubt our resolve and today we have acted. In Ontario, inmates will have to earn their freedom. In Ontario, inmates will no longer be granted this gift at the end of their sentence. Criminals will earn their freedom by actively and positively participating in treatment and work programs, demonstrating that they are free of drugs and alcohol, and by abiding by the rules and standards of positive behaviour.

In 1993-94, the NDP government's parole grant rate was 59%. I am pleased to announce in this House that in 1999-2000, due to this government's emphasis on public safety, the parole grant rate has been reduced to 28%. Parole is now a privilege to be earned, not a right to be granted.

To ensure that every inmate is fully accountable for his or her behaviour, this bill will reconstitute the Ontario Board of Parole into the Ontario Parole and Earned Release Board. This board would retain the authority to make all parole decisions. In addition, this board would make decisions on all early and conditional releases except for short-term treatment and work programs or other administrative releases such as medical appointments. The Ontario Parole and Earned Release Board will ensure that offenders have earned the privilege to be released early. The board will be responsible for making early-release decisions for high-risk offenders—those serving sentences of 18 to 24 months—as well as have the authority to audit, review and reverse earned release decisions made by correctional institutions for lower-risk offenders.

This government can no longer rely on a correctional system that has often shown itself to defeat initiative and discourage innovation. Some people—even some people in this House—believe we have a model correctional system in Ontario. But how can this correctional system be a model when our best estimate is that eight out of every 10 offenders who come in the front door leave the institutions and re-offend? How can this correctional system be a model when we have the second-highest cost of any jurisdiction in Canada?

Some critics of this government cling to the fiction that everything will be all right if we just leave it alone. I say to those critics that their stubborn refusal to consider bold and innovative solutions renders their thinking as outdated as those relics of a distant age.

Last week, I had the honour of presenting 27 Ministry of Correctional Services employees and volunteers with awards for exceptional achievement. I have also come to meet many other dedicated professionals in the ministry. But we mock their dedication if we accept the status quo. I have faith in those employees who have truly made corrections their vocation. Correctional staff are not failing us; the correctional system is failing us.

To ensure that public safety is assured, we are introducing this bill to create a no-frills correctional system that is safe, secure, efficient, effective and publicly accountable. We will encourage innovation and creativity in the way correctional services are delivered. We will introduce more public-private partnerships to establish efficiency in the correctional system.

We do not believe that the public sector has a monopoly on effectiveness and success in correctional services. By introducing competition to correctional services, we believe this will create an incentive for publicly run institutions to strive harder and work harder. This will create a healthy and vital competition between publicly and privately run jails. The net effect of a mixed private and public system will be more efficient and more effective correctional services.

There are those who think that a private jail would never work here in Ontario. They are wrong. Private jails already exist. Project Turnaround near Barrie has been in operation for more than three years. Preliminary reports indicate that this facility is having a positive and significant impact on the lives of young offenders. We will build upon that success.

I have already introduced a bill today which establishes a framework for tough standards for services delivered through partnerships; in fact, for all services delivered in correctional services. To properly ensure that public safety is maintained, we will introduce stringent accountability measures into the Ministry of Correctional Services. We will do this by setting tough standards for the operation and performance for all jails, whether they be publicly or privately run. These standards will be the strictest of their kind in the country.

How will local citizens know their communities will remain safe? We intend to maintain a ministry official, an on-site monitor, at any privately run jail, 24 hours a day,

seven days a week. We intend to establish local monitoring boards comprised of professionals and local citizens who would have full and free access to all areas of the jail, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We would retain the right to step in immediately and take over the delivery of correctional services in an emergency or if public safety were ever at risk.

The local boards would monitor the safety and security of the public, the offenders and the staff at the jail. These boards will first be established at the central north correctional centre in Penetanguishene and the central east correctional centre in Lindsay. These boards would eventually be established in every community that hosts a correctional facility.

The local boards of monitors would report directly to the Minister of Correctional Services, and the Minister of Correctional Services would make those reports available to the public.

This bill shows that this government is serious about public safety and will take measures to hold criminals accountable for their actions.

1410

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Hon Margaret Marland (Minister without Portfolio [Children]): I rise today to celebrate the most incredible people in our society, our children. In Ontario, our government has made children a top priority, leading the country in our support of children and working to ensure they have every opportunity to reach their full potential.

In the past five years, the Harris government increased funding to key programs for children, despite federal Liberal government funding cuts to Ontario's education, health and social programs. The 2000-01 estimates indicate that Ontario's spending on children's services is the highest it has been for the last 10 years.

This remarkable achievement has been the result of the commitment and dedication of our Premier, Mike Harris. It was this Premier who took the initiative to appoint the first minister responsible for children in the history of our province. Premier Harris further demonstrated his commitment to Ontario's children when he commissioned the groundbreaking Early Years Study, which gave us new insight into the critical importance of early child development. He has since presented the study at two annual Premiers' conferences, helping to make early child development a national priority and raising the understanding of the importance of the early years internationally.

Our government is also implementing a concrete early years action plan, including the establishment of five demonstration projects and the appointment of a 10-member advisory council task group. We have also committed \$6 million in funding for early years community co-ordinators and \$30 million in an early years challenge fund to help implement early child development and parenting centres province-wide.

Our government values the contributions young people make to our communities. We are very interested in engaging them directly in discussions and decisions on the future of Ontario. I'm very excited to report that we have received almost 400 applications for our new Ontario Youth Council, and I expect to announce the council's first members later this year.

Our government believes that in Ontario we have the capacity to make sure no child is left behind, no child falls through the cracks and every child has opportunities to grow into a successful, happy, healthy adult—tomorrow's leaders.

On November 3, Premier Harris launched Ontario's Promise, a tremendously important call to action to all Ontarians to help our children achieve these goals. Ontario's Promise will bring together individuals, community service providers, volunteers, charitable organizations, business and governments to secure a brighter future for all Ontario's children and youth. This groundbreaking initiative focuses on five fundamental promises to all Ontario's children and youth: a healthy start; an ongoing positive relationship with a caring adult; a safe place that offers positive, meaningful activities outside of the home; marketable skills through effective education; and an opportunity to give back to the community. Ontario's Promise, just two weeks old, has already attracted \$22 million in support from the business sector in Ontario.

While we have made great progress in supporting Ontario's children, we know there is more to do to ensure that all children have the opportunity to grow into strong, healthy and successful adults. We believe that one child living in poverty is one too many. Our government feels that the best way to improve the lives of children living in poverty is to improve the economic circumstances of their parents. We are working hard to create an environment where parents can have jobs and be financially independent.

Since 1995, 795,000 net new jobs have been created and 565,690 people have stopped relying on welfare in Ontario, including 247,820 dependent children. We also have established and expanded programs for children and families who need additional assistance. We are providing a better start for Ontario's 139,000 newborns and their families each year through our \$67-million Healthy Babies, Healthy Children early intervention program.

Our partnership with the Canadian Living Foundation helps over 135,000 Ontario schoolchildren receive a nutritious meal each day through our \$4.5-million contribution to the Breakfast for Learning program. Since 1995, our government has increased spending on child care by approximately 30% and 19,000 new regulated child care spaces have been created in this province.

We have brought about powerful legislative and funding changes to better protect children at risk of neglect and abuse. We have increased spending on child welfare by 80%, to over \$650 million, allowing children's aid societies to hire 1,000 new child protection workers.

Our government has shown, and will continue to demonstrate, an unwavering commitment to the children of Ontario. I am proud to be highlighting this commitment today, National Child Day, a day to commemorate the United Nations' adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ontario will continue to be a leader in supporting the healthy, positive development of children and giving them every opportunity to reach their full potential.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I would seek unanimous consent to make an announcement today about the strike in Hamilton-Wentworth and back-to-work legislation.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? I'm afraid I heard some noes.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I want to take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Correctional Services for making a commitment to fix the infrastructure of the jails and prisons in our province, and as I have told him, I thought that was a very worthwhile thing to do, because the Fathers of Confederation who built some of those jails would probably be ashamed of the fact that they're still in existence and use.

That speaks to the problem that we do have, and that problem is the working conditions of the correctional officers, which has been pointed out to the minister time and time again; the fact that the working conditions of the correctional officers have been jeopardized by overcrowding, that this government has spent time to close 743 beds across the province and at the same time cancels the program that would have seen them go into programs on the weekend that were valuable to the people who needed the rehabilitation that he wants to talk about.

The idea that he wants to do one thing and says another seems to be becoming very, very apparent. I'll show you how apparent it is. He talks about pride in the fact that he's running a private institution now in our province, the fact that he wants to take a great deal of credit for the Camp Turnaround project in Barrie, which we like to call Camp Run-Amok. The very first day of operation we had an escape. It's unbelievable.

Let's talk about the real issue here, the fact that they cherry-pick those students; that they want to claim that the high recidivism rate comes down because of that camp. Let's talk about who he puts in there: if they're violent, they're not allowed to come in; if they've got a long sentence, they're not allowed to come in; if they have mental health problems, they're not allowed to come in. They cherry-pick that situation and they make the camp sound as if it has a great success rate.

In actual fact, when we take the numbers that the ministry is forgetting to add in there about where else they're being transferred to, the recidivism rate is actually higher at Camp Turnaround than it is in regular

institutions that have been running already. So there's your private success story.

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Let's talk about another private success story. Let's talk about the youth detention at Genest in London. In their 18 months of operation as a private institution, there have been three reported escapes. Before that, in a 10-year period, zero escapes.

Let's talk about the pride that he takes in private partnerships. Let's talk about private partnerships, the private partnership that he established with the canteen company that last year was caught smuggling drugs into the correctional facility. Good private operation.

Let's talk about the partnership they want to have with Wackenhut—another failed experiment. Ohio, California etc—a failed experiment. This government doesn't want to learn the lesson that the rest of the world knows: privatization is a sham.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): I appreciate the minister's comments with regard to National Child Day, but let's get one thing clear on the record: children are not a priority for this government, because there are more children falling through the cracks than ever before.

Since 1989, the number of poor children in Ontario has doubled, to 538,000 children. One in five children in Ontario lives in poverty. This government is no friend to children, and the statistics speak to that. This is no accident. This is the result of your government's cuts to social assistance.

The jobs that you have created are low-paying, and many are part-time and benefit-free. These jobs have increased the number of children living in poor working families by 48%. Children make up 42% of those who visit Ontario's food banks, and families with children are the fastest-growing group of homeless people.

What do these poor children have to look forward to? They are more likely to have speech and hearing problems, less likely to participate in organized sports and recreation, and less likely to live in safe neighbourhoods. That is what our children can expect without action.

This government first refused and now waffles over whether or not it will extend parental leave.

The education funding formula prevents the use of school facilities for early child development and parenting centres, in direct opposition to the recommendations of the Early Years Study.

There are nearly two million children in Ontario, and 1.4 million of them have moms who work, yet there are only 67,000 subsidized child care spaces in this province.

In September of this year, a new federal early childhood development accord was signed that will bring over \$800 million to Ontario. The Better Child Care Coalition has challenged Mike Harris to match those funds. They are worried that he will not do it. The challenge fund sits in a bank waiting to be announced for the third time,

while the American-style Ontario's Promise program has been described as icing without a cake.

The statistics indicate that when it comes to children, they are not a priority for this Tory government. I urge the minister to put children first and respond positively to the recommendations of the report.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The Minister of Correctional Services confirms today that he has no interest in or familiarity with corrections, with rehabilitation or, quite frankly, with what has been going on and is going on right now in correctional institutions across the province of Ontario. His passion for privatization and his intimacy with his corporate partners, Wackenhut Corrections Corp of America and who knows how many other private for-profit corporate operators that want to come into Canada and Ontario so they can drain huge profits out of our correctional system and out of Ontario into Texas, Arkansas and the ilk, is apparent.

I would ask the minister to please have read his own statute before he made the announcement today. It's naive to the point of outright wrong to suggest that he's introducing any sort of new regime. The fact is that superintendents of prisons across this province had the power, by way of discipline, to extend prison sentences beyond the two thirds and revoke portions exceedingly in greater numbers of the statutory remission for decades. The reality is that Mr Sampson hasn't had enough interest in the correctional system here in Ontario to call upon superintendents in our prisons to in fact do that.

This government is still reeling from the blow it delivered itself when it called for a 42% salary increase for the Premier and his backbenchers. What do they come up with to counter the negative spin they created for themselves? They had the minister of corrections last week detailing lineups of women, kids, parents, young folks and old folks with their urine specimen bottles in hand at welfare offices across the province. Now the minister of corrections is indulging in the same passion for bodily waste of Ontarians, but he wants to collect it from prison inmates rather than from welfare recipients. There are going to be buckets of urine, tanker truckloads of urine criss-crossing this province from one test lab to the next until this government abandons its obsession with bodily output.

The question the minister should be asking is how the drugs are getting into the jails in the first place. If he sat down and talked to correctional officers instead of to his corporate friends, he'd start to understand that because of his understaffing of prisons across this province, because of the overpopulation of prisons across this province, because of the under-resourcing and this minister's elimination of effective rehabilitation programs, you bet your boots there are drugs getting into jails. With increased privatization with your corporate buddies, more and more contraband is going to be smuggled into our prisons. You aren't solving the problem. In Snobelenesque style, you

are creating a problem so you can justify privatization. We'll take you on in committee, Minister. Just watch.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): On this National Child Day, this Harris government should be embarrassed by its appalling track record on children. Today we learned that even in good economic times child poverty is more extensive and deeper in this province than ever before. This morning, Campaign 2000 revealed the shocking level of poverty in this province. Using the most recent statistics from Statistics Canada, we know that 470,000 children in this province live in poverty; one of every five children in this province remains poor, despite the good economic times; one in three poor children come from working families; and since 1996, Newfoundland and Ontario are the only two provinces where families are sinking deeper into poverty. What a record to be proud of.

What has the Harris government done? This is the list the minister didn't refer to: cut social assistance rates by 22%, cut the \$37 nutritional supplement for pregnant moms, closed the family responsibility offices and made sure thousands of women didn't get the support they were owed, ended counselling at second-stage housing for families affected by domestic violence, cancelled drug cards for working poor families and cancelled youth funding for youth programming. Ontario's promise is nothing but a front for this government to off-load even more of its responsibilities for kids on to volunteers, service organizations, the business sector, the faith communities etc. Where is your leadership when it comes to providing for Ontario's youngest and most vulnerable kids?

If the government wanted to do something about kids, if they really cared about kids, they would increase the minimum wage, provide affordable housing, stop the clawback of national child benefits, have rents frozen in the province and give back drug cards to working poor families. But it's clear children aren't a priority. This government is more interested in big tax cuts for its wealthy friends than it is about Ontario's youngest citizens, and that's a fact.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Just before we begin oral questions, I'd like to announce that we have with us today in the Speaker's gallery the federal interns from Ottawa, accompanied by our provincial interns. Please join me in welcoming our special guests.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I understand the government has changed its mind with respect to extending parental leave. I would ask for unanimous consent to deal with Bill 138, the Fair Parental Leave Act, by the New Democrats, so we could have second and third readings in this House today.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? I'm afraid I heard some "noes."

1430

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My first question today is for the Minister of Health. In January this year, Joshua Fleuelling, 18 years of age, suffered a severe asthma attack. He couldn't breathe. He was rushed by ambulance. They tried to take him to the closest hospital but were informed in the ambulance that that one was full and he should be taken to a hospital further away. Pretty well everyone is aware that Joshua died as a result of the delay in getting him to the hospital.

The coroner's inquest jury responded with recommendations last Friday, Madam Minister, and those recommendations represent nothing less than a stinging indictment of the way you have mismanaged health care in Ontario during the past several years. Are you now prepared to admit it was wrong to cut \$1 billion from our hospitals, it was wrong to close 8,000 hospital beds and it was wrong to fire thousands of nurses?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): First of all, let me take this opportunity to express our sincere sympathy to the Fleuelling family. This certainly was a very tragic situation.

I would also, on behalf of the government, like to express our sincere appreciation to the jury. I know the deliberations were very difficult, but I have to say we very much welcome their recommendations. We welcome their acknowledgement of the fact that problems are being encountered in the health system, and these problems are not just provincial and not just Canadian. They are worldwide. Certainly they are problems which have developed over a period of time, and they are problems which, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, we are working very hard to address in a timely manner. We want to do everything we possibly can to ensure that every Ontarian gets the best health treatment possible.

Mr McGuinty: This is the sixth year of your government, Minister, and you've done nothing but cut and hack and slash, and Ontarians are paying the price.

It would be bad enough if this were the first coroner's inquest, but it's the third. In 1997, a 35-year-old mother, eight months pregnant, suffered a severe brain hemorrhage. There was no room for her in a Toronto hospital—there were no beds—so they transported her to Hamilton and she died. In 1998, five-year-old Kyle Martyn died after waiting three and a half hours in an emergency room to be seen. Joshua Fleuelling was not the first, and it pains me to say it is likely he won't be the last.

We will not turn the health care ship around until you begin to acknowledge, here and now, that you have made some serious mistakes. I want you to admit it was wrong

to cut \$1 billion, it was wrong to shut down 8,000 hospital beds and it was wrong to fire thousands of nurses.

Hon Mrs Witmer: It is extremely unfortunate that we cannot all move together, as the jury has recommended, in a co-operative and collaborative manner. It pains me to say that since 1994-95 the federal government took millions and millions of dollars out of the health system in Canada. Throughout that period of time you did not once join us in demanding that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Would the Minister of Health take her seat. The member for Windsor West, come to order. The Minister of Health obviously has a voice we're not going to be able to hear too well today. I would appreciate co-operation. She won't be able to yell and I won't be able to hear her, and I'm going to be up very quickly.

Minister of Health, sorry for the interruption.

Hon Mrs Witmer: It pains me to say that over the period from 1994 to 1995, the Liberal opposition in this House declined to support us in our efforts to encourage Jean Chrétien to restore the millions and millions of dollars he had taken out of the health system in Canada.

Mr McGuinty: If the minister is looking for more money, then take the \$190 million you're putting into partisan political advertising and put that into health care.

On your watch, Madam Minister, we have had three coroners' inquests. You've had countless reports prepared by everybody from the Ontario Hospital Association to nursing groups to the opposition parties and a variety of others interested in protecting and enhancing public health care in Ontario. You have refused to move forward. Again you tell us today that you welcome these recommendations. You've been welcoming recommendations for six years now. What we want you to do is to act on them.

Here are a couple of specifics for you: (1) hire back the nurses you fired; (2) I want you to reopen the 1,600 hospital beds that are needed immediately to clear our emergency rooms up. There are two specific recommendations. Will you do those, Minister?

Hon Mrs Witmer: The Leader of the Opposition knows that despite the fact that the federal government cut billions out of health care, our government has increased funding from \$17.6 billion to \$22 billion. Despite the fact that your government and other governments cut nurses, we have put together a task force and we are hiring back the nurses. We have hired more than 6,000 nurses in this province. We are also moving forward with strategies on asthma. We have been moving forward since 1998 on an emergency room plan. We have been moving forward to restructure health care. We have been moving forward to increase the number of hospital beds and long-term-care beds in this province.

The recommendations that have been provided to us are recommendations that in many ways we are currently addressing and the initiatives are well underway. We welcome these recommendations and we will determine how we can implement them all in—

The Speaker: Order. The minister's time is up.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Parkdale-High Park, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker: He was yelling for the whole question. I appreciate the opposition House leader—I'll look after it.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Last warning to the member for Windsor West; her last warning. If you shout out again, you're going to be out. If you want to shout when I'm standing up, I'll throw you out right away. It's as simple as that.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. It doesn't help to have the other side yell when I've made a ruling like that.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the minister responsible for children's issues. Today is National Child Day. It's a day when we should be celebrating our children and our collective efforts to make sure they get everything they need in their lives so that they can achieve their greatest potential. Unfortunately, in Ontario we have very little to celebrate. On your watch, on the watch of your government, the number of children living in poverty has doubled. According to Campaign 2000, which released its report card today, the number of poor children in Ontario jumped 91% while in the rest of the country it grew by 28%. Close to 500,000 Ontario children are growing up in poverty. This year, 42% of food bank users are children. The fastest-growing group of homeless today in Ontario are families with young children.

In a time of unprecedented prosperity, unprecedented numbers of children are growing up in poverty. Why are you failing Ontario's children?

Hon Margaret Marland (Minister without Portfolio [Children]): First of all, let me say on behalf of our government, as I referred to in my statement, our government is very concerned about one child living in poverty. Attention has been referred to by the leader of the official opposition to the Campaign 2000 report that came out today. I wish for his sake that his staff had really done their research. Had they done their research, they would know that according to this report, the highest number of children living in poverty occurred in 1993 under the NDP government and, more important to us, today fewer children are living in poverty than when we took office.

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Mr McGuinty: I disagree with your numbers, Minister. Close to 500,000 children are growing up in poverty today. Here are a few other numbers that you may want to take into consideration in your capacity as the advocate for children here in Ontario.

Since 1995, annual government revenues have increased by \$13 billion. Since 1995, our GDP has gone up by \$97 billion. We are nearly \$100 billion richer today than we were when you first took office.

Notwithstanding that, you cut welfare by 22%. You've gotten out of the social housing business entirely in Ontario. You have abdicated your responsibility when it comes to rent controls in Ontario. You've abdicated your responsibility when it comes to child care in Ontario.

The message you are essentially sending to children in Ontario who are growing up in poverty, Minister, is, "Kids, tough luck; you're on your own."

I ask you this again in your capacity as the advocate for children in Ontario: why are you failing our kids?

Hon Mrs Marland: I'm glad that the leader of the official opposition places before us his view and his interpretation of facts that are there for everyone to see. We understand very clearly that the best way to help children living in poverty is to get jobs for their parents. Since 1995, this government has created 795,000 net new jobs.

Since you refer to welfare, I would like to remind you that we have 565,690 fewer people relying on welfare. But the best part of that news is that 247,820 of those people dependent on the welfare cycle are children who are no longer on that dependency.

Mr McGuinty: Those parents that you have driven away from social assistance have gotten menial, poor-paying jobs. They've become our working poor, and what they have to do to feed their children is go to food banks.

Madam Minister, here's an opportunity now for you to move beyond rhetoric to action. Here's an opportunity for you to put a little bit of money where your mouth is.

You cut welfare for the parents of poor children in 1995 by 21.6%. There are 437,000 children today on social assistance, living in families with incomes that are somewhere between 50% and 60% below the poverty line. You can make just a bit of a difference. As the advocate for—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock. The member for Brampton Centre, I heard that. Withdraw it.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): I withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker: Sorry for the interruption. That'll be his last warning as well.

The member for London-Fanshawe, since I am up and I'm getting out of shape—I can't keep getting up—this will be his last warning as well. Last warning to both of you.

Sorry for the interruption. The leader of the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: You cut the welfare in 1995 by 22%. The cost of living has gone up since that time. I'm asking you now, as the advocate for Ontario's children—you are the sole provider for children who find themselves in families where the parents are dependent on social assistance. Why would you not agree right now to

increase welfare in Ontario so that it takes into account increased costs of living? Will you do that, Madam Minister, on behalf of those 436,000 children who have parents who are dependent on social assistance? You're their sole provider. Why can't you do that for them?

Hon Mrs Marland: I can't believe that the leader of the official opposition has just insulted the people who have had the courage and determination to get off welfare and be financially independent. For you to stand in this House and insult those people is beneath you. I would suggest to you that when we say we are getting them jobs and giving them training so that they are equipped to get jobs, and you stand up and say they're better off on welfare, you stand in this House and say we should increase the rates of welfare, I'd like to remind you that the number of children, the 247,000 children I have said are no longer dependent on welfare, is more than the combination of North Bay, Thunder Bay and Sudbury—

The Speaker: Order. The minister's time is up.

HEALTH CARE

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Minister of Health. Joshua Fleuelling lived only 18 years, but last Friday the jury investigating his death left what may become a fitting legacy for a young life cut short. The answer to that rests in your hands.

I've been in touch with Joshua's family and their lawyer throughout this inquest. Let me tell you, they believe his death will be in vain if you don't take action and implement these recommendations. Key among these recommendations is a call for an immediate moratorium on hospital closures and hospital bed closures, emergency, acute care, mental health and chronic care. Again and again in this Legislature, we have asked you to call a moratorium, and yet emergency rooms and hospital beds continue to close.

Minister, you won't listen to us. Will you listen to the jury? Don't let Joshua's death be in vain. Will you implement an immediate moratorium on your plans to close hospital beds in Ontario?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As I indicated in my response earlier, again this is a very tragic situation. Certainly we welcome the recommendations that have been put forward by the jury. In fact, we indicated on Friday we would be moving forward to review the recommendations to determine exactly how we could implement them in a timely, efficient and effective manner.

I would indicate that today in this province we have more hospital beds than we had last year. As the member knows, we saw a decline of many beds over many years. In fact, we had seen 10,000 hospital beds close between 1985 and 1995. I'm pleased to say that we are moving forward now with more beds, not only in hospitals; we're also building 20,000 new long-term-care beds. As you know, my predecessor, the honourable—

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

Ms Lankin: This is a tragedy all right; it is a tragedy the way in which you represent history in this province with the facts you state in this Legislature. You still have plans on the books for closures of more chronic care beds and emergency rooms coming up. The recommendation was clear, and you know it's not the first time. Other inquests—the Kyle Martyn inquest made the same recommendation. How many times do you have to hear it? How many more people have to die before you will listen? There are other measures the Fleuelling jury said must be taken to address the current emergency room crisis.

We've been saying over and over again and calling on you to stop the privatization of our home care system. We've been telling you that you must end the competitive bidding model. The jury now says you must end the competitive bidding process in order to alleviate the pressure on our emergency services.

Minister, you won't listen to us. Will you listen to the jury? Will you end the competitive bidding model in our home care sector?

Hon Mrs Witmer: It's obvious perhaps in the member's questioning that she isn't aware of the fact that many of the recommendations that were put forward are very consistent with initiatives our government already has underway in order to ensure that every Ontarian has access to the best health care services possible. I would just like to remind the member that there are more beds in the system today than there were last year, in 1999. I would remind her of the 800 new permanent hospital beds that were announced in November and also the 1,200 additional beds that were announced this year for across the province.

When it comes to home care, again as the member knows, we in this province lead as far as our per capita spending on home care is concerned. In fact, recently there was a report that indicated there would be millions more dollars required for the rest of Canada if the other provinces were to meet the same standards that have been set in Ontario.

1450

The Speaker: Order. The minister's time is up. Final supplementary.

Ms Lankin: Minister, I've put to you two direct recommendations from the jury and you have refused to respond to either one of them. The verdict is out and you and your government have been found guilty. You introduced the competitive bidding model. The jury is telling you to throw it out. You still have plans to close emergency rooms. They're telling you to put on a moratorium. My leader, Howard Hampton, revealed how you put a cap on nursing hours for home care. They're saying get rid of that cap. You're the government that put a policy in place that made it unnecessary to have an RN 24 hours a day in long-term-care facilities with minimum nursing hours. The jury is saying you should reverse your bad policy.

Don't tell me what you're doing is consistent with the recommendations. There are four policy recommendations from that jury that directly contradict your government's actions. They're asking you to take a stand, to reverse it, to make sure Joshua's death is not in vain. They called their report "a legacy," Joshua's legacy. Will it be, Minister? You won't listen to us. Will you listen to the jury? Will you implement those recommendations immediately?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Obviously the member isn't hearing anything. I have said now a number of times in the House that we welcome the recommendations. They are very consistent with many of the initiatives that are already underway. Again, I remind the member that the jury recognized there are some issues that are world-wide that are being addressed; they're systemic problems.

I would remind the member opposite, as far as home care is concerned, I am very proud to say it was our government which brought the standard of nursing care in the home to the same level. Before this time, there were five hours, 15 hours, 27 hours. We have come and we are delivering the consistency of 43 hours. In fact, we call on the federal government to develop national standards for home care, national standards for pharmaceutical. Maybe you should consult with the your federal leader, because your federal leader seems to think it's the fault of the federal government that this whole situation happened in Ontario.

CHILD POVERTY

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the minister responsible for children's issues. Minister, I'd like to know why your government has turned its back on 470,000 children who live in poverty in this province.

In a report that was released by Campaign 2000 today, it was revealed that there are shocking levels of poverty in this province. Since 1996, Ontario and Newfoundland are the only two provinces in Canada where families are sinking deeper into poverty. In other words, in booming economic times in Ontario we have almost half a million children who are worse off, living in deeper poverty than ever before. You've got money to give your corporate friends a big tax break, and it's clear Ontario children are paying the price. If you really cared about kids and wanted to do something for children, you could raise the minimum wage, you could freeze rents, you could extend job protection for parental leave, you could stop your clawback of the national child benefit. When will you do any of these important things, Minister?

Hon Margaret Marland (Minister without Portfolio [Children]): Let me reconfirm for this member in the third party. You are choosing to read this Campaign 2000 report selectively. Because we are restricted in this House from using certain words, I might refer you to the fact that we are down from last year. There are 60,000 fewer children dependent on the cycle of welfare and other supports. I would remind you that the downward

trend in the number of children reported to be living in poverty is since 1996—that was our first full year in office—the downward trend we now expect to continue. But I will say again for this member that it's not a matter of numbers when we look at children living in poverty. We are concerned about one child living in poverty.

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

Ms Martel: The fact is that Campaign 2000 used the most recent statistics from Statistics Canada, 1998, when your government was in power, Minister. Since 1996, only Ontario and Newfoundland have families that are sinking deeper into poverty. What a record to be proud of.

We've got one in five children in this province living in poverty. One in three of those children are actually from families that are working; they are the working poor. That's probably because the minimum wage has been frozen for the last five years. We have 470,000 children who are poor in the province during good economic times, Minister, and you are doing nothing to help them.

I ask you again: you could raise the minimum wage, you could freeze rents, you could stop the clawback of the child benefit, you could restore drug cards to the working poor, you could do any of these things and finally start to eradicate child poverty in these very good economic times. When are you doing to do something and show you do care about kids?

Hon Mrs Marland: I would like to tell you exactly what we have done, which was actually an opportunity that party could have had when they were the government.

We now have an estimated 220,000 low-income people who no longer pay any income tax at all as a result of this government's cuts to personal income taxes and the increase in non-refundable credits. We also have the child care tax benefit, which helps the working parents of middle- and lower-income families pay for their child care.

While I'm responding to this question, I think we need to look at the numbers Campaign 2000 used. They used the Stats Canada numbers, and Maryanne Webber, director of income statistics for Stats Canada, says, "Stats Canada itself insists that LICOs are not intended to be used as the poverty line."

They even go further to say that regularly—

The Speaker: Order. The minister's time is up.

IPPERWASH PROVINCIAL PARK

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question's to the Minister of Management Board regarding his role in the shooting death of Dudley George at Ipperwash. He will remember that the Premier said in the Legislature that no direction was given to the OPP before, after or during any situations, no direction by the government, by staff or by any minister.

We now find under new information that on the day of the shooting you were at a meeting with the Premier, the Deputy Attorney General and the Deputy Solicitor General. I found that a memo was sent to an OPP superintendent that day, the day of the shooting, summarizing the meeting, pointing out that the Deputy Attorney General argued that the government shouldn't meddle with the police at the park. But the notes go on to say the Premier and Hodgson came out strongly—strongly in favour of action, I gather. Are you continuing to say that you and the Premier gave no direction to the OPP in this matter?

Hon Chris Hodgson (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I know the Attorney General wants to answer this.

Hon Jim Flaherty (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): As the member opposite certainly knows, the issue he raises, or raises in part, relating to the alleged involvement of the then Minister of Natural Resources with respect to Ipperwash is being litigated in our courts in Ontario. As I understand it, a motion was heard last week in the Superior Court of Justice and was reserved by the judge who heard the motion. Clearly this matter is not only before the courts of Ontario but has been reserved by a judge of those courts. In those circumstances, I suggest to the member opposite that the timing of his question endangers judicial independence. We ought not to deal with that kind of subject at this time, given that the matter is reserved by a judge of the Superior Court.

Mr Phillips: We've heard repeatedly from the Premier that he and none of the ministers gave any direction to the OPP. We now have information coming forward of a secret meeting that took place on September 6, the day of the shooting, with notes that indicate that the Deputy Attorney General was arguing one course of action and, I gather, that the minister and the Premier, according to this, were perhaps arguing a different course of action.

We have argued all along that the way to get to the bottom of this is by you and the Premier committing to holding a public inquiry at the earliest possible date. To date we've had the Premier refusing to even commit to holding that public inquiry.

Minister, with the latest revelations, will you, on behalf of the government today, commit to holding a public inquiry, to begin at the earliest possible moment when no one's right to a fair trial is jeopardized? Will you make that commitment to the people of Ontario today?

1500

Hon Mr Flaherty: As the member opposite no doubt knows, the allegations that he makes in this place are matters that are being litigated now before the Superior Court of Justice in the province of Ontario, including the production of documents, including the interpretation of documents, including notes. All of those matters are before our courts in the province of Ontario now, as recently as last week.

The member probably knows, or should know, that there is a judge of the Superior Court who has been directing the case management of the litigation. She has assigned dates, or dates have been agreed to, with respect to examinations for discovery. The issues related to production of documents have been to—I say respectfully to the member opposite, it is not for us in this place to substitute our view for the view of the courts dealing with the litigation arising out of that situation, or to prejudge the result thereof.

MEAT INSPECTION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, on the weekend the always newsy Toronto Star published a story outlining problems with the provincial meat inspection system. The reporter, Robert Cribb, alleges that there are problems relating to some of the abattoirs that are regulated by the province and that tough penalties are rarely handed out to offenders.

Minister, you would know that food safety is a very important issue in my riding of Durham. You would also know that I have several very responsible abattoirs in Durham.

Can you give us a factual report on what you and your ministry are doing to ensure that meat coming out of provincially inspected plants is indeed safe for the public?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I thank the member from Durham for the question. Food safety is a top priority of our government. I want to assure the member that Ontario has one of the best meat inspections in the country—in fact, in the world. Ontario is one of the few provinces where all meat slaughtered must be slaughtered in licensed and inspected facilities. If an Ontario plant poses a significant risk to food safety, it is shut down until the problems have been fixed. Provincial inspectors are highly trained individuals, whose top priority is to make sure food is safe.

In 1993, there were 143 inspectors. There are 125 inspectors today, a change that has come about because 130 abattoirs closed over that period of time. These changes were brought about because in 1991 the Provincial Auditor's report and in 1994 a follow-up at KPMG called for increased efficiency in provincial meat inspection.

Contrary to what you've read in the Toronto Star, there has been no decrease in inspection hours. My ministry works very hard to ensure that provincial abattoirs are producing safe food. When problems do arise, Ontario has strict regulations that bring plants into compliance.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for that thorough response, Minister. The always newsy Toronto Star isn't always factual, by the sound of things. I appreciate the assurance that your ministry is very much involved in the

sense of keeping watch over the food we eat and the meat that comes out of provincial plants.

In addition to inspecting provincial abattoirs and charging those involved with selling illegal meat, what other initiatives does your ministry have to improve and protect food safety? What is the government doing to make sure that we are on top of the latest developments in new technologies that can help protect people from food-borne diseases that potentially could enter the marketplace? Minister, what are you doing to protect the consumers of Ontario?

Hon Mr Hardeman: We are working very closely with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Natural Resources on developing a strategy that gives Ontario consumers more trust and confidence in food safety. This new strategy is a co-operative effort that allows Ontario to stay abreast of international and scientific developments to ensure food production from field to port.

In addition, my ministry supports food safety initiatives through our four-year, \$90-million healthy futures for Ontario agriculture program. For example, in September I had an opportunity to announce our government's \$1.7-million participation in partnering with three firms to further develop and market a new packaging material that turns colour to warn consumers of dangerous pathogens such as E coli and listeria. Just last week I announced a new project that will increase the comprehensiveness of food safety in the pork industry.

These are just a few examples of our commitment to improving food safety in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): New question, the member for Windsor-St Clair.

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I too have a question to the Minister of Agriculture about the inspection of abattoirs in Ontario. We did a little research beyond what was in the Toronto Star, and I know the member for Durham would want to be aware as well. We looked at other provinces in terms of the number of inspectors they have. Let me give you a for instance. In Alberta they have one inspector for every 1.3 plants, versus one inspector for every 2.5 plants in Ontario. That is twice the inspectorate to look after their needs in Alberta. In the state of Michigan they have 209 inspectors to look after 114, versus 80 here in Ontario to look after 220 plants.

There are simply not enough inspectors. The number of inspectors was cut, and we recognize that the number of abattoirs declined over that period of time. Are you satisfied that compared to other jurisdictions, Ontario is doing enough? And why wouldn't you have put that part into your answer to Mr O'Toole's question earlier?

Hon Mr Hardeman: I thank the member opposite for the question. Inspectors from our ministry are on site every day at an abattoir if they are slaughtering livestock. The number of inspection hours has not changed since 1996. We continue to employ highly qualified inspectors who have the ability to shut down plants if there are serious safety risks. In 1993 there were 143 inspectors

and there are, as I said earlier, 125 today, and we have one hundred and some fewer plants to inspect.

I want to assure everyone in this House that if there is a kill going on in the province of Ontario in a provincially licensed plant, there will be an inspector on site to make sure that the quality of meat is assured for the people of Ontario.

Mr Duncan: We did a little other research too and we found out that not only did you go from employing full-time people, you now contract out the inspecting positions. The total budget went from \$12.5 million to \$7 million.

The question we have, based on your response, is this—and you'll also be aware that there's a hodgepodge, and we recognize you're consulting about this now and about the resources that local medical officers of health have available to enforce at their end of it. Minister, how is it that you can say you're satisfied with the way things are? Will you agree today to appoint a select committee of the Legislature to look at, among other things, the role of the provincial inspectorate? You'll be aware that you gave up the inspection to the Ministry of Natural Resources; we don't know why. Second of all, part of that mandate would also be to look at the role of medical officers of health and whether or not the province provides adequate compensation to municipalities to ensure the safety of our meat processing system from the time that the animal is brought into the slaughterhouse till the time it reaches people's tables right across Ontario. Will you agree to that?

Hon Mr Hardeman: First of all, as it relates to the change in the way we do inspections, in fact in 1991 the Provincial Auditor suggested that the way inspection was being done in the province was not effective and efficient. He suggested that we have people inspecting and not people spending their time between inspections. That is the reason for the change.

As it relates to the reference to the Ministry of Natural Resources, I want to point out to the members of the House that in fact only the follow-up enforcement is being done by inspectors or enforcement officers from the Ministry of Natural Resources. I want to say that's indeed working much better. In fact, in the last year they have laid 62 charges under the inspection act, which was considerably more than over the same period of time last year. Of these, 18 cases were convictions and 40 are still waiting for their day in court.

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

1510

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr Brian Coburn (Ottawa-Orléans): My question is for the Solicitor General. Constituents in my riding, as in many others, have consistently told me that community safety is something they take very seriously. At local events, door-knocking and other goings-on in my riding they want to feel free from fear of crime in our

community. Our government has made a commitment to the people of Ontario to improve safety in our streets, like our Partners Against Crime initiative that invests \$150 million in putting 1,000 net new officers on the front lines.

In Ottawa-Orléans, we have given almost half a million dollars to the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service to put more officers on the streets. That results in another 22 officers on the front lines in Ottawa-Orléans. More police officers on our streets and providing the police with the tools they need is one of our government's priorities in helping to make the streets safer.

Minister, can you tell my constituents about some of the other initiatives and investments our government is making to make our street safe?

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Solicitor General): There are so many things to speak about. I think we'll start with what the member is referring to in terms of our community policing grants, where almost half a million dollars was given to the Ottawa-Carleton regional police to assist them in getting more police officers out on the streets of the province.

Just last week, during Crime Prevention Week, I was able to go to the York Regional Police Service and announce the fact that the 1,000th police officer under our \$150-million grant program had been awarded, and that's a milestone. This is part of our commitment to get 1,000 new police officers to assist municipalities. Certainly we look in terms of the numbers of the OPP, which have increased, but we felt it was important for us to support our municipal partners, to show them that we think it's important to get police officers on the streets of this province. A thousand police officers are bound to make an impact on community safety.

Mr Coburn: Thanks for that comprehensive answer.

Another important issue to my constituents, of course, is road safety. In 1995, we launched the comprehensive road safety plan that gave the police the tools they needed to help make our roads safer. Other initiatives we took to help make our roads safer include the Sergeant Rick McDonald Memorial Act, which increased the penalties on criminals who take reckless flight from the police; the creation of five regional traffic management units; and since 1998 we have allowed municipalities to designate community safety zones in areas where safety is of particular concern, like schools.

Minister, can you tell the House and the people of Ottawa-Orléans how our government is addressing the issue of safety when it comes to driving on Ontario's roads?

Hon Mr Tsubouchi: Road safety is a priority for all of us. Let's talk about one segment, the RIDE program. Since 1995, this government has doubled the amount of money going to RIDE to \$1.2 million a year. What this has meant to the member's area is that since 1995 about \$200,000 has been going to the RIDE program specifically.

This morning I was at the launch of the Toronto Safe and Sober Driving Coalition campaign again. People

don't know that in the city of Toronto, for example, there were 48 murders committed but there was almost double that in traffic fatalities. These traffic fatalities are preventable. Clearly, the program now is intended to address not only impaired driving with alcohol but other types of bad driving and impairment of your abilities as well.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): My question is to the Minister of Finance. I want to tell you that the property tax bill that you tabled last Thursday has been a huge disappointment in Hamilton. You will know—you should know—that Hamilton businesses pay 60% more in business education tax than our neighbours in Burlington. It has been identified that equalizing the business education tax for Hamilton business would require about \$41 million, and yet your bill throws only a measly \$5 million at this issue. Meanwhile, while you delay, businesses are leaving Hamilton and the existing businesses in downtown Hamilton are struggling to survive. The main issue in the last election was in large part about downtown Hamilton and you introduce a bill that will continue to see business bleed away from downtown Hamilton.

Minister, let me ask you on behalf of the small businesses in downtown Hamilton why, with so much money in surplus, are you only throwing crumbs at such an important economic issue in our local community of Hamilton?

Hon Ernie L. Eves (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): The inequities in the city of Hamilton proper with respect to business property taxes are, as I'm sure the honourable member is aware, a result of many decades of non-reform of the assessment system in the city of Hamilton. Hence, local governments in the past have chosen to tax businesses in Hamilton as opposed to taxing residents, more so than they have in other areas of the province.

However, we decided to reform the property taxation system in Ontario. We are not going to be able to correct 60 years of inequities over a few years or months. Surely the member must understand that. But he also understands, which he didn't say in his question, that we are reducing the provincial business education portion of business taxes by half a billion dollars over eight years. We have expedited that by a year, and next year there will be \$325 million a year in assistance to those businesses.

Mr Christopherson: I've heard you, on a number of occasions, make the argument that because it has taken so many years for the inequity to be created, you need X number of years to phase in a correction. But what you're failing to take responsibility for is, number one, your government wanted and took 100% total control of education and education taxes. Number two, you're running a huge surplus. In the last budget you gave away almost \$4 billion in corporate tax cuts. Lastly, Minister, the children in Hamilton and the children in Burlington

receive exactly the same education. It's of no use to them whatsoever for you to say things will be fine a few years down the road.

You have the money. You say you have the commitment. You certainly have the control. Why won't you acknowledge that this blatant ignoring of Hamilton's downtown business crisis is something you can do something about, and why won't you step forward and ensure that you provide the money necessary so that our downtown business can survive? You have the power. You have the money. Minister, act. Downtown Hamilton needs you to act.

Hon Mr Eves: First of all, tax cuts do not result in lack of revenue. I know you preach that. Now we have over \$8 billion more a year in revenue coming into the province of Ontario as a result of 166 tax cuts than we had when you raised taxes. That is totally inaccurate, not even close to being accurate.

Number two, we are doing something about the education portion of commercial business taxes in Ontario. The overwhelming majority of the \$500 million a year, half a billion dollars a year, will go to two municipalities: Toronto and Hamilton. The reason is very simple. They were most out of whack, inequitable systems over the last five, six or seven decades. We can't correct 70 years of mistakes in a couple of years. It's just that simple. We will do it as quickly as we can. What would you suggest we do? Take the tax burden for the businesses in Hamilton and move them to Peterborough? Would that be fair?

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Education. There was a time in this province that when it came to public education, turmoil was the exception; it has now become the rule on your watch. The straitjacket you've imposed on school boards through Bill 160 has resulted in half of our high school teachers and a third of our elementary teachers being still without contracts for this school year. Bill 74 has resulted in fully 75% of the schools in our province now facing disruptions in their extracurricular activities. Not only are students going to lose more time now to strikes and lockouts, and presumably we'll be dealing with the first one later today in this House, our students are also going to be losing basketball and football, school plays and a host of other extracurricular activities.

You were forced to admit on the weekend that in the face of this constant turmoil you are helpless. You have thrown up your hands, Minister. I want to tell you as a legislator and as a parent, that is completely and absolutely unacceptable. What I want to know from you is, what are you going to do to bring our parents and our teachers and our trustees and our principals and our students and all supporters of public education in Ontario together to resolve this constant turmoil?

1520

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): I'm very pleased to hear that the honourable member's party is going to support the back-to-work legislation. I'll certainly take that from his comment, that he is going to support the back-to-work legislation that the Minister of Labour would like to introduce so we can relieve the parents in the Hamilton-Wentworth community from the pressures they have been under because of this particular strike. I'm glad he has agreed to do that.

Secondly, I admitted no such thing on the weekend. Again the honourable member might want to check his facts and check the research.

Thirdly, it is not unusual—unfortunate, but not unusual—that collective agreements are still being negotiated in November of this school year. Again, if he checks his facts, he will see that is indeed the case.

The other thing is, I was very pleased to hear that there are many thousands of schools and teachers who are providing extracurricular activities to our students, as they should be, as they want to. That was one of the things I heard very clearly in the meeting on Friday. Unfortunately, we still have teachers who are choosing to work to rule, and we find that unacceptable. It's penalizing—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Order. The minister's time is up.

Mr McGuinty: Minister, it has become very clear that your legacy when it comes to public education in Ontario will be nothing less than a permanent state of crisis. I hope you take a great deal of pride in that knowledge.

Let's be honest. Let's understand now that you personally have so poisoned the waters, you have generated so much ill will among all of the players, you have demoralized to such a great extent all of the supporters of public education in Ontario that it is completely impossible for you to act as any kind of a consensus-builder. It seems to me that given that sad reality, the appropriate thing for you to do in all of these circumstances, the best thing you might do in the interests of Ontario students, is to step aside. Admit you've been the cause of these problems, that it is your bills and your legislation which have generated this mess. I'm asking you now, do the right thing and step aside.

Hon Mrs Ecker: What has poisoned classrooms in this province are those individuals who think it is a legitimate form of protest against a board, against a government, against a government policy, to take it out on the kids. That is what the problem is here.

Secondly, what part of this legislation doesn't the honourable member support? The legislation that starts putting limits on average class size—would he like us to withdraw that? Because that's in the legislation he says is a problem. Limits on taking special education money out of the special education budget—does he agree with that? Because that's something in the legislation he's now asking us to withdraw. Limiting the ability of a board to take money for smaller classes and spend it on something else—is that something he disagrees with? Does he think

somehow or other our teachers are not capable of meeting the same kind of workload standard that teachers across this country are meeting and still providing extracurricular activities? If that's what he's saying, he should say so.

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Earlier today you asked for unanimous consent to make a statement regarding the labour dispute which has so adversely affected the Hamilton-Wentworth elementary school students. Minister, would you like to take an opportunity now to explain what this government plans to do about this disruption that has gone on far too long and is causing students in the Hamilton-Wentworth area to miss very valuable school time?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I thank the member who asked the question. I'm sorry I couldn't get unanimous consent at the time.

The request was simply to enlighten the House, the members of the public and those involved in this particular circumstance in Hamilton-Wentworth that today the Minister of Education received notification from the ERC, the Education Relations Commission, that it has in fact determined there is jeopardy with respect to the students in the Hamilton-Wentworth area.

Interjections.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I know the members opposite are cackling, and I would ask that they allow me to finish.

The letter states clearly at the bottom of the very first paragraph, and I'll refer to it if you'd like: "This letter is intended to serve as advisement of jeopardy."

Upon receiving that, I think we have a fiduciary obligation to begin the process of introducing legislation to order the teachers back to work. I'll try to summarize in the supplementary.

Mr Chudleigh: This strike has gone on since October 30. Students can't afford to miss class time, especially now that they have a much more demanding curriculum. How quickly do you expect this legislation to be ready, and how quickly do you expect this legislation could pass through this House?

Hon Mr Stockwell: I think there's some misunderstanding here. We understand what the letter says, and we understand that the board has requested a vote by the union. We have built into the legislation the opportunity for the union to vote on the final offer part of the bill. If that's accepted, then no arbitration process will be put in place. We've accepted that point. We planned for it and built it into the legislation. This is splitting hairs.

What we need to discuss here today is the fact we've been advised there's jeopardy at this board. We don't want the kids to lose their year. We don't want the kids to be penalized because of a labour dispute. All good minds should come together at that point and adopt back-to-work legislation to ensure children in the Hamilton-

Wentworth area won't lose their year because of a labour disruption between teachers and a school board.

Any fair-minded individual who reads the letter I have provided to the opposition and looks at it with fair comment would clearly understand the final sentence of the first paragraph: "This letter is intended to serve as advisement of jeopardy."

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: The one clause that I know the member for Parkdale, who knows little about the issue, will comment on is suggesting there is a final offer on the table. If you take the copy of the bill I provided to your caucus, we have built into the legislation that if that offer is accepted by the union, then all bets are off. But in the meantime, we can't wait.

LABOUR LEGISLATION

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): My question is for the Minister of Labour as well. Today, joining us in the gallery are 26 individuals who got up at about 4 o'clock this morning to take a bus to come down here because they thought Bill 139 was going to be debated today. They're concerned about 139, and they're concerned about Bill 69 and some of the amendments being proposed in this bill.

If the minister isn't worried about the amendment he's put forward, which has such vast implications and such an undemocratic set of principles, is he not worried about those who may follow him if he's mixed up in any kind of cabinet shuffle? We know the Premier and some of his top aides are certainly anti-union. Does that not worry you?

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): Many things worry me. That's just not one of them. I have great faith in the people who make up this caucus and in their knowledge and goodwill.

I welcome the people who travelled all that time to come here.

I will tell you that I have no fear. I have great faith in each and every man and woman who sits in this caucus that if they are Minister of Labour they will wear this mantle well and do the best thing for the workers of Ontario.

Mr Patten: Last week, in response to a question from our labour critic and also from our leader, Dalton McGuinty, you said that if "we pass a regulation that's different than I committed to, then yes, you can probably get up and get exercised and scream and yell," blah, blah, blah. In other words, you're acknowledging there is more power available to you than you require. I suspect you feel personally uncomfortable with this, because I know you. But others may not. The unions are extremely worried about this. That's why they came here today. I hope you will take a few moments afterwards just to say hello to some of them and listen to some of their concerns.

Can you explain how anyone in the Ottawa district area is going to benefit by this particular amendment you're proposing?

1530

Hon Mr Stockwell: This amendment is grandfathered. It's one year. It's not forever; it's for one year. I say to those members who have come here today that the decisions taken by this government are not individual decisions. They're decisions canvassed before caucus; they're decisions that are made in cabinet. That may be difficult. I understand that's not how your group operates, but ours does.

I will categorically say to you and give you my undertaking that what I agreed to, what the unions agreed to, what the generals and subs agreed to during the negotiation of Bill 69 will be embodied in the regulation passed by this government. I will also give you the undertaking that no unilateral decision can be made by an individual to change the terms and conditions of those decisions that are taken. Finally, if it's a matter of sitting down and having discussions with the good folks who have travelled that distance and allaying their fears and meeting with them to hear about their concerns, I would be more than happy to do that. That's part of my job.

PETITIONS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This petition is to the Ontario Legislature and it deals with northerners demanding that the Mike Harris government eliminate the health care apartheid which they're practising and that discrimination which they continue to practise.

"Whereas the northern health travel grant offers a reimbursement of partial travel costs at a rate of 30.4 cents per kilometre one way for northerners forced to travel for cancer care while travel policy for southerners who travel for cancer care features full reimbursement costs for travel, meals and accommodation;

"Whereas a cancer tumour knows no health travel policy or geographic location;

"Whereas a recently released Oracle research poll confirms that 92% of Ontarians support equal health travel funding;

"Whereas northern Ontario residents pay the same amount of taxes and are entitled to the same access to health care and all government services and inherent civil rights as residents living elsewhere in the province; and

"Whereas we support the efforts of OSECC (Ontarians Seeking Equal Cancer Care), founded by Gerry Loughheed Jr, former chair of Cancer Care Ontario, Northeast Region, to correct this injustice against northerners travelling for cancer treatment" who are being discriminated against in this health care apartheid;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand the Mike

Harris government move immediately to fund full travel expenses for northern Ontario cancer patients and eliminate the health care apartheid which exists presently in the province of Ontario.”

I sign and submit this 3,000-name petition to Victor to bring to the table.

PARENTAL LEAVE

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario’s Employment Standards Act provides vital job protections for new parents on parental leave, including reinstatement to their previous pay and job or a comparable one, accumulated seniority while on leave, continued participation in workplace pension and health benefit programs, and prohibitions against discriminatory treatment; and

“Whereas unemployment insurance parental benefits have been extended from the current 10 weeks to 35 weeks effective for a child born or adopted on or after December 31, 2000, changes long sought by women’s groups, labour unions and others and in keeping with the modern provisions in many European countries; and

“Whereas parental benefits are distinct from pregnancy benefits (15 weeks), this means that a total of 50 weeks EI benefits will be available to a natural mother who qualifies for EI benefits and serves a two-week waiting period; and

“Whereas the federal government and the Quebec government, and more recently the governments of British Columbia and Nova Scotia, have amended their legislation to allow for 52 weeks’ combined pregnancy and parental leave for a natural mother and at least 35 weeks’ parental leave for a natural father or adoptive parent; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has refused, without just and good cause, to amend the Employment Standards Act in a timely manner, effectively denying parents access to the new EI benefits since they would otherwise risk their job at a time when the security of their employment and working conditions is most critical;

“We, the undersigned, petition the legislative Assembly as follows:

“To amend the Employment Standards Act of Ontario forthwith to extend the current parental leave and normal protections of workers’ jobs and working conditions by 17 weeks, effective December 31, 2000.”

I agree with these petitioners and I’ve affixed my signature to it. I urge this government to pass my Bill 138, the Fair Parental Leave Act.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): “Whereas there are a higher number of elderly people and people with disabilities living in the Hamilton-Wentworth region,

because of the excellence of the health care system in the area; and

“Whereas the case managers and placement coordinators in the Hamilton-Wentworth Community Care Access Centre have higher caseloads than other community care access centres in the central-southwest region; and

“Whereas the staff at the Hamilton-Wentworth Community Care Access Centre are paid less than their counterparts in the central-southwest region; and

“Whereas the health care system in Hamilton-Wentworth is a self-contained seamless system; and

“Whereas increasing funding will be needed to provide health care services to citizens in the future in this self-contained seamless system; and

“Whereas all workers working in the health care system, and the citizens of Hamilton-Wentworth, expect adequate funding for the health care system in toto in Hamilton-Wentworth, both now and in the future and recognize the equal importance of all the parts of the seamless health care system;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: to provide adequate funding immediately to the Hamilton-Wentworth Community Care Access Centre so that pay and conditions of staff will be equal to those in other community care access centres in the central-southwest region; and that adequate funding will continue to be provided in the future according to the needs of the community.”

CAMPING

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): I have a petition here signed by over 1,000 of my constituents who are very upset about the 21-day limit on camping on crown land. They have a petition which also moves toward a solution. The petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the provincial government introduced a 21-day limit on camping on crown land in 1970 but has never felt it necessary to enforce that limit because the vast majority of campers on these abundant lands respect the habitat and pose no environmental threat; and

“Whereas the vast majority of campers frequently provide real benefits and support to the areas in which they camp; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources began this year to enforce the 21-day limit, causing massive inconvenience to campers, many of whom have gone to significant expense to set up their camps and have caused no harm or damage to the natural habitat, nor inconvenience to their neighbours; and

“Whereas many of the reasons the Ministry of Natural Resources have given to support their recent crackdown, including concerns regarding overcrowding, are largely unsubstantiated;”—particularly in the north—

“Therefore, we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to demand that the Ministry of Natural Resources stop its unreasonable crackdown on the responsible campers who are using crown lands, and work toward an agreement that would eliminate the 21-day limit for responsible Ontario residents.”

As I said, there are over 1,000 names on my petition, and I’m very pleased to sign it as well.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas it has been determined that recent funding allocations to the developmental services sector in the communities of Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent, and Windsor-Essex have been determined to be grossly inadequate to meet critical and urgent needs;

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

“That the Ministry of Community and Social Services immediately review the funding allocations to the communities of Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent, and Windsor-Essex, and provide funding in keeping with the requests made by families and/or their agents.”

In support of these several hundred petitioners, I affix my signature.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas children are exposed to sexually explicit material in variety stores and video rental outlets;

“Whereas bylaws vary from city to city and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit material;

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

“To enact legislation which will:

“Create uniform standards in Ontario to prevent minors from being exposed to sexually explicit material in retail establishments;

“Make it illegal to sell, rent, or loan sexually explicit materials to minors.”

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas it has been determined that recent funding allocations to the developmental services sector in the communities of Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent and Windsor-Essex have been determined to be grossly inadequate to meet critical and urgent needs;

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

“That the Ministry of Community and Social Services immediately review the funding allocations to the communities of Sarnia-Lambton, Chatham-Kent and Windsor-Essex and provide funding in keeping with the requests made by families or their agents.”

This petition is signed by a number of residents from Ridgetown, Chatham and Tilbury, and I affix my signature to it.

1540

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, the property owners of Lamarche township, part of the newly amalgamated town of Cochrane, feel the doubling of our property taxes doesn’t recognize the additional costs rural ratepayers are faced with;

“Whereas we do not have the services that urban ratepayers do;

“Whereas we have to pay for our wells and septic systems, that are expensive to install and maintain;

“Whereas we do not have street lights, sidewalks or even garbage pickup and some of our roads in the country are not well maintained;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement a tax rate that recognizes the differences between rural and urban taxpayers.”

I affix my signature to this.

PENSION INDEXATION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have another petition in regard to the demonstration in front of the Ministry of Labour’s office. It reads as follows:

“Whereas injured workers petitioned the Legislature of Ontario from 1974 to get full indexation of their benefits and pensions; and

“Whereas in 1985, all political parties in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario agreed to enact full annual indexation in the Workers’ Compensation Act; and

“Whereas in 1998, Bill 99 restricted indexation of pensions and benefits under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act; and

“Whereas the Canada pension plan is fully indexed annually;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore full indexation on an annual basis to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act of Ontario.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to put my signature to this petition.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

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

“Whereas patients requiring eye care in Niagara are faced with a shortage of ophthalmologists and, as a result, are compelled to wait several weeks to secure an appointment with an ophthalmologist;

“Whereas Niagara patients who require potentially vision-saving eye surgery have to, in many cases, wait for several months to have that surgery scheduled;

“Whereas, while the shortage of ophthalmologists is occurring, the removal of billing caps on these medical specialists provides a temporary but essential easing of the health care crisis;

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Health’s solution of removing the exemptions of the billing cap and forcing patients from Niagara to travel along the very busy Queen Elizabeth Highway to receive treatment in Hamilton is unacceptable;

“Be it resolved that the Ontario Ministry of Health remove the cap on billing for ophthalmologists in Niagara until such time as Niagara is no longer an under-served area.”

I affix my signature as I’m in agreement with the petition.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): I’m very pleased to tell you that petitions related to the northern health travel grant and the inadequacy and unfairness of it keep coming in. I want to thank Olga McDaid for sending me these petitions today, and I will read them.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the northern health travel grant was introduced in 1987 in recognition of the fact that northern Ontario residents are often forced to receive treatment outside their own communities because of the lack of available services; and

“Whereas the Ontario government acknowledged that the costs associated with that travel should not be fully borne by those residents and, therefore, that financial support should be provided by the Ontario government through the travel grant program; and

“Whereas travel, accommodation and other costs have escalated sharply since the program was first put in place, particularly in the area of air travel; and

“Whereas the Ontario government has provided funds so that southern Ontario patients needing care at the Northwestern Ontario Cancer Centre have all their expenses paid while receiving treatment in the north which creates a double standard for health care delivery in the province; and

“Whereas northern Ontario residents should not receive a different level of health care nor be discriminated against because of their geographical locations;

“Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to acknowledge the unfairness and inadequacy of the northern health travel grant program and commit to providing 100% funding of the travel costs for northern residents needing care outside their communities until such time as that care is available in our communities.”

We will continue to fight this battle. Hopefully the government will finally listen. I want to sign this petition as well.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition addressed to the Minister of Education.

“We believe that the heart of education in our province is the relationship between student and teacher and that this human and relational dimension should be maintained and extended in any proposed reform. The Minister of Education and Training should know how strongly we oppose many of the secondary reform recommendations being proposed by your ministry and by your government.

“We recognize and support the need to review secondary education in Ontario. The proposal for reform, as put forward by your ministry, however, is substantially flawed in several key areas: (a) reduced instructional time, (b) reduction of instruction in English, (c) reduction of qualified teaching personnel, (d) academic work experience credit not linked to educational curriculum, and (e) devaluation of formal education.

“We strongly urge your ministry to delay the implementation of secondary school reform so that all interested stakeholders—parents, students, school councils, trustees and teachers—are able to participate in a more meaningful consultation process which will help to ensure that a high quality of publicly funded education is provided.”

Since I agree with the sentiments in this petition, I am delighted to sign it as well.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the northern health travel grant was introduced in 1987 in recognition of the fact that northern Ontario residents are often forced to receive treatment outside their own communities because of the lack of available services; and

“Whereas the Ontario government acknowledged that the costs associated with that travel should not be fully borne by those residents and, therefore, that financial support should be provided by the Ontario government through the travel grant program; and

“Whereas travel, accommodation and other costs have escalated sharply since the program was first put in place, particularly in the area of air travel; and

“Whereas the Ontario government has provided funds so that southern Ontario patients needing care at the

Northwestern Ontario Cancer Centre have all their expenses paid while receiving treatment in the north, which creates a double standard for health care delivery in the province; and

“Whereas northern Ontario residents should not receive a different level of health care nor be discriminated against because of their geographical locations;

“Therefore we, the undersigned citizens of Ontario, petition the Ontario Legislature to acknowledge the unfairness and inadequacy of the northern health travel grant program and commit to a review of the program with a goal of providing 100% funding of the travel costs for residents needing care outside their communities until such time as that care is available in our communities.”

We continue to read petition after petition signed by concerned residents of our communities in northwestern Ontario who are anxious to see the government act on this very important matter. I affix my signature in full agreement with the concern of my constituents.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would seek unanimous consent of this House that we adjourn the proceedings and revert back to introduction of bills so the government may introduce a bill entitled An Act to resolve the labour dispute between the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, so that we may order the teachers back to work and allow the children to go back to school tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Is there unanimous consent? There is not unanimous consent.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Can I seek some clarification then? Is that request for unanimous consent out of order for the duration of the day, or is it just a fact now that the students will not be allowed to go back to school because Mr Kormos decided not to let them?

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry, I can't answer that question. Question period is over, and we'll enter into those things that we properly do. Right now we're in orders of the day.

1550

ROAD USER CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPROVEMENT ACT, 2000

LOI DE 2000 SUR L'AMÉLIORATION DES SERVICES OFFERTS AUX USAGERS DE LA ROUTE

Mr Turnbull moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 137, An Act to permit the Minister of Transportation to delegate powers and duties and responsibilities to deliver program services with respect to road user safety to persons in the private sector / Projet de loi 137, Loi permettant au ministre des Transports de déléguer à des

personnes du secteur privé des pouvoirs, des fonctions et des responsabilités pour fournir des services liés à des programmes en matière de sécurité des usagers de la route.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): The Chair recognizes Mr Turnbull, the Minister of Transportation.

Hon David Turnbull (Minister of Transportation): Mr Speaker, I'd just like to indicate that I will be splitting my time with the members from Etobicoke North, Peterborough and Northumberland.

It's my pleasure today to introduce Bill 137 for second reading. This bill is all about improving customer service while ensuring road user safety. If passed, the Road User Customer Service Improvement Act would enable the ministry to transfer certain services to a new provider. As a first step in this process, we are seeking expressions of interest from qualified candidates to deliver driver examination services. This bill supports our government's intention to focus on setting standards, developing policy and managing services. At the same time, we remain committed to maintaining road user safety as the ministry's top priority.

Members will be aware that demand for driver examination services is especially high as hundreds of thousands of new drivers are seeking to complete the graduated licensing process introduced across the province in 1994. In October 1999, I announced a package of measures to reduce waiting times for driver examinations. As part of that initiative, the ministry committed to hiring approximately 300 temporary driver examination staff, opening temporary test facilities and offering driver testing on weekends. The result was a significant increase in the number of road tests and a reduction in the waiting times for driver examinations.

When I announced the new measures, I also made a commitment to finding ways to further improve customer service. This legislation, if passed, would build on these improvements by seeking innovative customer service proposals from outside providers. At the same time, this initiative will strengthen the delivery of the graduated licensing program, which has been a tremendous success story in terms of road user safety.

It has been almost six years since graduated licensing was first introduced across the province. Studies show the number of collisions involving novice drivers has dropped by 31%. The number of injuries and fatalities involving novice drivers has gone down by 24%. We are encouraged by these statistics. Bill 137 would help to strengthen the delivery of this highly successful program.

I am pleased to have received support for this legislation from two groups with a great interest in road user safety. Émile-J. Thérien, president of the Canada Safety Council, stated, “We are further confident that an alternative service delivery for driver examinations will solidify the outstanding success realized by Ontario's graduated licensing program. We are confident this proposed alternative will relieve the current backlog and prevent such a recurrence in the future.”

Mark Yakabuski, vice-president of the Insurance Bureau of Canada, said, "We are delighted that the government has gone so far to amend the legislation to permit alternative providers of examination services in Ontario. Today's action will go a long way to further reducing waiting times for driver examinations. Today's announcement is good news for Ontario drivers, and for all of us involved in road safety."

The opposition has raised certain concerns about the effect of this bill on driver safety. Let me emphasize that road user safety is my absolute top priority. As I've said, the ministry will continue to set and enforce standards for driver examination services across the province. We will ensure that the new service provider complies with provincial legislation and we will rigorously audit the delivery of driver examinations throughout the province.

Our government will not compromise on road user safety. We have introduced many initiatives to strengthen this commitment. These measures include investing a record \$1 billion this year into highway improvement projects across the province; making Ontario's truck safety laws the toughest in North America; implementing longer suspensions and mandatory alcohol education and treatment programs for drinking drivers; and continuing to fulfill the commitments made in our action plan for safer roads.

Our initiatives demonstrate Ontario's strong commitment to road user safety. We are proud that Ontario now has the fourth-safest roads in North America and the lowest fatality rate since 1950, but we can and we must do better. We must strive to make them the safest because even one fatality is one too many. This commitment will continue under this bill regardless of who delivers the service.

The opposition has made the claim that this bill would allow the service provider access to confidential driver data. I will remind the opposition that the service provider is bound by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The opposition has also suggested that a new provider would have the power to set fees. This is simply not correct. In fact, the ministry will continue to be responsible for establishing fees.

As a ministry and a government, we have made a commitment to review all government operations and find ways to improve customer service. This bill is proof of that commitment.

Having clarified the issues for the opposition, I certainly look forward to support on this important bill.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): I'm quite pleased to join in today's consideration of Bill 137. I find this particular piece of legislation very key in terms of the Ministry of Transportation's priorities, goal-setting standards arrangements, and I would like this afternoon to outline to some degree the primary benefits derived in Bill 137.

This legislation is proposed and designed to allow some MTO services to be delivered by another service

provider. Specifically, the bill supports MTO's intention to look for a new service provider for driver examination services. The demand for driver testing services in Ontario is at an all-time high. All you have to do is canvass the members of this assembly and you will find they have probably had a number of phone calls regarding access to this service. That's one of the primary rationales for bringing in Bill 137. When demand is high, when demand is persistent, you undertake some serious planning to deal with that demand in ways that are both efficient and, above all, effective for the customer. That's one of the keys. We want to reduce the number of phone calls to members in the assembly and get more people driving more safely on Ontario's highway network.

MTO has already made some significant strides in this area in terms of customer service. Last year, Minister Turnbull announced a package of significant measures to deal with customer service problems at provincial driver examination centres. In this initiative, the ministry has hired more than 300 new driver examination staff on a temporary basis. We've also established temporary driver testing facilities and expanded the hours of operation at a number of provincial testing centres. Consequently, this initiative will allow for more road tests to be offered and the average waiting time across the province for driver examinations to be reduced. With the passage of Bill 137 and a move to an alternative service provider, the province can provide more significant customer service improvements in driver examinations that have already been made.

I think it's important to note also that in this prescribed bill you would see the role of government become the steerer of the boat, not the rower. That's where we'll be looking to see how the opposition deals with that primary philosophical outlook we have on how to provide services.

1600

Ontario is committed to having the safest road system in North America. If there is an organization out there that can help us move closer to that goal by running a better driver examination service, we want that organization to be testing our new drivers. The key, of course, is to find the right service provider for the job. To ensure that the right organization is selected to undertake this important task, the ministry has established a comprehensive screening process. Before earning the right to deliver driver examination services in Ontario, a successful bidder would be required to meet a number of detailed criteria.

The selection exercise begins with the release of a request for qualifications, called an RFQ. The RFQ invites potential candidates to express their interest in assuming responsibility for the MTO driver examination business and requires candidates to meet specific criteria. If the RFQ process identifies qualified candidates, the ministry will then proceed to the next stage in the exercise, which is the release of a request for proposals document, or RFP, as it is known in the trade. Only pre-screened, qualified candidates will receive the RFP

document. That means that only qualified candidates will be allowed to bid on the delivery of driver examination services.

If a successful candidate is chosen, the ministry would develop an alternative service delivery contract with the winning bidder. As I have suggested, great care is being taken to ensure that from the public's perspective the operation would have only one possible outcome, and that will be better, more cost-effective service delivery. I believe the citizens of Ontario simply cannot lose with this approach, because the whole point of the exercise is to provide them with better and more effective service. If the selection process results in a new provider of driver examination services, the service delivery contract with the ministry would contain measurable objectives and clear milestones for customer service improvements.

In addition, it is this government's earnest desire to better government, to enrich the lives of Ontario citizens by providing respect and opportunity. I and my colleagues believe taxpayers have vested their trust in us as a government. They expect us to treat their dollars prudently and respectfully. Indeed we recognize that taxpayers are customers who expect value for their money when they pay it. Above all, with this legislation we look forward to ever so modestly improving customer service so that the people of Ontario will benefit.

Others have spoken to Bill 137's benefits in terms of road user safety. But from my perspective, the importance of the bill is that it would mean better, more cost-effective, customer-friendly services to the public. For that reason, I urge members to support Bill 137.

In addition, if you look at this bill in terms of its accountability, there is a whole set of mechanisms set out. I anticipate the opposition will not be able to focus on this because it has a positive benefit. When you look at section 9 and subsections 10(1) and (2), we have such things as an annual report and additional reports to the minister. In terms of handling personal information, all uses of documentation under that have to be undertaken through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in the delegation of these responsibilities.

When you look through the provisions of the bill, the specific dimensions of accountability are there in terms of providing for accelerating our road user safety objectives and also for providing effective, efficient and convenient customer service through driver examination centres in this new way.

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): It is my pleasure to speak to the members today in support of Bill 137, An Act to permit the Minister of Transportation to delegate powers and duties and responsibilities to deliver program services with respect to road user safety to persons in the private sector. I think the title of the bill says it all with respect to road safety. This bill will permit the Minister of Transportation to improve customer service at driver examination centres through a new service provider.

I want to emphasize the words "customer service." It's something that is extremely well known in the private

sector but unfortunately is somewhat foreign to many in the public sector.

As members know, the ministry is seeking expressions of interest for a new provider of driver examination services in this province. I believe that customer service and indeed competition will serve the citizens of this great province well in the future. Again, competition and good customer service are what make the economy go, as well as keeping the citizens extremely satisfied.

I believe that Bill 137 will enable the ministry to take steps to provide better service to the people of Ontario. I know that all members of this House support those goals, and I truly hope the opposition will do so as well and indeed will support this bill.

I've been in business in this great province for some 40 years, so I believe I have a bit of an idea of what customer service is all about. Certainly you don't stay in business for that length of time unless you contribute and cater to the public. I know both the opposition and the third party constantly criticize the private sector. For the life of me I cannot understand why. They go out and buy a car, a house, groceries or a new suit or dress. They buy all these things from the private sector, yet they stand in this House and criticize the private sector.

Interjection: Shameful.

Mr Stewart: I think that is extremely shameful—I thank my colleague from Brampton. The business community—small business, the small entrepreneur, home businesses or whatever it might be—should be absolutely disgusted at what they are saying about them and the businesses they conduct.

I am aware that one member has expressed concern that Bill 137 would compromise road user safety in this province. I would like to try to lay those concerns to rest today. The fact is that road user safety is the MTO's number one priority, and let me assure you that it is mine. Bill 137 will support the delivery of Ontario's graduated licensing program, which has proved to be an unparalleled success since its introduction six years ago.

Under graduated licensing, novice drivers obtain a licence that requires them to obey a comprehensive set of driving restrictions on alcohol, night driving and travelling on busy highways. These restrictions are designed to provide new drivers with valuable experience at a period when statistics show they are the most vulnerable; and indeed that is so true, because night driving on the busy highways, especially the 400 series, is a bit of a hairy situation these days, even for those of us who are more experienced drivers.

1610

Under graduated licensing, all novice drivers must complete a two-step licensing process and take two road tests before obtaining their full licence. After driving on the 401 fairly regularly over the last five or six or 10 years, I would suggest that some adult drivers should go back and take those two road tests as well. I think they need some upgrading, as I observe, anyway.

The graduated licensing system is designed to promote safe driving habits among beginner drivers, in the belief

that those habits, once learned, will last a lifetime. I believe some of the habits all of us have learned, whether it's through ethics or morals or whatever, do last a lifetime if you're taught well in the first place.

Statistics show overwhelmingly that graduated licensing is working. Studies show that the number of collisions involving novice drivers has dropped by 31%. The number of injuries and fatalities that involve novice drivers has gone down by some 24%. It is working. With graduated licensing, Ontario is on the way toward achieving its goal of having the safest roads in North America. Bill 137 would enhance the delivery of this highly successful licensing program.

A new provider delivering driver examination services would build upon the improvements the ministry has implemented to reduce waiting periods for driver testing. The backlog, as we've seen it over the last number of years, is less, but there is improvement to be made. Today, with Ontario's growing population, and more than eight million drivers on the roads, the demand for driver examination services is high. That demand will continue to grow in the future, along with our economy and population.

Increasing the effectiveness of the driver testing process today will ultimately help support our efforts to make our roads safer in the future.

Bill 137 enables the ministry to pursue potential new service providers. A new service provider would be responsible for vision testing. It would also examine candidates for licences on their knowledge of the rules of the road. Don't we often forget the rules of the road, and don't we often forget to be courteous on the road? Again, I believe novice drivers, new drivers, those candidates for licences, must know the rules of the road. A new service provider would take driver's licence photos and book appointments for road tests, and it would be responsible for carrying out road tests needed to obtain Ontario's class G1 and G2, commercial and motorcycle, licences.

We believe that government ministries should set provincial standards and work to see that they are met, again in consultation with the public, which has to abide by those standards. We also believe their primary business is to manage services effectively and efficiently, rather than to deliver services directly.

With the passage of Bill 137, the Ministry of Transportation would continue to play a key role in licensing drivers across the province, again in co-operation with the private sector. It would set licensing policies, fees and standards. It would focus on efforts to see that those standards are met, and met consistently.

Under the government's proposal, a new service provider would build upon the improvements we have already made to the system. The delivery of the graduated licensing program would be supported, and this supports our efforts to make our roads safe. That's the whole key to this legislation, and that is to make our roads safer for the travelling public.

In conclusion, I would like to urge every member of the House to join me today in supporting the second

reading of Bill 137. As elected representatives of the public, we all want services for the people of Ontario and we all want safer roads, and that is what Bill 137 is all about.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): Certainly this is an interesting topic that we are addressing, second reading of Bill 137. I see this as all about customer service—most of it, anyway—and I rise today to support it. I'm sure that every member in the Legislature is going to support the Minister of Transportation in this approach to a new way of delivering the kind of customer service that we need.

This is very consistent with other things the ministry is doing. For example, I recall back in 1995-96, shortly after we took office in the first term, that we were privatizing a lot of the maintenance of our highways. I recall the opposition yelling and screaming and carrying on. I haven't heard too much from them lately, now that it's working extremely well. Of course, whenever you start something there are a few hiccups in it, but this has worked out very well, not surprising when you have the private sector involved.

This is one more step that we're taking in that direction as we look to seeking interest from potential new service providers for the delivery of driver examination services. In this regard, the immediate goal is to provide the public with better service. I don't think there's any question it's a hallmark of this government, ever since 1995, to provide a better service. You can take many examples. You can go to the common counters that were implemented prior to the election. This is an area where the public can go and get information on any ministry. It's sort of a one-window approach to handling customer service. I might mention it's working very well. We'd like to see it expanded even further, but it is evolving. The kiosk where you can go and have your licence renewed—if you can go and get money 24 hours a day from the automatic teller, surely to goodness you can go and do things like having your licence updated. That has certainly been in place for some time. Those are two activities of this government.

Also I think it's interesting to note the kinds of awards the public service is receiving because of the guidance from this government. For example, the Ministry of Natural Resources, through their Parks Ontario reservation system, recently received a prestigious award from the Canadian Information Productivity Association.

Mr Speaker, do you recall just a year or two ago, when this new program of reservations was brought in, they were on their hind legs over here, yelling and screaming it wasn't working? They didn't give it half a chance. It was just getting started. I haven't heard very much from the opposition benches about Parks Ontario and the reservation system in this last year or so. Of course it's working well, and we wouldn't want to take a chance on the opposition coming along with something positive and supporting the government.

Here are some examples, just a few of many examples, where customer service has been improved in

Ontario. Once again the MTO, the Ministry of Transportation, is moving in that direction, and I'm certainly very pleased to see that. Our government's longer-term goal, and the ministry's number one priority, is exactly this: to make Ontario the North American leader in road-user safety. Again, that has been the priority.

I had a question to the Minister of Transportation recently, the Honourable David Turnbull, just after travelling through Quebec and seeing the roadsides down there manicured like a park. I was questioning why that wasn't happening in Ontario. Of course, you ask questions you know the answers to ahead of time, and I wasn't surprised with his response. It was the terrible conditions the roads were left in when we took over the government in 1995, and we're still catching up, putting all the dollars on to paving roads and repairing them.

1620

We must have been the pothole capital of the world in 1995 when we took office. It was indeed a disaster, and the minister of the day—that was the Honourable Al Palladini—committed to filling every pothole in the province of Ontario, if he had to do it himself. I remember the members from the opposition, particularly those in eastern Ontario, driving through 401 in my area. They were incensed by the roads and the conditions they had left them in. They were incensed in 1995-96. I haven't heard very much from them lately talking about the potholes in Ontario.

I even heard a radio station back in the fall of 1995, spring of 1996, talking about the biggest potholes, and they were wondering where they were coming from. They had calls coming in. They had potholes in northern Ontario, this caller said, so big that the moose used them to hide from transports. Those were the kinds of stories we were hearing on the radio. Down in the Cornwall area I understood that somebody phoned in and said the potholes down there were so deep that if you went to the bottom of one of them you could hear Chinese talking in China. Those were the stories that were out there. We don't hear those kinds of stories today.

These potholes—you break rims. As a matter of fact, my son-in-law, driving his car on the road from Sioux Lookout down to Dryden, hit one of those potholes, bent two rims—they never have found the hubcaps off that car—and ruined two tires. This is in a pothole on a highway. This government has since paved that road, and they were pretty pleased about that. That's the kind of dangerous situation the roads were in when we took office.

I just wanted to get into safety. That's what reminded me of that. According to the latest collision statistics, Ontario has now, thanks to what has been done in the last five years, the fourth-safest roads in North America. There's a good and bad here. That's something we can celebrate, that we're fourth, but there are also three ahead of us, and I don't think Minister Turnbull is going to be happy until we are number one in road safety in North America.

Road fatalities in this province have dropped to their lowest level since 1950. With the number of vehicles on the road, the number of transports on the road that we see today, that to me is pretty remarkable, and a lot of that has happened just in the last four or five years. I think of the number of transports. I don't know if you have noticed or not, but I certainly have, the number of transports moving goods in the province of Ontario that were not moving goods in 1995. There was nobody there to buy them. There were some 800,000 net new jobs created in Ontario, and there are now people earning who can go out and buy those goods. They're working to produce the goods, something that wasn't happening at that time. There are that many more trucks on the road, but the safety is still there, not to mention those 800,000 people going to work on a daily basis in their cars on the Don Valley and the Gardiner here in Toronto.

I've heard the opposition talk about gridlock in the Toronto road system, and I stress the Toronto road system, not necessarily so much the province's. The reason it's there is because there are so many more people going to work. It's something they never planned for. If they'd listened to the commitment that we had in the Common Sense Revolution back in 1995, they could have planned ahead for those 725,000 net new jobs that we were committed to for over five years, and we're committed to another 825,000 over the next five years. If the city of Toronto wants to plan ahead, now is the time. They should expand the Don Valley, expand the Gardiner and look ahead at what's coming in this city, look ahead at what's coming in this great province of Ontario. It's certainly remarkable the amount of goods moving, the number of cars, people going to work, people going out to buy goods because they now have some money in their pockets. They've got the \$200 from that tax rebate that was sent.

Talk about happy people. In the parade in Cobourg last Saturday, I never saw so many people with so many smiles and chattering along the parade route. They indeed are happy people today compared to 1995. At the Santa Claus parade of 1995 there were a lot of sad looks on their faces and not too many people out along the streets to celebrate. Certainly the statistics of the reduction in the fatalities on the roads in Ontario is something to celebrate, but we still have more to do.

We can't stop until every fatality on the roads of Ontario has been eliminated. That may be a long stretch to think through, but I think there is still more that can be done in driver education, driver testing and road safety. We will become, at the rate we're going, number one in Canada and North America in road safety.

A new provider for driver examination services would build on improvements that we have already made to the system, further improving waiting times. Certainly my office, not recently but going back a year or so, was inundated with calls about waiting lines. I know the minister wants to do something about that, and I'm sure this new approach, with having the private sector involved, will make quite a difference. We were also

very disappointed in the number of offices that were closed in my riding and taken to centres such as Peterborough, but I understand a lot of things do orient to Peterborough, and I'm very supportive of Peterborough and of my good friend Gary Stewart, who's in that riding. But people in my riding are very concerned about the distance they have to go for their testing, and we look forward to the private enterprise providing improved service.

I'm certainly very supportive of the new graduated licensing program. As the members know, graduated licensing is saving lives and making roads safer in every part of this province. But it did take a long time, in spite of the lobbying of the Insurance Bureau of Canada. The Liberal government of 1985 through to—well, there was an unholy alliance there for a couple of years—1987 to 1990 just didn't get the message from the Insurance Bureau of Canada. They didn't understand what they were bringing forward. I believe it was almost at the end of the term of the NDP government; they were having difficulties understanding about this graduated licensing program. But it does work. It has worked in many other places around the world, and it is now working extremely well here in Ontario.

A new service provider for driver examinations would enable the Ministry of Transportation to focus on what government agencies do best. The government will continue to set the high standards for testing across this great province and strive to make sure those standards are being met. The Ministry of Transportation will continue to focus on its many province-wide safety initiatives, and that is where those efforts should be put. As somebody said earlier—I think it was John Hastings, the parliamentary assistant for the ministry, who made the comment—the government should be here to steer, not to do the rowing, and that's the kind of thing that would happen with private enterprise.

As members know, for example, the ministry is currently implementing the action plan for safer roads. This was announced back in September last year. This action plan includes a number of major improvements to one of Ontario's busiest trade corridors, Highway 401, and a wide range of other measures to enhance and promote safety on roads throughout this province.

I well remember in the campaign back in the winter of 1994-95 this was a big issue in the riding of Northumberland. There are some curves as you go through from Port Hope to Cobourg and on east, and there was a number of accidents there that crossed over the 401. The median was rather narrow—unfortunate planning in the beginning—but as people came out of Toronto and were driving for some time along a straight road and then came to the curves, mesmerized by the highway or whatever, accidents were very common there, particularly on snowy days. People were crossing the median and even a school bus crossed. Again, the coroner's recommendation was to get a barrier in, and there was a lot of pressure to do that.

I'm pleased to be able to report at this time that almost all of that centre barrier is now complete, and it's my understanding that this time next year that probably will be completed through that area. It has already been saving lives. Certainly the OPP have told me that they see a tremendous change in the direction, and that was happening while the wall was being built, while just some portions were being put in place. It's certainly part of the safety and concern that this government has for the people of Ontario as we build those barriers.

1630

In terms of work to improve Highway 401, much of it lines up with the recommendations of the coroner's jury at the inquest into the terrible accident that occurred back in 1999 on Highway 401 and Essex. We all remember the foggy conditions. People weren't slowing down; however, the odd one did and then they ran into the one that did slow down. It was quite a nasty scenario. I remember, I think it was two nights and running. In response to the jury's recommendation, MTO is accelerating the construction of median barriers along 401 between Windsor and Tilbury. The ministry's planning to be in a very aggressive construction schedule as soon as environmental process and design stages of the work are completed.

As a result of these efforts, the median barriers will be completed about two years ahead of schedule. Safety will be significantly enhanced, and here we are again with these barriers on the 401. It would have been great if we could have taken those lanes and put them out along the boundary fences and had some brush and stuff in between. It would have provided a tremendous amount of safety for the drivers of our four-lane highways, but since the lanes and the road beds are already on location, and we had the bridges designed as such, the best we can now do is put that barrier down the centre.

As I see the barriers being developed and put in place, particularly in Northumberland, I think it's interesting to see the holding ponds that they have for water that's running off from the ditches. It slows it down, retains the salt to drain in and soak into those areas. It helps to retain the groundwater rather than having the flash runoffs from the pavement, as we are all too familiar with, that happen on major highways and off roofs in big cities as well. These retention ponds are very, very valuable to the environment, and it's great to see you constructing those at the same time that they are putting in these barriers.

It's good, because of the stimulation of the economy, that the dollars are there so that we can be ahead of time, be ahead of schedule, just as the coroner has recommended that we get on with building these barriers. I didn't see any barriers being built prior to 1995. As a matter of fact, there were very few dollars invested in the infrastructure of the highways in the province of Ontario up until 1995, during those 10 lost years.

As well, the ministry will install a permanent vehicle-counting station in the Windsor-London corridor to monitor the volume of traffic that's moving through there. Again, a lot of that has to do with the stimulation

of the economy and the number of transports and people going to work.

Under the action plan for safer roads, work is also well underway on paving the outside and median shoulders of the highway. By the end of this year, the ministry expects that about 160 kilometres of the total distance of 175 kilometres will be completed. That in itself is customer service. It's also safety for the people of the province of Ontario.

Some of the other improvements include the addition of rumble strips on the edges of the highway to alert motorists when they're leaving driving lanes. They put a lot of those rumble strips through Northumberland and east of here. It's quite a wakeup when you pull over accidentally or on purpose and you hear them. It's a call to the fact that you're no longer on the driving part of the lane and it brings you to your attention and really wakes you up very, very quickly. They're probably very reasonably priced things to put on highways, those rumble strips. There they are to alert motorists when they leave those driving lanes—another safety issue. Also, customer services is part of that.

As well, reflective pavement markings are being installed on the curved portions of the roadway between London and Windsor to improve visibility for drivers at night. We talked about the 1999 accident up in Essex. We had a similar one on the bridge over the Trent River, now Quinte West—it used to be called Trenton; it's now the Trenton Ward—back in 1981. There was fog coming off the river, an extremely cold night and some of the transports slowed down going through that fog and others didn't slow down. It was very early in the morning. We ended up with a very, very serious accident with many people killed in that pileup. As a result, they put lights in, put reflectors in the centre, and it certainly improved the conditions there.

The ministry is also stepping up its driver education programs in its efforts to promote road safety. These efforts include measures to address aggressive driving, and drinking and driving, and to encourage all drivers to obey the law by using their seat belts. I get so enthused every time I come to something like seat belts. I've been wearing seat belts ever since I bought a Volkswagen back in 1958. I had quite a time convincing them that I wanted them and getting them to put them in. But they do save so many lives, they're so important in our vehicles, and we've evolved to shoulder straps and to air bags. Certainly it's improving car safety, the unit you're in.

Drinking and driving in the 1950s and 1960s was kind of an excuse for having an accident: "You can't blame it on the driver. He happened to be drunk. What else would you expect?" Through education programs, culturally it has become unacceptable, and we have a much, much better attitude toward taking a drink and going out on the road. That has certainly turned around.

It's great to see the various functions that the OPP or the police in general carry out with their RIDE programs, checking people to see if they have in fact been drinking and driving. I have had the occasion to be through several

of those. I also had the opportunity a couple of years ago to work with the OPP out of Cobourg, and we did a RIDE program. I stood in the middle of the road with the OPP officers as various drivers stopped. It was a neat educational experience to be involved in that and also to see the seat belt blitzes that go on, some of the volunteers standing on the corners in communities, counting and checking to see how many people are indeed wearing their seat belts or not. It's great to see the increased number of people wearing their seat belts in Ontario.

As I've noted, Bill 137 would help to improve the delivery of driver examination services right across this great province. But in terms of Ontario's policies, fees and standards for driver examinations, the Ministry of Transportation here in the province will continue to run the show. In other words, they're going to continue to steer, but there'll be more growing going on by other organizations, particularly the private companies that will be involved in delivering this in the future.

This government made a commitment in our Blueprint document—that was our campaign platform back in 1999. I'm sure you would remember it being part of that campaign. It was there to ensure that the government is more accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario. There's just a great section that starts on page 18 and goes through to page 20. It's "Making Government Work Smarter, Faster and Better." That's really what this particular bill is about. It's about "Customer Service and Satisfaction"—that's item 3. "Service Where and When You Need It" is item 4. It really fits right into those two sections. That's on pages 19 and 20, in case you want to check on that.

We're working right through this Blueprint. We'll soon have it completed. Customer service and satisfaction have certainly become a hallmark of this government and I think are going to be well into the future. When we come to the election in 2003-04, the public will recognize that this government not only is doing what we said we were going to do—and that has become a slogan, a hallmark of our government—but we'll also be recognized for how customer service has improved in this province; not that it didn't need to—it wasn't great there for a long time—but now it's in much better shape.

We're talking here about a declaration of taxpayer rights in our customer service. My, my. We hear about the rights of a lot of people, but what about the rights of taxpayers? They're the ones who have been taking it in the ear for so long.

I mentioned earlier the common counters. There's a commitment in here for more common counters, one-stop shopping. This is a commitment our government has made in customer service as part of this bill we're debating today.

"Complete business registration at one location" through a kiosk: that was started—I'll be fair here—just prior to our government, but how this has accelerated and stepped up. It used to take weeks and weeks and weeks to

register a business. Now I understand you can do it in 20 or 30 minutes at one of these kiosks.

“More electronic kiosks with more services: these user-friendly computer terminals in 60 locations in Ontario allow people to renew their driver’s licences and plate stickers, pay fines, change address information,” and so forth. This indeed is customer service, along with more Internet services. I can’t believe how the Internet has been expanding. We have gone to something like doubling our Internet activities every 100 days. That would happen three times a year. Just imagine the expansion of the Internet.

1640

Those are some of the commitments. I thought you, Mr Speaker, and the opposition in particular would be interested in seeing what we’ve been doing on our commitments for customer service. Certainly, here we are with Bill 137, a bill all about customer service and about safety. Again, hallmarks of this government are safety and customer service.

Speaking of this commitment that we have in the Blueprint, it’s there to ensure that the government is more accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario. I just commented about the taxpayer bill of rights. How can we be fair with taxpayers and to know where their dollars go? So often taxpayers say to me, “Those tax dollars just seem to go off into a black hole, and I never know where they go or where they come out or what happens to them. Doug, tell me what goes on with those tax dollars.” It’s good to see this coming through in customer service. In the future they will know. And we have more accountability in our schools and more accountability in our health care system.

It was a sad situation we were evolving into with the previous government. There was no accountability anywhere, especially the last year. What did they sit: 21 days or 22 days in a whole year? They were just sitting there collecting their salary, I guess. I’m not sure what else they were doing—trying to figure out when to call the election or when not to call the election.

Interjection.

Mr Galt: The member for Niagara Centre is pointing out 1995. What were they going to do? He’s trying to come up with the reasons in 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1995 they kept sitting and didn’t call the election when they should have, on the anniversary date of about four years. Instead, they went almost through the fifth year, almost to the point where the Lieutenant Governor would have to dissolve the Legislature and have an election anyway. But their leader finally came through with an election in the spring of 1995, much to the appreciation of the people, the hard-hit taxpayers of Ontario. I can tell you there were a lot of people who just couldn’t wait for that election. I can also tell you that they were absolutely thrilled with the results of that particular election.

One of the important parts of the commitment of this government is to deliver safe, efficient, high-quality services to the people of Ontario, and that is indeed happening. We’re here to fulfill that commitment. We’re

exploring new and innovative ways to improve customer service. When we’re improving customer service, all we have to do is look to private enterprise and see what’s going on.

I remember a survey that was carried out back in the early 1990s. It was when there was a lot of cross-border shopping—I believe that was the time period—about eight, nine, 10 years ago. The survey said they weren’t cross-border shopping to save money; it was for improved customer service. I couldn’t believe after that survey came out the turnaround of customer service in the city of Toronto. It didn’t matter what hotel you went in, whether it was to the Exhibition here in Toronto or wherever, customer service literally turned around overnight when that survey came out. So it’s obvious to me that customer service is very important in the response of not only private industry but the public sector as well when those kinds of surveys are carried out and brought to the attention of the public.

Wherever it’s practical, safe and cost-effective to do so, we are prepared to transfer out the delivery of those services. In this case, this is a straightforward examination of process where criteria have been established and can be used by the private sector. I certainly look forward to those kinds of activities.

Bill 137 reflects this important commitment to the people of Ontario, and we’ll continue to explore further improvements in the future. In this way we’ll ensure that the government delivers to hard-working people in all parts of this great province the high-quality services and excellent value for money they expect and certainly deserve.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent to revert to introduction of bills to allow the introduction of appropriate labour legislation, that the House immediately proceed to second reading debate for the remainder of the afternoon, the time being divided equally among the three caucuses, and that at 5:50 this afternoon the question on second reading be put, and that following that vote, third reading be allowed to be called and the question on that motion be immediately put without further debate or amendment, and that there be no deferral permitted on any divisions requested, with any division bells limited to five minutes, and that notwithstanding this interruption, this afternoon’s debate on Bill 137 be considered a full sessional day’s debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Is there unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Questions and comments?

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): The member for Northumberland talked about the 401 and he made some good points. He talked about the median barrier that will stretch from Windsor to Tilbury, and the people in that area certainly appreciate that. But they are mystified as to why the government didn’t continue that median barrier across the riding of Chatham-Kent, where Carnage Alley exists, where so many people have died in

the last many months. The people don't understand why they would stop at Tilbury and not extend that median barrier through Chatham-Kent. As well, the people in that area and people across Ontario wonder why the government has not put in place an immediate action plan to put three lanes on that section of the 401, as called for by many people: three lanes going east, three lanes going west. We have a high volume of traffic. Trade is increasing and the economy is good. We need those three lanes now.

Also, people are wondering why we don't have fully paved shoulders on both sides of the highway. The government has put a shoulder on the right-hand lane but they haven't on the other side. People come to me and say, "Don't we count if we're driving in that other lane?" Why would the government not move in that regard?

The actions to date by the government are simply not enough. I have received over 5,000 responses to a survey where people are asking for these safety measures to be implemented. I know when the member brought up the 401 he was speaking of his general geographic area and his riding, but certainly much more needs to be done in Chatham-Kent. I thought that was what the minister was going to bring about here today rather than Bill 137.

1650

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have but two minutes in this rotation of two minutes per caucus to comment on the comments of Lord knows how many members who shared the leadoff for the Conservatives. It's a very dangerous road to travel. This government is talking about privatizing driver testing at a time when the government itself is being critical of private driver training. At a time when the government has expressed concerns about people being able to buy a driver training certificate, they want to make access to drivers' licences the parallel of going to the corner store to buy a long-distance card.

We've got serious problems on our highways. They've been noted, and I believe they are of concern to every member in this assembly. But we should be talking about strengthening the types of driver training that are going on out there, the effectiveness of driver training and maintaining and strengthening the integrity of driver testing to ensure that only those people who meet the universal and, frankly, what should be high standards are allowed on our roads in the first place. The route to privatization is going to infect the integrity of the Ministry of Transportation's driver examination system. It's going to result in the termination of the jobs of hundreds of people who are committed, long-time, qualified, competent and professional staff of the Ministry of Transportation, who have been designing driver examination programs and who have already seen the MTO gutted by this government. Again, a Snobelenesque creation of a crisis: shut down a whole bunch of driver testing offices so you have huge lineups, so that people can't take their tests, and then say, "Oh, well, we'll privatize and hand it over to our corporate buddies so they can make huge profits."

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Further questions and comments?

Mr Hastings: Mr Speaker, I—

The Speaker: You're not allowed in questions and comments. You were in on the debate.

Mr Hastings: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It seems to me that—

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): You're challenging the Speaker?

Mr Hastings: Yes, I'm challenging the Speaker, like you often do, member for York West.

The Speaker: Get to your point quickly. Don't talk to them; talk to me, please.

Mr Hastings: I'm talking to you. I think I ought to be able to make a two-minute presentation. The other two parties—

The Speaker: You can't. The rules are very clear. You cannot—

Mr Hastings: You always stretch the rules—

The Speaker: We don't stretch the rules, so don't say that. It's part of the rules. You can't speak.

Further questions and comments?

Mr Brad Clark (Stoney Creek): It strikes me as odd that from time to time bills are introduced in this House and we hear different opposition members speak about the fact that there are so many other important bills we should be debating in the House, that there are so many other things that are far more important than what the government is supposedly proposing. Here we have an opportunity to actually deal with an educational crisis in Hamilton and put the students back in school, and the member opposite is refusing to co-operate with the government and the Liberal Party. Here we have an opportunity to talk about a bill that is vitally important to 40,000 kids, putting them back in school, but the member is refusing to allow us unanimous consent to bring it into the House.

I challenge the member: if he wants to talk about it and debate it, why doesn't he support unanimous consent? I say to the people at home, you should be talking to the member, Peter Kormos. Why is he refusing to allow us the opportunity to put the children back in school? I don't understand it, personally. From time to time, we hear him say there are far more important bills to debate. Well, here we have an opportunity for you to debate a bill, but you refuse. You put political posturing ahead of 40,000 kids who should be back in school.

The Liberals are willing to go ahead. Our government is willing to go ahead. The sole member standing in the way of democracy in this House, the sole member standing in the way of 40,000 kids going back to school is the member opposite. I'm totally confused. As far as I'm concerned, we should now be debating the back-to-work legislation. Instead, this member is refusing to allow that to happen.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I'd going to actually address the bill, which has a lot of significance. Once again, it represents the attack of the right wing, the Fraser Institute crowd, on another public institution.

This is what they do—my friend from Etobicoke North knows this. Here's what the Fraser Institute and the right-wing people will tell you to do: "What you do is discredit a public service. You create a crisis in a public service to such an extent that people, in exasperation, will accept a solution they normally would not, a solution that is not good for the province in the long run."

All you have to do is allocate the appropriate number of staff and facilities so that people in this province have the service available. This reminds me of so many other areas we have in the province. For instance, if you back things up in the Ministry of the Environment lab long enough or if you cut the staff there, then eventually people will say, "We'd better have privatized laboratories throughout," and close down the Ministry of the Environment labs that provided part of the service for people in Ontario. The former Minister of Education was quite honest when he said, "What we're going to do is create a crisis. You have to create a crisis so you can have the changes we want." That's what happens.

I think the Ministry of Transportation has provided a good service in years gone by. There are some excellent people who are still employed by the Ministry of Transportation who know how to do the job. There are guarantees there. I think the former Minister of Transportation recognized that. He knew there were good people there. All we need is the appropriate allocation of staff and resources to that ministry to have an essential service provided for the people of this province. We don't have to privatize it. We don't have to throw out something that used to work quite well when it was adequately funded and had the appropriate staff. Let's have those days restored. They were even days when the Conservative Party was in power.

The Speaker: Response?

Mr Hastings: I'm certainly glad to respond to the member for St Catharines. In many ways, I think he echoes a preference for the old nostalgia. It has nothing to do with the service provided by the folks at the MTO. Very shortly, in about 40 days, we will be in the second year of the 21st century. Governments have so many demands on them today from health care and education—hopefully we'll get this bill through very shortly—that governments have to look at new and innovative ways of providing the same service at an effective, efficient cost, at an affordable cost that is customer convenient. It seems to completely miss the member for St Catharines that people are looking for service. Sometimes you have to look at different ways of providing that service. That's the essence of this bill.

I know other speakers are going to come forth to say there aren't sufficient safeguards in this legislation. I'll be more than happy to designate in later presentations the specific levels of accountability and safeguards in the legislation, from the way an agreement would be set up by the Ministry of Transportation with an alternative service provider, to the specific ways information has to be reported through the annual meeting of the service provider. There's a whole set of other specific provisions,

including revocation of the delegation of these powers should the alternative service provider not live up to the terms, conditions and items set in the contract. That's why we need this legislation.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Hoy: I will be sharing my time with the member for Sarnia-Lambton and the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr Sergio: What about York West?

Mr Hoy: And the member for York West.

It's interesting that the minister began his comments on Bill 137 by talking about graduated licensing. Indeed the government has created its own crisis. It has been common with the Harris government to create a crisis and then rush in and say, "Now we need to fix something."

Graduated licensing is exactly that. It's a crisis created by the Harris government. They ignored the advice of experts who knew the early recipients of G2 licences would all eventually be coming on stream to have their final licensing take place. This produced hardship on many people. It put hardship on those who had their licence, were looking for jobs, needed to renew and found out that the waiting lists were some 10 months long. Some were even longer than that. It also provided hardship for university students who needed a vehicle to go out and earn some money to pay for the skyrocketing tuition costs here in Ontario.

As an example, a young person who was going to teachers' college came to me and said, "I need my licence to go to my placement school." She couldn't get it because the waiting lists were so long. The Ministry of Transportation confirmed that the waiting list could be as long as 10 months and estimated that over 600,000 road tests would be required, when the average number of tests in the four years prior was only 354,000.

1700

The government created a crisis and they would not listen to the people in terms of the licence-issuing offices that already existed. In Ridgeway and Leamington those offices were, through me to the minister, asking that they remain open. They wanted those licence-issuing offices to be in place.

I wrote to the former minister back in August 1995. The town of Ridgeway was asking to have their licence-issuing office reopened. The Ridgeway Chamber of Commerce sent a letter in support of this. There was a petition with 1,383 local citizens' names on it. The town of Ridgeway has a population of about 4,500 and that includes men, women and children, so a petition of this size was very significant. They really wondered whether the government had a commitment at all to rural Ontario, which I'll talk about in a few moments as it pertains to Bill 137. They really wondered if the government was listening. If there was a crisis, and here's an opportunity to reopen an office and have people avail themselves of getting a licence in a timely and efficient way, surely they would have listened to the people in these two communities.

Further to that, there was no cost to the province. The local people said, "We can provide the office, we can provide the infrastructure that's required, at no cost to the provincial government if you would simply reopen this office." I think it was a reasonable request. It was turned down by the Harris government.

I have in my hand just a sample of the many, many requests to my office in the riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex. People had called to have their licence put in place in January, their licence expired in August and the test wasn't until September. Clearly, these people were desperate. They called in August—this is another one—the appointment was in January of the following year. They called in April and the test was going to be in November. In many cases their licence was due to expire. They called in August, and they were upset about a booking that was going to take place in October. As I say, the government created its own crisis.

Here today now, they come in with Bill 137. As you look at the very first page, the bill permits the Minister of Transportation to delegate powers, duties and responsibilities relating to road user safety to persons in the private sector. That's exactly what the bill's intent is all about.

Bill 137 will reduce safety on Ontario's roads. This is just another in a series of anti-democratic, blank-cheque bills from this government. It's a six-page bill that essentially permits the cabinet to do whatever they want by regulation. We don't see the regulations in this House; it is done by the government. What safeguards are there? What reporting will there be? What audits will be taken? The government and the minister want to take power to themselves and form regulation.

The public must wonder what safety features will be in those regulations, and I think we should see that in advance and it should be in the bill if the minister is concerned about safety. Bill 137 will allow the government to privatize any of the powers of the Ministry of Transportation relating to road user safety. It's another in a series of blank cheques, these types of bills that essentially allow the government to do whatever they want.

What could the government privatize beyond what they speak of in the bill—it's what they don't speak of in the bill—once they've taken this power unto themselves? Truck inspection, including spot checks and weigh stations; highway inspection and monitoring, including the inspection of new highway construction. Where are the safeguards, where are the reporting systems, where are the audits for this blank-cheque bill?

Road safety: profit levels, which will certainly be an issue with those who are going to take on these services, will be their sole motivation to provide the service. And when profit levels are entered into the equation, often corners can be cut. The Walkerton tragedy so graphically illustrates the government's blind ideology. Their driven agenda of privatizing vital government services has resulted in reduced standards in public safety. It has also resulted in higher cost and lower service for consumers.

The government claims there will be rigorous standards which will be set by regulation, and there will be monitoring. But as we have seen with the Walkerton tragedy, when this government privatized the vital public safety service of drinking water testing, there was virtually no monitoring or enforcement.

I want to talk for a moment about higher fees. We know that this privatization will foster the ideal of making profits, and as happened with the privatization of other government services, such as toll roads—Highway 407—Bill 137 could result in higher fees for drivers. Private sector companies may also charge more in rural and remote areas in order to offset a smaller customer base. Along with that, the reduction in services for rural and northern communities is one I'm very concerned about, as is my caucus. Privatizing road safety services could result in for-profit corporations reducing levels of service in less profitable smaller and remote communities, forcing new drivers to travel to larger urban centres for a driver's test.

The question would be—as you think back to my conversation about the two offices in my riding that the government didn't seem to want to open or help, or accept their help—would new offices be opened in rural Ontario, in northern Ontario, in a for-profit system? And would there be closures of the existing offices in these same locations in northern remote areas and rural Ontario? We know what happened when the government decided to take away the ag offices across Ontario, close them down. The rural Ontario people feel disenfranchised. They see the government becoming more remote from them. Here is just another example where the government has not put safeguards in place for rural and northern communities. We know what happened when the family responsibility offices closed. There was chaos across Ontario. I and my staff and other members here can attest to the fact that we spent hours and hours and hours on the phone trying to get to the centralized Family Responsibility Office. It was chaos. We also know what happened when the Ombudsman's offices in various locales in Ontario were shut down.

1710

The government would allow any company or organization to bid on the provision of road safety services, including those from the United States. I don't think that's what we want here in Ontario at all. People travel great distances to get their licences currently, particularly in regard to the G2 licences I spoke about. They were driving from municipality to municipality trying to find an area where the waiting list was maybe only eight months instead of 10; maybe it was nine months instead of 12. Then what happened with this crisis created by the Harris government in terms of those licensing offices was that the list in a location where it was only eight months at one time for the local people now grew to 10 because people from Toronto were coming to Chatham-Kent. They were seeking any relief. They were willing to drive—have someone drive them, in many cases, because they had no licence—because of that lack of respon-

sibility by the government to foresee what was going to happen when this influx of people who needed their G2 licence came about.

The auditor has spoken about privatizing highway maintenance. In his 1999 report, the auditor showed that privatization had not saved any money and may ultimately result in significant increases in the cost of highway maintenance. So there you have it. We have proof, an example from the Provincial Auditor on privatization of highway maintenance. He's very concerned about that. We on this side of the House are concerned about that as well—not only with highway maintenance and its privatization but also within this Bill 137.

I want to speak a bit about the motive of profit. I think it's important that we recognize what is happening here. The government will privatize perhaps any and all interests under the Ministry of Transportation. In terms of road safety, they may privatize all of it. The bill allows for it. The motivation of profit will be strong. It's human nature. We need to protect the people of Ontario from skyrocketing fees or a reduction in services or a combination of both. We need to be sure that this blank cheque that the minister is asking for under Bill 137 is scrutinized and debated here in the House, as it should be and as it will be. We also need to have public hearings on this bill.

I am certain, with the interest that has come to me since the minister's announcements in regard to some of the issues here and having seen the bill, and others have seen the bill, they are very concerned. I think we need to have a committee if the government, with its majority, passes Bill 137—and they'll use that, I'm sure. Government members rarely have the freedom of choice to stand up and vote against bad legislation. So it is highly likely that the government will use its power of numbers on their side and pass Bill 137 at second reading.

Therefore, we must have committee hearings so that the people of Ontario can come and give their opinions about Bill 137. I know they will be strong. I know they will be concerned about those very issues that I have spoken to. They will be concerned about the customer base and the fact that maybe this company will say, "I don't have enough customers here. I can't make a go of it. I'm going to shut down these services. I'm going to reduce them. I'm not going to move to a northern or rural area. I'm not interested in that. I wouldn't mind having a business in one of the bigger cities; I certainly wouldn't mind having one in Toronto, where the walk-by traffic is tremendous, but I'm not really interested in those other areas." There are no safeguards and no guarantees that this wouldn't take place. There are no guarantees whatsoever that this would not take place.

An interesting thing in all of this is the government promotes it to be a very good bill. That's their wont to do. But we read the last line on page 1, "The crown is not liable for any act or failure to act by a delegate." Those are the people who will be delivering this service. The government is saying, "We won't be liable for anything. We're going to privatize, but we don't want to be liable

for what those people might or might not do. We're not interested in that. We're not going to be liable." After Bill 137 passes, if that takes place, they do not want to be liable for the actions of others. This is very worrisome; it is very worrisome indeed.

It's clear in my mind that the government is reacting only to the crisis they had some time ago and their failure to recognize there were going to be huge numbers of people looking for their final licence renewal under the G2 system. The government was told to be prepared. Experts told them; the public told them. I suspect government members' offices were inundated, as was mine. People were really in difficulty maintaining their current licence, having the expiry date appearing soon and not being able to get their licence renewed for up to 10 months. I know those people wrote letters to government members' offices. They must have. I don't know that, but I suspect they did. I know they wrote to my office; I know they wrote to offices of other members of the opposition, because we have had good strong chats about that.

The government is using a cynical attempt to shield itself against the reduction of safety and services that will result from the passage of Bill 137. They're shielding themselves against any reduction in safety and service because it says the government cannot be held liable for any damages that result from any action by a delegate. The action we are concerned about would be reduced services, a lack of services in total or having persons having to drive farther and farther.

The rural communities, I must tell you, are very concerned about the actions of the government to date. They feel disenfranchised. I was in eastern Ontario and the people there were very upset. They felt like the Harris government had abandoned them, left them totally out. They talked about the ag office closures. They said to me, "We needed those offices. They were a vital part of our community. They helped community groups. They helped 4H clubs. They helped the youth." They said, "Isn't it ironic that the government praised the positioning and availability of ag offices when the ice storm occurred?" The government was actually heaping praise on the ag offices and their network, one to the other and to the people of Ontario, when the ice storm occurred. But why would the government praise these offices in such glowing terms and then turn around, collapse them and close them all down?

Interjection: It doesn't make sense.

Mr Hoy: It doesn't make sense. The people didn't understand the government's thinking at all. I don't understand it either. The people would dearly like to have those Ag offices returned to them. They want them back.

1720

The government says one thing and does another. They will say one thing and move on to something else in reality.

As I conclude my remarks, I want to say that Bill 137 will reduce safety on our roads. There are no safeguards, there's no reporting, there are no audits within this bill. It

allows the government to take on any of the powers of the Ministry of Transportation relating to road safety. It's another blank cheque in a series of bills we have seen that allows the government to do whatever it wants by regulation.

Back in 1996, I was reading an article that happened to be written by someone in another country. They were talking about regulation. I found it most interesting because, as you know, with the bully bill of some years ago this government of Mike Harris took on regulatory powers for so many ministers, for so many items. I found this an interesting article. This writer—and I think he was quite correct in all of this—said that when governments take on regulation, they do that because they really don't know where they're going. "We don't know the outcome of this; we don't know where it's headed, but we're going to take regulatory power on to ourselves because we have this idea, we have this notion." In this case, with Bill 137, the notion is bad. They take this regulatory power on to themselves because they really don't know what direction they will be heading. "We'll deal with this in crisis-management style and put in a regulation whenever needed."

We saw that with Walkerton. After the Walkerton incident occurred and so many people died and so many people were so very sick—and some of those people will remain ill and need treatment, I'm told, for the rest of their lives—the ministry came in with some regulations. Let's have it all here in black and white so we can understand it within the bill.

The other reason this writer cited for governments taking on so much regulatory power was they did not want to come back, in our case, to the Legislature. They didn't want to come back here and be accountable for their actions. They didn't want to come back here and explain away any shortcomings. They want to do that behind closed doors without any consultation, without consulting the Legislature and thereby consulting the people. They want to do it behind closed doors. They don't want to debate.

As I say, Bill 137 most definitely should go to committee. Let the people of Ontario have some time to discuss the issues, as I have mentioned, such as road safety, higher fees, reductions in service and many other items within the bill. Whether it will actually save money or not—

Interjections.

Mr Hoy: I hear many members say it won't. The auditor said when it came to privatizing highway maintenance that it may ultimately result in significant increases in the cost of highway maintenance. Under the guise of saving money, the government may actually be moving to a system that is going to be more expensive, more difficult to access in rural and northern communities. It may not exist at all in those communities. We feel strongly that Bill 137 should go to committee, if indeed the government exercises the power it has over there and passes it here at second reading.

With that, I appreciate the opportunity to make these comments. I'm anxious to hear the comments of others. But I have to emphasize how interesting it was that the Minister of Transportation got up and began almost immediately with his conversation about graduated licensing and is now talking about privatizing. I think it's "Create a crisis, bring in a bill," and this is a bad bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Further debate?

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It's a pleasure to be able to add my voice to what I fundamentally disagree with in this Bill 137. Bill 137 is An Act to permit the Minister of Transportation to delegate powers and duties and responsibilities to deliver program services with respect to road user safety to persons in the private sector.

I fundamentally disagree with privatization of this nature because I believe it would be of value to the Harris government to understand that there are areas of public interest that should be protected by government. In other words, there are areas where there is a role for government to play, just as there are areas where government should have an arm's-length relationship and should literally butt out. Of course, I can always talk about Bill 112, the McMichael bill, as one area where government should not have been interfering and micromanaging.

But this bill gives the government a blank cheque to privatize all programs and services that ensure road safety in Ontario, and this privatization of road safety is in keeping with the Harris government's neo-conservative agenda, in my estimation, of privatizing government services. This is one way for the Ontario government to off-load its responsibility and remove its liability as well. It wants to get out of the business of being government, and I guess that's what it said it wanted to do at the very beginning of the 1999 session.

It appears to me that the Harris government knows that if it bleeds to death publicly run services, then these services will be rendered dysfunctional—they can't do their job. This means customer service, then, becomes non-existent; that customer service is jeopardized. Many of you know that the licensing branch of the Ministry of Transportation is in a terrible state. The waiting period and the long distances that people have to travel even to get licences are frustrating people, and of course it needs to be fixed. We have to have a better-managed system, better customer service.

One of the peculiar aspects of the Ministry of Transportation and the services it provides, such as driver testing services, is that the fees paid by individuals to the ministry add up to a significant amount. I understand that it adds up to something like \$920 million. Now, although this is a significant amount of intake from licensing fees and other fees from the Ministry of Transportation, very little of that, obviously, is put back in the system. Therefore, we don't have a well-managed public system that provides good customer service.

After taking office, the government refused to provide driver testing offices with the necessary additional

resources required to administer the new, graduated licensing system passed in 1994. Consequently, driver testing services have been plagued with backlogs. This forces new drivers to wait many months to get an appointment for a test. Of course, the government caved in to the public pressure for more resources last year, but only on a temporary basis. So, after creating this crisis of lack of services, the government wants to hand over the service to the private sector.

This government's agenda is clear: strangle and bleed to death public systems and then privatize. The privatization of universities: same track record. Don't provide the resources to the public system, starve them, and then the answer is that the public system cannot do its job, government can't do its job, therefore privatize. We can expect privatized jails, same thing.

This bill also places a number of what we call Henry VIII clauses. It gives the Harris government powers to do whatever it wants by regulation. I feel it incumbent on me to talk a little bit about what Henry VIII clauses mean, because it shows that there's a fundamental flaw in the process of changing and privatizing all of these services.

1730

I asked the library to give me a definition of a Henry VIII clause and I also asked for some of the background. What I found is that "Henry VIII clause" is the popular name for the clause in a statute that gives government the power to pass a regulation which overrides or alters the terms of the statute itself. So we're going to put in Henry VIII clauses to allow the government to do what it wants without needing public debate. Such a clause attracts the nickname of King Henry VIII because the 16th-century monarch gave himself the power to legislate by proclamation, a power historically associated with his executive autocracy.

Henry VIII clauses are traditionally regarded in parliamentary democracies as undesirable because they empower the cabinet to pass regulations behind closed doors which override statutes passed by the democratically elected Legislature. That's the premise of this discussion.

I'll tell you what the Ontario Court (General Division) stated about this Henry VIII clause. They said, "This power is constitutionally suspect because it confers upon the government the unprotected authority to pull itself up by its own legal bootstraps and override arbitrarily, with no further advice from the Legislative Assembly and no right to be heard by those who may be adversely affected by the change, the very legislative instrument from which the government derives this authority."

That is fundamentally what this bill is all about. One of the first comments by the minister when he spoke to this bill was that it was going to ensure better customer service. The member from Peterborough spoke; he suggested that private business of course provides better customer service. That's not always the case. Take a look at the privatization of Highway 407. That gives you the best example of terrible customer service, but there's an

added clincher to this when you're talking about privatization: there's no accountability. Whom do you go to to complain about bad customer service? You can't go anywhere, because of course the government isn't going to come and step in and help. There's no one there.

Government is mandated to provide services at cost. That's the difference. Instead, private business is interested in making a profit. Sometimes the end of making a profit translates to better customer service, but sometimes it doesn't: the only thing is the bottom line, and you get to the bottom line by undercutting customer service. So the simplistic approach of suggesting that privatization is the be-all and end-all is not the case.

The member from Kingston and the Islands wants to speak on this matter as well, but one of the areas that I am concerned about is road safety. Again, profit levels being the sole motive to provide service, we know that corners are cut. We've seen that in the privatization of utilities in different parts of the world, and that's the case that unfortunately we saw with the Walkerton tragedy. With the privatization and cutting of corners and no real monitoring system, you end up with some huge impact on public safety.

Higher fees: when you want to make a lot of money or if you're in the private sector, you're not going to provide services at cost. You're in the business of making money. Of course that's what's going to happen: we're going to have higher fees. I still would like to know why the fees that have been given to the Ministry of Transportation have not been returned to restore the Ministry of Transportation licensing department to a level where it is providing good customer service.

I have to say that there's a fundamental difference between Mike Harris and his ideologues and Dalton McGuinty and the provincial Liberals. We believe that protecting public safety is the responsibility of government. There is a role that government has to play. It has to fix the problems if there is customer service that's not being provided, but it doesn't do so by just giving it to the private sector. A good society is all about protection of the interests of people in areas of public safety for the sake of the common good. That's the difference between the Harris Conservatives and the provincial Liberals.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): As the people of Ontario can see, the privatization train just rolls on. What did we have today? A statement from the Minister of Correctional Services about the privatization of our jail system. Here we have the privatization of our motor vehicle system. We earlier had privatization in a whole group of other areas. Universities are coming up next, and you could just go on and on.

What I would like to do first of all is respond to some comments that the member for Northumberland made earlier today when he said that privatization in the MTO outsourcing or the maintenance contracts has actually saved money. I would like to disagree with him, and I'm not citing my own words but I'm citing the words of the Provincial Auditor in his report last year.

The Provincial Auditor is an individual who is extremely highly regarded. He's highly regarded by everyone, including the government, because they wanted this individual to either set up a committee or to determine for himself what our salaries should be in here. Of course, rightfully, he rejected that offer. But he's highly regarded by everybody because he's not a spokesman for the opposition, he's not a spokesman for the government; he is a true independent individual who speaks on behalf of the concerns of the Legislative Assembly. He's an officer of the Legislative Assembly.

What did he say in his report last year about the privatization of the highway maintenance contracts? Contrary to what the member for Northumberland said earlier today, he said, "The ministry had not achieved the target savings of 5% on the four outsourcing contracts we reviewed, which covered about 20% of the province's highway system."

He goes on to say, "If all these costs were factored out of the ministry's estimates, outsourcing would result in estimated losses on three out of the four contracts that have been let out so far. As a matter of fact, he estimated that it is costing the Ministry of Transportation 5% more to privatize the maintenance contracts than what we were paying when the ministry itself was doing its work. That means it's costing you and I some 5% more in dollars and cents to have the work done by private companies than when the ministry did a lot of this work itself.

How anyone can suggest that as a result of that we are better off, that the system is better off, that we're saving more money, is totally beyond me.

While we're on the subject of the Provincial Auditor, we may just remind the people of Ontario once again that tomorrow he will be coming out with his report dealing with the year 2000, in which he's doing a number of value-for-money audits. I'm quite sure that the people of Ontario, as well as the members of this Legislative Assembly, will be extremely interested in what he will have to say tomorrow about how some of these privatization efforts and outsourcing efforts have actually gone in the province of Ontario and whether it is costing us more money, because so far, leaving all the other issues aside, it is costing you and me, the taxpayers of Ontario, more money for the privatization that has taken place within the Ministry of Transportation than we have saved, much more money.

1740

Let me just go on a little bit further. I now refer not to our propaganda or to the government's propaganda, but to the bill itself. I always like to deal with the bill itself and the exact wording that is contained in the bill. It's very interesting that the Minister of Transportation, in his opening press conference, states that he only has immediate plans to privatize the driver testing area. Let me say that in some areas there have been problems in the driver testing areas, where there have been long lineups and everything that's associated with that. There have been some problems. But it's completely open to debate as to why those problems were there. It may very well be that

there weren't enough people administering the driving tests within the government-operated centres. That remains to be seen.

What exactly does the bill say? The bill states, "The minister may enter into an agreement with one or more individuals ..."—let me just get to the relevant section—"relating to road user safety." Nowhere in the act does it define what "road user safety" means. The minister is saying that right now we're only talking about the licensing provisions. But there is absolutely no guarantee that, for example, truck inspections, spot checks of weigh stations, may not be included at some time in the future under some regulations. It doesn't say anything about whether highway inspections and the monitoring and inspection of new highway construction can be included under road user safety. The minister is in the House right now and I hope he will pay attention to some of the comments that I and other members are making.

There is absolutely no guarantee that at some point in time in the future, road user safety cannot include traffic offences, speeding along the highways and other traffic offences. Are we talking somewhere down the line about someone other than the Ontario Provincial Police and the other police authorities in the province checking our highways to make sure that people aren't speeding, to make sure that people are adhering to the Highway Traffic Act sections and provisions? According to my interpretation, this hasn't been rejected by any of the government members. Road user safety—certainly speeding is a road user safety issue; adhering to other highway traffic provisions are road user safety issues. Is the government saying that at some point in the future, by regulation under this act, it could turn over some of the usual highway patrol functions and other police functions on the highways to outsourcing, to privatization?

I know the minister is very cute when he says, "Right now I'm only talking about driver testing." But all of these other provisions can very well happen at some point in time in the future. I have some concerns about that. Unless there is something specifically contained in this act that will prevent any police functions from in effect being taken over by private outsourcing, I will have great difficulty in supporting this or indeed in supporting any kind of privatization effort along these lines.

Let's go on to the next section. What will these delegation agreements allow the private sector to do once an agreement has been entered into with the ministry? I'll just read to you from clause 3(c). It will permit the delegate—in other words, the private contractor—to establish the fees to be charged to the public.

I don't know what that means. Does that mean that, in effect, at some point in time in the future, we can have different rates for the same kind of service across the province of Ontario for driver testing? Will there be different fees charged for the same service in different parts of Ontario? If it doesn't mean that, why is this section even here?

The next section goes on to say that the delegation agreement can, and I again quote directly from the act—grant “the delegate access to and use of specified ministry resources, including information databases.” That basically means to me that a lot of these private sector contract holders will have access to information that presumably, until now, can only be accessed by the government or by other levels of government. I think it’s a very dangerous precedent to set, to allow, in effect, access to government information to the private sector.

I know that the minister will say, “We will completely control what kind of information these private sector delegation agreement holders can have.” But let me just go on and tell you what this section goes on to say.

It says that those individuals who have those delegated powers can have that information “solely for the purpose of exercising or performing the delegated powers, duties or responsibilities.”

I can’t, for the life of me, understand how you can limit somebody, a private sector individual, who has got this information and limit it to the fact that he can only use it for the specific purposes that he has the licence for, which is basically the licensing power that we’re talking about here. Once that private sector individual has that information, there is absolutely no way that there can be any assurances given to the members of the public that that information will only be used for the purposes of administering the licensing requirements and driver testing requirements of individuals in the province of Ontario. Once that information goes to the private sector, there’s absolutely no control that the government or the ministry will have over what happens ultimately to that information. Whereas it’s very pious to say, “It can only be used for driver testing purposes,” there’s absolutely no guarantee that anyone can give in this House whereby the information cannot be used by that private company for other purposes.

Those three areas alone give me great discomfort. Besides the notion that I think that unless it absolutely can be proven that the people of Ontario benefit from privatization in a whole bunch of different ways, I believe that privatization of these kinds of services simply should not happen. We all know that basically what we have government for is to ensure that there are standards in place and to ensure that public safety, whether we’re talking about the water that we drink—and we know what has happened to that situation, and the kind of discomfort that a lot of people feel as a result of what happened in Walkerton just recently and the inquiry that’s currently going on.

The people of Ontario are concerned that their government is no longer interested in the public safety that we all demand from the government in the services that it provides.

Some might say that taking a privatization bill for licensing and somehow equating it to what has been happening in Walkerton may be a stretch, but I say it is all part of the same government program, and that is to get out of as many good public policy areas where the

government has been traditionally involved over the years, and as a result have absolutely no accountability to the general public at a higher cost—that’s the conclusion the Provincial Auditor has so far come to—and with much less accountability and much less assurance for the safety of the general public out there.

1750

The other thing I find interesting is that this talks about higher fees as well. Before I turn to that, let me just turn to another section. Obviously, even the government is a little bit concerned about this and the minister is a little concerned about the use of this. It’s very interesting: there’s a section 4 in this act in which it states, “The minister may amend a delegation agreement without the agreement of the delegate, including by adding limitations, conditions and requirements applicable to the delegation” at any time. That tells me that the government is concerned that in an emergency situation it needs to take all the control and power back, and at that point in time it can basically rewrite the whole contract it has with a private firm.

Why would you need a clause like that in an agreement in which basically you are allowed to act unilaterally if you feel so assured in the processes that are set up that the public is fully protected? You wouldn’t have to put an out clause in there, clawing all the powers back, if the process you’ve set up in the act in the first place is foolproof so that the information these private entrepreneurs get isn’t going to be abused.

I say to this government, I know you are bound on privatizing many of the government services, and we heard it again today in the area of corrections. In our provincial jails there’s going to be massive privatization. I think the people of Ontario are saying, “Enough is enough.” They don’t want any more of this kind of privatization, especially since in the only areas where privatization has taken place so far an independent voice, namely the Provincial Auditor, clearly showed in his report of last year that in fact it is costing taxpayers, the people of Ontario, more money with a lot less accountability, as a matter of fact with no accountability in some cases.

There are many concerns about this bill. Yes, we want public hearings, but we want something even better than that, and that is for the government to withdraw this bill and to fix the system the way it exists right now. In my own community, 25 people who currently work at the Ministry of Transportation area office in Kingston, who are involved in the licensing area, will in effect be unemployed. Yes, some of them may be re-employed with the new private sector firm at a much lower salary, because that basically is the whole name of the game when you get to privatization in this area. It’s to drive the wages down so that a private entrepreneur can pocket some profit.

Let me make it crystal clear: I have nothing against the profit motive. It’s a good, fundamental way in which our society has operated for the last 200 years. “Profit” is not a dirty word as far as I’m concerned. But when the profit

is made on the backs of the people of Ontario, and when we are losing the aspect of accountability, and when we are paying more as taxpayers, then I say there's something totally and drastically wrong with that.

I look forward to the comments of the minister. I would like to have him state categorically in this House that not only is it not his intent, but that it is not possible in this bill, for example, to have the policing of our highways turned over to a private concern. Certainly my reading of this act, that it deals with road user safety, is broad enough to deal not only with the licensing provisions, not only with the inspection provisions, but also potentially with the policing of our highways to make sure that those roads are being used safely. That could include everything from following the rules of the road as set out in the Highway Traffic Act to speeding and many other activities as well.

The point that I will leave this debate on deals with the smaller rural and northern Ontario communities. There's no question that in the privatization game everybody loves to corner those markets where there's an awful lot of money to be made, particularly in large urban areas. It reminds me a little bit about when this whole gambit started a number of years ago about the potential privatization of our liquor stores. Everybody wanted to get the big liquor store for the big dollars to be made. Well, it's the same thing with respect to this area. What will it do to our smaller communities? What will it do to our northern Ontario communities? Who is going to want to take over a private contract where you may only have a few customers per week or per day? We know, you

know and I know, that basically the smaller communities rely on good government services not because it was a profitable operation in particular municipalities, no, but because governments in the past had thought and were of the belief that those services were an absolute necessity to those communities, and that's why they were there. When you privatize a service like this, that notion is gone, and that means that those individuals will have to travel long distances to the large urban areas where obviously it may very well be profitable for the private entrepreneurs.

The other thing, of course, that it will lead to is higher fees, and we've already seen that with the privatization of Highway 407. The fees that are being charged are much higher now than the fees that were contemplated when the agreements were first signed. As a matter of fact, the fees went up by something by like 25% to 30% just in the last rate hike. There's absolutely nothing in this bill that will prevent that from happening. As I've already indicated, the private entrepreneur in this particular case would appear to have the ability to, in effect, set their own fees, and that is scary. Again, I read from section 3(c). It says it permits "the delegate to establish fees to be charged to the public." Why is this necessary? Why have you even got this in here if you didn't mean it?

I say to the government, withdraw this bill. The people of Ontario will not benefit from it.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1758.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Dalton (L) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	Thornhill	Molinari, Tina R. (PC)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Guzzo, Garry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	McLeod, Lyn (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Boyer, Claudette (L)	Thunder Bay- Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Hon / L'hon Ernie (PC) Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, David (L)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Gerard (L)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Eves, Hon / L'hon Ernie L. (PC) Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance / vice-premier ministre, ministre des Finances	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, George (L)
Perth-Middlesex	Johnson, Bert (PC)	Toronto-Danforth	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Peterborough	Stewart, R. Gary (PC)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Ecker, Hon / L'hon Janet (PC) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Palladini, Hon / L'hon Al (PC) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC)
Renfrew-Nipissing- Pembroke	Conway, Sean G. (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Willowdale	Young, David (PC)
Sault Ste Marie	Martin, Tony (ND)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Sandra (L)
		Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Dwight (L)
		York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Monte (L)
		York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
		York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
		York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Estimates / Budgets des dépenses

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Alvin Curling
Gilles Bisson, Alvin Curling, Gerard Kennedy,
Frank Mazzilli, John R. O'Toole, Steve Peters,
R. Gary Stewart, Wayne Wettlaufer
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

**Finance and economic affairs /
Finances et affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Marcel Beaubien
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Doug Galt
Ted Arnott, Marcel Beaubien, David Christopherson,
Doug Galt, Monte Kwinter, Tina R. Molinari,
Gerry Phillips, David Young
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

General government / Affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Steve Gilchrist
Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente: Julia Munro
Toby Barrett, Marie Bountrogianni, Ted Chudleigh,
Garfield Dunlop, Steve Gilchrist, Dave Levac,
Rosario Marchese, Julia Munro
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

Government agencies / Organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: James J. Bradley
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Bruce Crozier
James J. Bradley, Bruce Crozier, Leona Dombrowsky,
Bert Johnson, Morley Kells, Tony Martin,
Joseph Spina, Bob Wood
Clerk / Greffière: Donna Bryce

Justice and Social Policy / Justice et affaires sociales

Chair / Présidente: Marilyn Mushinski
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Carl DeFaria
Marcel Beaubien, Michael Bryant, Carl DeFaria,
Brenda Elliott, Garry J. Guzzo, Peter Kormos,
Lyn McLeod, Marilyn Mushinski
Clerk / Greffier: Tom Prins

Legislative Assembly / Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: R. Gary Stewart
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Brad Clark
Marilyn Churley, Brad Clark, Caroline Di Cocco,
Jean-Marc Lalonde, Jerry J. Ouellette, R. Gary Stewart, Joseph N.
Tasca, Wayne Wettlaufer
Clerk / Greffière: Donna Bryce

Public accounts / Comptes publics

Chair / Président: John Gerretsen
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: John C. Cleary
John C. Cleary, John Gerretsen, John Hastings,
Shelley Martel, Bart Maves, Julia Munro,
Marilyn Mushinski, Richard Patten
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi privés**

Chair / Présidente: Frances Lankin
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Garfield Dunlop
Gilles Bisson, Claudette Boyer, Brian Coburn,
Garfield Dunlop, Raminder Gill, Pat Hoy,
Frances Lankin, Bill Murdoch
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

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