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Jeudi 3 mai 2001

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 3 May 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 3 mai 2001

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

HORSE RIDING SAFETY ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CAVALIERS

Mrs Molinari moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 12, An Act to increase the safety of equestrian riders / Projet de loi 12, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des cavaliers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to standing order 96, the member for Thornhill has 10 minutes to make her presentation.

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): I would ask for unanimous consent to display props on my desk.

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? No, there is not.

Mrs Molinari: I would like to ask the honourable members to picture in their minds a young girl, a beautiful, active, precocious 10-year-old. It is early April. Her 10th birthday was only the week before. The little girl is all excited because the next morning she is going to go horseback riding at a trail ranch. She leaves a note on her dresser to remind herself that she needs to wear old clothes. She is going riding and she wants to be prepared.

By the time the note is found she is already dead. She fell from her horse and her foot got stuck in the stirrup. As the horse continued to move, she struck her head on a rock, which killed her.

Now imagine the girl's parents. They sent a very excited little girl off with her friends that day in April. Never did they think that a day of horseback riding might end so tragically. Imagine those grief-stricken parents discovering that their daughter's death was not the first of its kind. Imagine them finding coroners' reports on the deaths of three young people dating back as far as 1977, all of which stated that provincial legislation should be introduced to ensure safety equipment is worn by those riding horses. Imagine the parents realizing that the tragic accident could have been avoided if their daughter had been made to wear a helmet and boots, and if her horse had been given tack fitted with detachable or hooded stirrups.

Unfortunately, this scenario really happened. The little girl's name was Elizabeth Hader and, but for a helmet

and boots, she might be alive today. It is in Elizabeth's memory that I present this bill: in her memory and in the memory of countless other young people who have been critically injured or killed in horseback riding accidents in Ontario.

Elizabeth's parents, Paul and Laurie Hader of Aurora, are here today, as is Phyllis Morris, the former Aurora town councillor who drafted the original horseback riding safety bylaw which inspired this bill. I would like to welcome them to the debate.

As I ask you to support Bill 12, I pose these questions: Would you let your child play hockey without proper equipment? Would you let your child ride a bicycle on a busy street without a helmet? Would you let your child do anything dangerous without first being protected? Why should horseback riding be any different?

Horseback riding is a risk sport. It is a fun leisure activity involving beautiful, spirited animals but it is a risk sport. As a risk sport, certain minimum safety standards must be put in place. As more and more Ontarians try horseback riding, the need for such safety standards becomes increasingly clear. Too many Ontarians, many of them children, have died or have been injured in riding accidents. Their injuries might well have been prevented if they had been provided with a certified riding helmet and proper footwear. Equestrian accidents occur not only through carelessness or lack of experience, but can happen to the most experienced riders. Horseback riding is an inherently risky sport. The dangers can never be completely eliminated, but proper safety precautions can drastically reduce the chances of serious and possibly fatal injury.

The purpose of Bill 12 is to increase the safety of horseback riders under the age of 18 by requiring the operators of riding establishments to ensure that proper safety equipment is used. Riding establishments would be required to provide proper helmet and footwear to riders if they do not have their own. The legislation allows for a reasonable rental fee to be charged. If a young person does not wear a helmet, they will not ride. The bill also amends the Highway Traffic Act to increase the safety of riders who use Ontario's roadways.

Why does Ontario need to regulate the horse riding industry? Currently, without standard laws that insist on the wearing of helmets and boots or the provision of hooded breakaway stirrups for those under 18, it is left entirely up to the individual commercial operators to determine what level of safety to offer the riders. In the case of the vast majority of riding establishment operators, this is not a concern. For those few operators who

put profit above protection, this legislation will ensure that the safety of the rider is always first.

The industry itself has asked for safety standards. The support of the Ontario Equestrian Federation and the Association of Riding Establishments of Ontario is behind this bill. They themselves have been pushing for riding establishments to adopt minimum safety standards. Currently, however, the industry admits it is too fragmented to regulate itself and there is no legislation in Ontario which presently deals with this issue.

I'd like to quote the Ontario Equestrian Federation and the Association of Riding Establishments. The OEF is an umbrella organization representing all equestrian sport, with the exception of the racing industry in Ontario. The ARE promotes safety, animal welfare and education, and provides support to equine stable operators in Ontario. This is what they have to say: "Ms Molinari's proposal that appropriate footwear and a riding helmet be worn by those under the age of 18 years while riding a horse is commendable. Any and all efforts to ensure the safety of Ontario youth is a goal of the equine community; the support of the Legislative Assembly will help to ensure that the experience of riding a horse is a positive one for all."

When Phyllis Morris introduced her bylaw on equestrian safety in the town of Aurora, letters of support came pouring in. Each letter said the same thing, that people were shocked at the senseless deaths of young riders, that definitive action was obviously called for and that there was no reason not to wear helmets and boots when riding. Such simple pieces of equipment could save lives.

One letter read: "I was appalled to learn that children under the age of 18 are not required to wear a helmet when horseback riding. In addition, ranches are not responsible to provide safety stirrups when horseback riding. These two issues have serious repercussions for our children. I ask that you establish regulations to protect our children. Unless regulations are implemented, serious injury or death is inevitable. Please do something to change the regulations and protect life's greatest asset—our children."

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Another letter said: "A friend of mine named Elizabeth Hader died because she did not have a helmet on or the right stirrups on the horse. Please don't let another friend of mine die."

A third letter read: "I have two children of my own. It is so hard for me to imagine going through what the parents of Elizabeth went through. God bless them. Please let's prevent this from ever happening again."

The issue of equestrian safety has been one that has haunted Ontario for decades. In 1977, 22-year-old Wayne Delaney was thrown from his horse and killed while riding at a ranch in west Toronto. One of the many recommendations of the coroner's jury was that "it be mandatory that operators of riding establishments do not permit horses to be ridden by persons not wearing footwear which does not have heels of sufficient design as to

prevent the slippage of a person's foot through a stirrup" and that "the operators of riding establishments maintain a supply of riding helmets so that these will be available to all riders on request."

A mere two years later, 13-year-old Wade Sciscenti fell off a horse and died of massive brain damage. The coroner's jury wrote: "We the jury feel that since helmets are required for motorcycling and skidooing it should be equally requested for horseback riding and therefore recommend that safety standards be set to have equestrian helmets approved by CSA standards, and that the wearing of approved equestrian helmets be made compulsory for all riding schools, stables, and horseback riding."

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I will indicate from the beginning that I intend to support this piece of legislation. I extend to the members of the family today my personal sympathy and, I know, the sympathy of all members of the Legislature. It is always extremely tragic when it is a youngster who passes away, that as a result of an accident, a youngster's life is lost. It is devastating for the family. Whenever we can take action that would protect young people who are vulnerable, in terms of providing greater safety for these youngsters, it is our role and responsibility to do so.

I know there is a philosophy out there among some people that government should be backing off, that government should have as little role as possible in the personal lives of individuals. There are people who will oppose the intervention of government even in bringing about safety for the citizens it represents. I recall that when seat belt legislation was first introduced, there were a number of people who resisted it and said it was not wise. Happily, many of those people changed their minds. But it is interesting that young people themselves often have a more cautious view than adults and are more careful in terms of taking actions to protect themselves.

An example would be this: I can recall getting into a van to get a ride from someone. I was only going to go a block, and of course we should put our seat belts on. Someone else was driving in this case and there were two children in the van, both of whom insisted that the van would not move until such time as I put my seat belt on. I wear my seat belt 99.99% of the time in my own vehicle. But it was refreshing and encouraging to see that here were children who were insisting that an adult in the car take the precaution—usually it is the opposite way—even for one block. Of course, those children were right. They had been taught that both by their parents and in the school system.

Here is a situation where young people are involved in riding horses, equestrian riders. These youngsters are excited by the opportunity to ride a horse, to be involved with horses. However, there is danger. As the member has mentioned in her initial remarks, horses aren't always rational. They are very large animals and an accident can happen. There is no guarantee that we can completely remove the chance of that accident happening. Never-

theless, it is important that we take any action we can to protect the health and safety of the children. In this case it relates to people under 18 years old. Just to show a comparable example, I was talking to an individual who said that today he no longer allows his children to ski without having a helmet on. This individual talked about that from the point of view that it's very important; there have been accidents in skiing, so helmets were essential.

Children then insist that adults take the same action. We're seeing this with bicycles. Dianne Cunningham, who is the Minister of Colleges and Universities in this province, brought forth legislation dealing with helmets for people who are riding bicycles. If you had said, when I was a youngster just a few years ago, that I should be wearing a helmet while riding a bicycle, most people in those days would have laughed at it. You would have been called names; it would have been said that you weren't a tough person because you weren't prepared to ride a bicycle without a helmet. Well, look around today: children are wearing helmets. Look around today: adults are wearing helmets.

We went through this process with motorcycles, where there were people who strongly resisted helmets, and today there are people in our society who, as a result of accidents where they weren't wearing a helmet, have been incapacitated in many ways. So there's a general consensus now in our society that we take these steps. What is unfortunate for all of us is that very often what prompts the action, in terms of legislative or regulatory action, is a tragic accident. The only satisfaction that parents of members of a family or friends would have is that as a result of a tragedy that has happened to them personally, others may be spared that same experience.

So I certainly will be supporting this bill. There's an indication that riders under the age of 18 will be required—there's a requirement on the operators of riding establishments to ensure that riders use proper safety equipment, included properly fitted tack. The operators at establishments are also required to have proper safety equipment available for hire at reasonable rates.

It goes on to say that the bill also amends the Highway Traffic Act, that it is an offence for any rider under the age of 18 years to be mounted on a horse on a highway without the proper safety equipment. Parents and guardians of riders under the age of 16 years are also guilty of an offence if they authorize or knowingly permit riders to contravene that restriction. It may not happen initially, but I think we'll find that people will become accustomed to the rules and regulations contained within this legislation and there wouldn't even be an argument within a few years about whether or not this was sensible.

I happen to be a person who believes that government does have a role in intervening, particularly when it's the safety of children involved. That is why I think you saw very strong support in the Legislative Assembly for Mrs Cunningham's bill that I mentioned, who herself had had an experience within her family that brought it even closer to her in terms of the need for legislation.

I hope the Red Tape Commission does not review this and decide that it's not necessary. One of my concerns

about the Red Tape Commission, headed by my former adjacent colleague Frank Sheehan and I think Mr Bob Wood, the member for London West, is that they are to look at all potential regulations and legislation, all that exists at the present time. I would hope that in their obsession with wanting to get the government out of everybody's lives, they would recognize the importance of this legislation and legislation of its kind, which is designed, first of all, to protect children in our society.

1020

I look in the public galleries today; there are children from various schools. They will not have an opportunity to live out their lives and enjoy all that life has to offer them if indeed they are the victims of an unfortunate accident, if we as adults, as members of the Legislature, did not take the appropriate action to try to prevent this from happening.

I should mention this; it is perhaps just a little bit off the topic. If you are talking about helmets, it would be nice if there were helmets that would also protect our children from the bad air that we're experiencing today in the province of Ontario. I only put that out there because I know the member, as all members would be, would be concerned about all things which impact children.

I can tell you that, as I see these children here, some are involved in horseback riding, some are riding bicycles, some are skiing and some are playing sports of other kinds that may be contact sports. We want to ensure that all of these children have the proper equipment.

I go back even to adults, Mr Speaker. You are a hockey fan. You've had some good teams from down your way in Stratford, Ingersoll, Monkton and a number of places such as those. You will recall that it was normal for youngsters and others to play hockey without helmets and without a face mask of any kind.

If you had said to junior hockey players a generation ago, "You're going to have to wear not only a helmet, but you're going to have to wear a mask of some kind to protect your face and perhaps a guard for your throat and so on," there would have been a major negative reaction. Today it is accepted that those pieces of equipment, although they're sometimes controversial, are necessary.

That's why I think this is a step forward. This is not a step backward. This is not an unnecessary intervention; this is what I consider to be a necessary intervention.

I was concerned, as some members of this Legislature would be, that the responsibility of what I used to call the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations—I think it's now called Consumer and Business Services—for safety was taken away from them in such places as midways and circuses, where children are involved, or elevators, which are important. I think that is a role for government and I hope that there's a supervision of this piece of legislation by the ministries of government and not by some privatized organization in the province, because I think that would be a step backward.

I will be supporting this bill. I would be surprised if there isn't a good deal of support among members of this Legislature for a piece of legislation which is designed to

prevent tragedies, if possible—we can never remove the risk—and is designed to significantly reduce the risk of permanent injury or death, or even minor injury to those who are involved in horseback riding and are under the age of adulthood, which we define as 18.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm certainly pleased to rise today in support of the private member's bill put forth by my colleague.

The bill has a twofold purpose. It's entitled the Horse Riding Safety Act, 2001. "The purpose of the bill is to increase the safety of horse riders under the age of 18 years by requiring the operators of riding establishments to ensure that riders use proper safety equipment, including properly fitted tack. The operators of the establishments are also required to have the proper safety equipment available for hire at reasonable rates."

The second part of the bill also amends the Highway Traffic Act. It is an offence for any rider under the age of 18 years to ride or be mounted on a horse on a highway without the proper safety equipment. Parents and guardians of riders under the age of 16 years are also guilty of an offence if they authorize or knowingly permit riders to contravene that restriction."

The purpose of the bill in terms of both aspects is to deal with the safety component for young riders. Being the father of a young rider myself, my second-oldest daughter, Lauren, takes riding lessons. I can say for the establishment where she rides, which is out in the member from Simcoe North's riding, in Oro-Medonte, they required the riders to purchase their own riding helmets and the equipment they needed. It's very important for a young rider of her age—she's eight now—to be wearing a properly fitted helmet and properly fitted tack, because the horses are obviously a fair size and for a young person to drop to the ground may result in some serious injury to that person.

This is not a minor issue in terms of rider safety, and the focus is dealing with the riding establishments in Ontario.

When you look at the facts about the horse industry in this province—and I want to share a couple of statistics. In a study undertaken in 1998, the total herd in Ontario at that time was approximately 290,000. Twenty per cent of Ontario horses are used for tourism activities. There's no central registration for riding establishments. The Ontario Equestrian Federation estimates there is a minimum of 1,500 riding establishments and possibly as many as 5,000. It's estimated that one million people participate in riding activities in Ontario on a regular or semi-regular basis.

What this legislation is dealing with specifically is safety standards for riders. Many riding establishments already provide helmet and boots to riders, but the legislation is necessary to ensure proper safety equipment is worn every time on every ride.

Other jurisdictions are also addressing this issue. In southern Ontario alone, 11 municipalities have adopted licensing bylaws in the last year to address this issue. In the United States, the state of New York passed a law in

early 2000 making it mandatory for people under 14 to wear helmets when riding horses. The city of Plantation in Florida has adopted a bylaw on the issue, and in the countries of France, Australia and New Zealand there's also been concern about rider safety.

What we're dealing with here is a bill that is designed to deal with riding establishments. Obviously it's directed at our young people in terms of making sure there are proper safety standards, proper safety equipment being available for those riders, and also dealing with the Highway Traffic Act to ensure that if you are going to ride a horse and you're in that age group, you are properly fitted with the safety equipment.

I'm pleased to speak on this bill, and I will be supporting it.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Let me stand in my place and offer the member from Thornhill congratulations on bringing forward very progressive legislation which protects children.

At the same time, let me offer to Paul and Laurie Hader my deepest sympathies. This is the two-year anniversary of your 10-year-old child Elizabeth's death. Being a father, I just can't imagine how painful that must be. I don't think we can imagine it unless we live it. So know that our thoughts and our prayers are with you, not only now but in the future. I'm sure this will provide some closure, what I would hope to be unanimous support would provide some closure to you because of your tragedy certainly, and it is a tragedy.

Let me tell you that this is not intrusive legislation. We in this House have a mandate to ensure that we do everything possible to protect the youth of this province. The member from Thornhill talks about protecting them during recreational activities. I say that's a very good opportunity to show leadership in this province when it comes to protecting kids.

1030

Mr and Mrs Hader will know that I have introduced legislation in the past with regard to protecting children involved in prostitution. The bills are Bills 22, 23 and 24. I think they're equally important as well, and I would hope the government acts quickly on this legislation. We know the government introduced my legislation before we prorogued the House and promised to introduce similar legislation in the new House but hasn't done so. Because you have experienced the tragedy of losing a child, you know how other parents who are losing children in many different ways would benefit from this legislation.

This is good legislation because it sets a standard for owners of businesses to operate within. It sets a standard whereby children who want to involve themselves in very wholesome, healthy, meaningful activities will be protected. Does it mean there will never be another fatality? No, it doesn't mean that. The world knows that. But it lessens the likelihood of tragedies occurring in the future, and I see that as very good legislation.

The Minister of Labour and I were talking earlier. We both have children who ski. There are so many other

things we can be doing to protect children in a recreational setting, in a sporting setting, in a cultural setting. This stuff is going to cost money to do, but I say it's money well invested. I say it's a meaningful investment in the future of Ontario, in what I believe to be its greatest resource: our children, who will be our leaders some day.

I would hope this legislation receives unanimous support when it is voted on today. There is need for committee work, as I think the member knows and as this House knows. I know that the shortcomings of the legislation will be dealt with at committee, but know that I will be supporting it.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It is a pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 12, An Act to increase the safety of equestrian riders. I'd like to welcome the Hader family here as well this morning. I'd like to congratulate my colleague, Mrs Molinari, the member for Thornhill, for bringing forth this legislation, which I believe will protect the safety of youth in our province.

This bill is the end result of a number of untimely deaths of young Ontarians as a result of horseback riding accidents. A number of coroners' juries have made recommendations that support the need for this legislation. An example of this would be an excerpt I'll read from the verdict of the coroner's jury serving on the inquest into the death of Wade Sciscenti on January 18, 1980:

"We, the jury, feel that since helmets are required for motorcycling and skidooing, it should equally be requested for horseback riding and therefore recommends:

"1. that safety standards be set to have equestrian helmets approved by CSA standards

"2. that the wearing of CSA approved equestrian helmets be compulsory for all riding schools, riding stables and horseback riding."

I'll also read an excerpt from the Ontario Equestrian Federation news release, a major stakeholder that supports Bill 12:

"The private member's bill known as the Horse Riding Safety Act, 2000, introduced by Tina Molinari (MPP Thornhill) in the Legislature today is endorsed by the Ontario Equestrian Federation (OEF) and its member organization, the Association of Riding Establishments of Ontario (ARE). Following the repeal of the Riding Horse Establishment Act in 1996, members of ARE have been working on safety standards for both equine and rider welfare. In response to the tragic death of a young York region resident in April 1999 and, again this past summer, of a Durham region rider, the ARE with support from the OEF intensified its efforts to formulate minimum safety standards for the equestrian industry. Ms Molinari's proposal that appropriate footwear and a riding helmet be worn by those under the age of 18 years while riding a horse is commendable. Any and all efforts to ensure the safety of Ontario youth is a goal of the equine community; the support of the Legislative Assembly will help to assure that the experience of riding a horse is a positive one for all."

A section of this act that I believe is extremely important is section 4, which amends the Highway Traffic Act by making it an offence for any rider under the age of 18 to be mounted on a horse on a highway without proper safety equipment. Before this bill is finally passed, I hope that will include township roads and county roads as well.

This is a very important issue in rural Ontario, where thousands of our residents own horses and often ride on the local roads. Often drivers of motorized vehicles passing horseback riders do not respect the fact that the riders may be inexperienced and the horse sensitive to vehicles. Quite often they do not slow down and there is a lot of noise from vehicles. I've seen a number of cases myself when driving the roads where the horse has reared and an accident has almost occurred. It is not uncommon for a horse to be disturbed, and a rider can be thrown off, causing serious injury. The headgear in particular could avoid these serious injuries.

Many communities, such as Aurora, north Pickering and Whitchurch-Stouffville, have passed bylaws requiring horse riding establishments to provide safety measures for persons ridings. As well, other jurisdictions, such as Australia, have similar requirements for their young horse riders.

Currently there are Association of Riding Establishments of Ontario requirements for riding establishments to provide safety equipment. But unfortunately, not all places are part of this group and obey the requirements of this organization. That is why I feel this bill is so important.

Safety has been an important priority with this government. That is why I support this bill today, and I thank you for the opportunity to speak to it.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I was delaying my comments on this bill. I was waiting for something from the legislative library to come in, and unfortunately it's not here. So I will do the best I can.

I first of all want to say that we will be supporting this bill. We think it's an important step in the role we have as legislators in trying to find a way to secure and make sure that all activities that children and others are involved in are safe.

You will know, Mr Speaker—not that you were here in the Legislature at the time—that one of your colleagues who was in the Legislature between 1990 and 1995, Dianne Cunningham, presented a similar bill in the Legislature at the time, having to do with bicycle safety. If you remember, the bill basically said that all children under the age of 18 should have the obligation of wearing a bicycle helmet when riding their bicycles on the streets of Ontario. At the time she presented that private member's bill, we were the government—it was the NDP government—and we worked along with Mrs Cunningham to make sure that bill did get support not only here in private members' hour—which I have no doubt Mrs Molinari's bill will get here this morning—but we put the weight of the government behind the bill to make sure it went through the committee process and, at the end, the

bill would become law, and so it did. We as New Democrats believed then that it was important that we find ways to make activities that children and other Ontarians are involved in safe activities to engage in.

After the bill passed, it was proclaimed into law, and it wasn't until 1995, upon the Tories coming to government, that there was actual weakening of the bill Mrs Cunningham had put forward. If you remember the bill as I remember it—this is what I was waiting for from the legislative library, and so I may stand somewhat corrected—the bill had called for anybody under the age of 18 who was engaged in the activity of riding a bike to wear a bicycle helmet on all roads across Ontario. There were some people in the Conservative caucus at the time who were not comfortable with the bill. From the perspective they were coming from, they thought the bill went a little too far and was a little too strong. In the view of our government, the NDP government at the time, it was a pretty good idea.

When the Tories got to power in 1995, they weakened the bill. I think what they did was lower the age at which a child had to wear a helmet, and I think there were also limitations on where the helmets would be needed. In other words, would they be needed on country roads versus city streets? I think that's rather unfortunate.

I'm hoping that when this bill passes, we're able to refer the bill to committee and hopefully try to find a way to bring back those aspects of Mrs Cunningham's bill that were watered down by the Conservative government, because I believe that what Mrs Cunningham did was a step in the right direction. Certainly she understands this issue very well as a mother of a child who is brain-injured because of an accident and understands first-hand what happens; in this particular case, what happened to her son.

1040

I know in my own constituency of Timmins-James Bay and my former constituency of Cochrane South, prior to the amalgamation of the ridings, there were a number of young people who were involved in bicycle accidents who did get brain-injured and had to deal with the ramifications of that. Unfortunately, a number of them were killed as well. Would the helmets have saved their lives? Would the helmets have prevented brain injury? I think in some cases the answer is a definite yes. So anything we can do here to find a way to not only allow this bill to pass this morning but to go into committee in order not only to strengthen the provisions of this bill, but to take a look at how we're able to deal with Mrs Cunningham's bill—I always felt it was rather unfortunate that the Conservative government had weakened those aspects of the bill that were put forward by Mrs Cunningham that I think were well in keeping with what a Legislative Assembly should be doing when it comes to bills.

The other thing I want to say is that I think we should make sure to put on the record and make clear for those who are participating in the debate this morning, either here in the Legislature, in the galleries or back home, that

I have no doubt this bill will pass this morning. If anybody votes against it, I would be highly, highly surprised. The unfortunate part is that when private members' bills are introduced here, far too often it is the government that refuses, in almost 99% of cases, to allow the bills to go past second reading. At times a bill may even end up at a committee level, but there's maybe one bill per term of government that's put forward at private members' hour that basically goes all the way through, becoming an actual law in the province of Ontario.

I think that's unfortunate, and I want to raise it in the context of this debate, because I think there is something about private members' hour. We, as a Legislature, if we truly believe in democratic principles, should be looking at how we reform our Legislature to allow members like Mrs Molinari and others to bring forward bills that are important to them as individuals, important to their communities, their constituencies, and to the province overall. It's a good, non-partisan way of being able to introduce legislation that is well-meaning and legislation that could make a meaningful difference to the people of Ontario. So I raise in the context of this debate the need that we move forward on a parliamentary reform package that allows us to be able to deal with how we find ways to make this Legislature work in the new millennium.

You know, Mr Speaker, as a member of this assembly and somebody who understands the rules of this assembly well as the deputy Deputy Speaker, this system of ours was built some 300 years ago by the British at the mother of all Parliaments in England and really has not changed so much as far as how the rules work over those 300 years. I think 300 years ago it made some sense to have a Legislature elected the way that we do today, but in a modern democracy in the new millennium, the year 2000, I think it's rather weird and I think somewhat obnoxious a democracy that we have a system of government that says you can elect a majority government in this House with 42% of the popular vote, because that's what happened in the last provincial election: Mike Harris got 42% of the popular vote and has more than 60% of the seats in the House, and therefore Mike Harris can do what he wants by virtue of that majority.

I will also argue that the Bob Rae government had 38% of the vote. We had 38% of the overall vote in the province of Ontario and we had 65% of the seats in the House. I think that's wrong. It doesn't matter who the government is, what the party is; I believe that democracy should reflect and this Legislature should reflect what happens in a general election. That to me would be true democracy.

I raise it in the context of this debate because I think it comes back to Mrs Molinari's bill and the problem we have in our current system of government because of that quirk that the government, by majority in the House, even though they don't have a majority of the electorate in the election, are able to control everything that happens in the House. So members such as—and I wish I knew the member's riding; I don't have the list in front of me. I keep on mentioning you by name.

Mrs Molinari: Thornhill.

Mr Bisson: Thornhill; I'm sorry. I was doing that not because I was trying to be ornery or anything; I just didn't know the name of your riding.

The member for Thornhill I think brings forward a bill that is reasoned, a bill that is based on some personal experience, a bill that has been certainly something that she cares deeply about and a bill that all members of this assembly can support. I think that's good and I think that's right and I think we should move forward with that. However, I am fearful in the context of our current political system that we have of "first past the post," because that's what you call the British parliamentary system, that unfortunately, because our system is so antiquated, a very good bill will pass here this morning at second reading, and if it passes at third reading and goes on to become legislation, it will be one of but a few. It will be one out of how many bills we pass in this House by way of private members' hour? I think that's wrong, because the member from Thornhill brings to this Legislature, as other members have done on all sides and in all parties around this House, bills that are reasoned, bills that are thought through, bills that speak to a constituency, bills as in this case that would save lives or prevent injury. But because of our parliamentary system, she has to have the full support of the government to allow that bill to go forward. She has to overcome the barrier of getting full support of the Premier and the cabinet and the government, which they'll demonstrate this morning by way of a vote. But it stalls after that because, if it doesn't fall into the overall context of the political message the government is trying to send, there is very little chance that the bill will become law. I think that's unfortunate.

I say again—I listened to the throne speech earlier, when the government talked about needing to open up the House to a bit more democracy—I would argue they should go to the next step. They should work with me, as the critic responsible in our party for looking at the whole issue of democracy—an opportunity to really look by way of a non-partisan, all-party committee of this Legislature—to take a look at the various forms of electoral reform, such as what we have in Germany, New Zealand and other places, so we can look at how to develop a made-in-Ontario model that says we will have a general election the way we do now, that at the end of the day every citizen will have the right to elect his/her representative the same way we do now, but if the vote for the party is 42%, as it was with Mike Harris, that number of seats in the House will only equal the 42%. That way, for Mike Harris to be able to move forward with his agenda, he would have to work with both opposition parties to either amend and make changes to the legislation so it's acceptable to either Liberals or New Democrats, or not go forward with the legislation at all, something that probably would be right.

I would say in a case like this, it would be a good example of how an individual member would have the ability to influence the overall legislative agenda of a government of this Legislature, because the backbenchers of the Conservative government under such a system

would have to be listened to a little bit more—quite a bit more, I would argue—than they are now, because Mr Harris, to pass his legislation, would have to have the support of Mrs Molinari not only as a backbencher but as a member of this Legislature. There would need to be a certain amount of trading off as far as making sure he gives support to the things that she wants.

I think this is a bill that's well worth supporting. It's something our caucus will definitely support. I hope that this bill will be referred to a standing committee of the Legislature, where we have an opportunity to look at it and find ways of making sure it is strengthened and that it works for children, for the people across this province. But, more important, I'm hoping that at that committee level we're able to bring back certain aspects of the bill that Mrs Dianne Cunningham, a Conservative member, brought to this House I believe in 1992 or 1993, which I think was a step in the right direction by way of trying to protect children on bicycles.

With that, I thank you for this opportunity to participate in the debate and look forward to seeing this bill go to committee. If we're all lucky, it will be one of the very few bills, possibly, that make it all the way to legislation in the House. I'm not hopeful that it will happen, but let's hope it happens.

Mrs Molinari: I'd like to thank the member from St Catharines, the member from Sudbury, the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, the member from Simcoe North and the member from Timmins-James Bay for their participation in the debate this morning. I'm pleased to hear there is so much support in the Legislature for this very important and crucial bill.

I started off my opening comments talking about some of the coroners' comments in some of the deaths. I'd like to mention another death, that of 12-year-old Jamie Shaw. The jury's recommendation at that time was that it be made mandatory that suitable protective headgear and footwear be made available to all riding establishments.

I'm pleased to get support from everyone here today for this bill. Bill 12 does not place unreasonable demands on business owners. What is unreasonable is that the Ontario public be expected to continue to ride in unsafe circumstances. Over two decades have passed since this became an issue with public attention.

1050

I want to quote from a magazine that's called *The Horse: Your Guide to Equine Health Care*. There's an interesting article here which says that while statistics show that horses can be hazardous to your health, there are ways to mitigate the risks. It talks about some of the consequences: "A survey, from Victoria, Australia, noted that for children, riding was the third-highest recreational activity requiring hospital admission." It goes on to say, "Reported head injuries are less frequent but more serious ... yet head injuries cause two thirds of deaths.... As examples of horse-related fatality rates, British Columbia, Canada, reported a rate of one in 10,000 riders."

There are a lot of statistics to show the necessity of a bill like this being passed. Also, in 1999, New York state

passed a law requiring rental horse providers and trainers to supply helmets to beginning riders and those less than 14 years of age.

I want to comment on some of the issues the member from Timmins-James Bay brought out about amendments to the bills and those amendments that were made to Mrs Cunningham's bill. The amendments are made to bills when they go into a committee and you have hearings and consultations. At times, there are important things that need to be considered before the bill is brought back for third reading. That's the process you go through in the consultation. I'm very optimistic that this bill will become law. I will be recommending that it go to a standing committee, and that that committee have the opportunity to have hearings and to listen to those who have an intense interest in the issue and make the bill much better than what it is.

I've done several consultations throughout before drafting this bill and I must say that some of the establishments wanted this bill to be much stronger. It's difficult to put a bill forward and have in it everything that is needed to make it safe. It's important that a bill is passed. I see this as an actual first step toward the safety of all equestrian riders in the province of Ontario.

After further consultation with some equine lawyers, as well as the OEF and the ARE, there are three amendments that I will be proposing to Bill 12 when it reaches committee. The first will be to strike from section 2(1) the words "within the grounds of the establishment," and insert after "any horse provided by the rider" the following: "from the stables of the establishment"; in paragraph 2 of subsection 2(1), the deletion of the words "and smooth"; and the final amendment will be in paragraph 3, with the deletion of the word "suitable." I believe some of these amendments will make the bill better and will reflect some of the concerns that came to my attention after the bill had been drafted.

Bill 12 is clearly a much-needed piece of legislation. It is the opportunity for our elected members here in the House to show the parents of Elizabeth, Wayne, Wade, Jamie and all the other victims of riding accidents that Ontario puts safety first, and the safety of all its citizens. I'm pleased to host the Haders, who are here today. I'm pleased to assure them that I'm very optimistic that this bill will receive third reading, that this bill will become law, that it will go to committee and, I believe, with the support of all of the House here today. Bills that don't reach, as the member mentioned—there are difficulties when you don't have all-party agreement. This bill is a non-political bill. It's a safety bill. It's something that is necessary in the province of Ontario. Having heard all the members and the support here today, I truly believe this bill will become law, so Elizabeth's parents can feel assured that these accidents will never happen again.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Thornhill has two more minutes.

Mr Bisson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just wanted to bring to the attention of the House that our legislative pages unfortunately will be leaving us today.

This is their last day and they, I believe, have the dubious distinction of having had the shortest rotation in the Legislature. You would know that normally pages are here from four to five weeks but, unfortunately, this group is down to three weeks. I'm coming to my point, Mr Speaker—

The Acting Speaker: This is not a point of order. I think this afternoon there will be the proper proclamation of that.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CONSEIL EXÉCUTIF

Mr Smitherman moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Executive Council Act respecting an institution of democracy in the Legislative Assembly / Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif concernant une institution démocratique de l'Assemblée législative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Pursuant to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes to make his presentation.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey): On a point of order, Speaker: I would like to have an opportunity to make a couple of submissions that this bill is out of order in that it contravenes not only the standing orders, but the traditions of this place. As we all know—

Mr Mike Colle (Eglington-Lawrence): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

Mr Tilson: How can you interrupt my point of order?

Mr Colle: You're interrupting his 10 minutes.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey.

Mr Tilson: I do wish to submit that this bill is out of order and should not be debated. The tradition of this place, which has been created by various Speakers since the history of this place began, has been that there shouldn't be accusations by members that other members are absent from this place. In fact, this point was made by Speaker Carr as late as April 23 last, when he said that the issue the member raises has to do with attendance by members of the executive at the daily oral question period.

The House has never imposed an obligation upon members to attend all meetings of the Legislature. Indeed, this assembly is constitutionally competent to carry out its business with a quorum of 12 members. Additionally, the Speaker is not vested with the authority to compel the attendance of any member. As we all know, the many and varied duties of being an elected member of this place often legitimately demand our attendance elsewhere.

Honourable members are assumed by their honourable colleagues to have valid and defensible and justifiable reasons for being absent from the House when it is meeting. This is one of the principal reasons that it is prohibited by our traditions and practices to draw the attention of the House to the absence of another member.

What this bill is submitting is that not all members should be identified as being absent or present, but certain members of this place should be identified as being present or absent. Clearly, what the member is trying to do is to change the rules of this place, to change the tradition of this place, by coming through the back door of private members' hour, which is an hour.

I submit that it is most improper for the member to do that. In fact, if this bill is held as being in order, then there is nothing to prevent government members, in their turn in private members' or any other members, to change the standing orders of this place during private members' hour, and I would submit that that is a most improper forum to do that sort of thing.

So Mr Speaker, I would ask your ruling that this bill be deemed to be out of order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Contrary to my better judgment, I would like to hear the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale on a point of order.

Mr Smitherman: Well, the use of the words "Contrary to my better judgment" leads me to believe that there may be some prejudice. I wonder, Mr Speaker, whether I might offer contradictory evidence to the information submitted by the member from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey. I may have the order wrong but I think I got the counties right.

1100

Earlier this week in the House, in answer to a question that I posed, the Premier in fact drew attention to the absences of a member. Frankly, the government seeks to use what may be considered by some as a tradition of this House to broaden the protection against them being called to account for their absences.

But the bill does not speak specifically to the issue or to the absence of any one particular individual. It seeks simply to suggest that there ought to be an established floor for attendance in this place for members of the cabinet, which would, of course, include the Premier.

Interjection.

Mr Smitherman: Other members, including the member who chooses to heckle me, the Minister of Labour, have, when they stood in opposition, raised the issue of attendance in this place. What we have seen over the last two years in an effort to protect the government from being held accountable is an attempt to broaden the standing orders to the point where the whole issue of accountability can't be raised in this House.

I would say, using the very broad interpretation offered by the previous speaker, that the Premier was in fact out of order, but not so called by Speaker Carr; I think a reflection of the fact that it is appropriate to have a debate with respect to accountability.

When the Premier, in responding to me, said, "I was wondering whether you, with all of your onerous responsibility in the Legislature, right in your own riding, might commit to a little better attendance, it seems to me," was the Speaker proper in allowing the Premier to use a reference to my attendance in the Legislature? Did I stand on a point of personal privilege or seek to use the standing orders when the Premier made an attempt to hold me accountable? I did not, because I view it as fair game to hold members accountable.

This bill, if we read the sections, does not raise an issue of the Premier's or any individual's particular attendance. It does suggest there ought to be a standard of accountability for members of the cabinet—

The Acting Speaker: Order. When there are two of us standing, one of us is out of order and it's not me.

The Chair recognizes the member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): For the record, I just want to put a couple of things with regard to this move by the Conservative government to try to stifle what is, in my view and the view of our caucus, a motion that should be debated in the House.

Section 96(a): "Unless otherwise ordered, each Thursday during the session, the House will meet in the morning for the consideration of private members' public business. On such a day ... there shall be not more than two items of private members' public business." So he's entitled. It's the second item coming forward.

If you go back and read section (h), it talks about no adjournment of the debate. Section 96(h) says: "There shall be no adjournment of the debate on any item of private members' public business."

I would submit what we have here is an attempt on the part of the government to stifle a motion that they're not in agreement with. That's purely what's happening here. I think every member has a right, according to the standing orders, to introduce motions or bills in the House. Some motions or bills may or may not be acceptable to a government party or to opposition parties, but nonetheless, it is the basic tenet of private members' hour to allow members to bring before the House an item they think is important as an individual member, by way of bills or motions, and that needs to be debated.

Agree or not agree—I'm almost finished—

The Acting Speaker: You are finished. I'll take two more. I'll hear from the member for Etobicoke Centre and the member for Sudbury.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I certainly will live by whatever ruling you make and I can understand the difficulty with respect to the ruling, because it is a rather complicated and difficult ruling you'll have to make.

I would like just to go on the record to suggest, Mr Speaker, particularly to you and maybe the members of the opposition, that if we do allow a private member's bill to in fact deal with the standing orders, then there can be no debate in future if the government chooses to change the standing orders by private members' hour—in

essence, bring in a private member's motion that says the standing orders shall change, and if the government House leader chooses to have one day's debate or two days' debate or three days' debate on second reading of any bill, that would be held in order. It can be done with one hour of debate in private members' hour. That can be done without the full-fledged debate of a government bill. I caution the members opposite. If that's the road you choose to go down, be very, very careful.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): The table has informed me that the challenge is in order, the point of order is in order, so I won't debate that, but there is a fundamental principle here that I don't think we should lose account of on either side of the House and that's the issue of accountability.

You're presupposing what the member is going to say. This member may stand up and only speak about accountability, with no reference to anything except accountability. To deny him that right is to deny him a right that I believe he has. I would suggest to you, Speaker, in your ruling understand that this bill as presented is about accountability. As such, if in fact the government is saying that being held accountable is out of order, I would suggest that we are in very dire straits in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: I want to make clear to the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale that when I said that it was against my better judgment, I meant that I do not entertain debate on points of order. I take a point of order from a member and I rule on it. I want to be very clear about that.

I want to address the point of order. In this place, of all places, we depend on our own perception of a democratic right. I realize that the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey has some concerns and has raised them legitimately. I think that in the long run and at the end of the day the democracy of this chamber in particular will be best served if we hear the debate and we make our decision at the end of that time. That is my ruling.

Mr Smitherman: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I'd like to congratulate the member on his attempts to get into cabinet, which have been feeble and have not served him well to this point.

I would say that this debate has been framed outside of this place. People know why there is an issue of accountability and why it is necessary for a private member to be addressing this issue in this fashion today. It is not something that I chose to do lightly. It was because as a former staffer to a former Premier of Ontario who came to question period 80% of the time, I've been struck that there has been unequal participation in that tradition over the course of history here.

I want to read what this act is about. It is very clear, it is very simple, and it is fundamentally about accountability. This is an amendment to the Executive Council Act. It is amended by adding the following section:

"If, at the end of a session of the Legislature, a minister of the crown has failed to attend 60% of the oral question periods held during the session, \$100 shall be

deducted from the minister's salary for each occasion by which his or her attendance fell short of 60%."

That is something that has been construed by members of the—

Interjections.

Mr Smitherman: There is a sickness provision in there. It has been built on the basis of accountability and it takes advantage of what we know to be true. What we know to be true is that there are some things that on an occasional basis, and perhaps up to 40% of the time, might otherwise call for members of the cabinet to be absent from question period. It allows for that. It does not establish a ceiling which is so difficult to reach: 60%, meaning that 40% of the time it might be appropriate to be elsewhere. It deals with provisions if a member of the cabinet was sick. It does not create an onerous test. It is not a bar that is all that difficult to get to.

Interjections.

Mr Smitherman: The Minister of Labour is here today heckling me, but it will be highlighted in the course of this debate that this is the same kind of thing that he has historically called for. He forgets, now that he's on the other side, that he is there as a member of the cabinet and his job, his sole responsibility, is to try and seek out to protect those who would attempt to run from the kind of accountability that this speaks to.

1110

This is based on a personal experience. Two years ago I was a newly elected member. I came to this place and I was struck by the fact that—I had previously worked for a Premier as a legislative assistant. On those days when he wasn't able to make it to question period, every effort having been done to do so, he worked hard to be here. Yet we see that there are different—the Premier makes my case for me. He makes my case for me because he has an instinct for accountability. When push comes to shove, the Premier this week made my case for me when he said, "I was wondering whether you," speaking of me, "with all of your onerous responsibility in the Legislature, right in your own riding, might commit to a little better attendance, it seems to me." The Premier made my case for the basic tenet of accountability that is the heart of this bill, because we understand that we have that responsibility.

Interjections.

Mr Smitherman: Government members will heckle me on this point, Mr Speaker, but my record stands in sharp contrast to the one whom they are here defending today, because I was here for a vast majority of those days.

I want to say that this "great man" defence has been used to explain away absences. We all recognize that different people in this chamber have a different level of responsibility. Those on this side seek to be there and we seek to carry out those responsibilities that the Premier this week referred to as "onerous." We don't view them as such. We view them as important responsibilities, and we seek every single day to be in that position. The people of Ontario will make that judgment, as they had.

We recognize that you are the government, and what comes with that is a set of responsibilities that we don't currently have.

But I wonder if we don't take that defence too far. The Premier, in answering a question earlier this week, said to me, "I also commit to travel the globe, to seek out every job, every investment"—he only had the one-arm pump—"every opportunity, because ours is a growth agenda. I commit to continue to put the time into the job that the job requires." We would all understand that as the Premier of this province he does have a set of responsibilities that we don't have. But I wonder why it is this Premier who, in contrast to past Premiers, who all had the same set of responsibilities, falls so far short of the same mark that they met. I wonder why it is that the Prime Minister of Canada, who, we would argue, has more responsibility to travel the globe, more responsibility to represent Canada, more responsibility to represent a broad country, a country so huge that it's not possible always to be one airline flight away from question period, and yet this same Prime Minister, faced with the onslaught of questions in the House of Commons, has made it to 55% of the sessions in the Legislature. He doesn't stand and use a defence which has feebly been offered by others to make excuses for their absences.

Earlier this morning there was a group from St Joseph's over on Wellesley Street, a group of high school students. These kids have heard a lot about codes of conduct. There are certain expectations placed on them in their student lives to be in attendance on a regular basis in their classrooms so that they can learn. There is a student code of conduct. I note that Jarvis Collegiate has an attendance and absences report for their Grade 9 students that says, "The school does not condone holidays beyond the regular break periods."

The reason that I realized I should push forward with this and that I should spend time working on this issue of accountability is because every working Ontarian, every kid, every person with responsibilities, understands that a 60% threshold for attendance is appropriate. When the contrast is painted for them about the real numbers for certain of our political representatives in Ontario, they're shocked. They're shocked and dismayed that all of the language that is heard from this government, all of the empty, useless, hollow rhetoric from this government on accountability, is destroyed when these numbers are raised which paint such a stark contrast to the reality of the accountability that they talk about. These numbers destroy it and show up those 11 references in the throne speech to accountability, demonstrate the extent to which these are just hollow words by a government which chooses to use the rhetoric but will not do the walk.

That's what this is all about, and that's why I have decided that this is an issue that deserves attention and that I should push forward on it. This is just one more element of the government's attempts over the course of their time here to diminish this place. That's what this is. This is one more element of a deliberate attempt to make

this place much less relevant and to make our democracy in Ontario much less relevant. The fundamental premise of accountability on the part of the head of the government and members of the cabinet is diminished by a lack of respect for being in one's House.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Where were you on Friday, George?

Mr Smitherman: I think that would be out of order.

I think we have seen on the part of this government a commitment to shorter sessions, to an absence of legislative committees that travel and meet with Ontarians. We have seen dramatic increases in the use of closure and time allocations. I would submit to you, Mr Speaker, to members of this House and to Ontarians that you have a government in Ontario which seeks to govern by fiat, which seeks to embody in its legislation all of the power to regulate through cabinet and to diminish the role of this place. The member for Brampton Centre last week, in heckling in this House, said this is just an ivory tower; everything meaningful that happens here happens stemming from the cabinet, order-in-council appointments and regulations.

So I send a message to members of this Legislature and to Ontarians that if you want this place to matter over time, the principle of accountability which is at the heart of this bill makes it necessary to be supported. I would urge all members to go back to their ridings and say that you voted in favour of a bill that expected members of the cabinet to be in their place for the daily question period 60% of the time.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): Mr Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, the member for Kitchener Centre, and the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey.

When the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale tabled his private member's bill, I couldn't wait for the chance to speak on it. By putting forward this bill, it has reinforced my opinion that the McGuinty Liberals just don't get it. I am here not only as an MPP, but also to champion the truth. It's time to set the record straight.

I strongly believe that we, as politicians, must be accountable to the voters and the taxpayers of this province. In the last election, the people of Ontario had a clear choice: the strong leadership of Mike Harris and his government, or the untrustworthy flip-flops of the McGuinty Liberals, who will say anything to get themselves re-elected.

The Premier made a commitment in his throne speech to take his message directly to people across Ontario. In fact, he has visited communities all across this province, including Ottawa, Hamilton and Sudbury, to find out what issues they are concerned about. Indeed, he shows a true respect for all voters and taxpayers in this province.

The Premier has made the commitment that he and his ministers will be here in the House and accountable for an appropriate amount of time, but he also committed to travel and to seek out every job, every investment and

every opportunity that would benefit Ontarians. The Mike Harris team has a genuinely pro-growth agenda for this province.

Mr Smitherman talks about accountability, but where was he during the second and third readings of Bill 13, the Back to School Act for Toronto and Windsor? Perhaps the support staff strike was not an important issue for Mr Smitherman or his constituents—

The Acting Speaker: I would remind the member that we refer to other members by their riding.

Ms Mushinski: Or perhaps the member just doesn't care.

If the member wants to discuss accountability, why is it that he, as a backbench MPP with no out-of-riding responsibilities, missed 28% of recorded votes held in the 37th session of Parliament, despite the fact that his riding office is only five blocks from Queen's Park? Even more disturbing, the member missed the vote on the third reading of Christopher's Law, the introduction of the sex offender registry—

Interjection.

1120

The Acting Speaker: Order. I realize there are a lot of things you want to get into in debate, but I would rather keep this at a level where we aren't being very personal. By that, I mean referring to individual members and what you might perceive as their attention to this place. I'll not allow that.

Ms Mushinski: I would ask the member if the protection of children isn't important to him.

After they demanded—and I repeat, demanded—committee hearings on the Children and Family Services Amendment Act, 2000, the members of the Liberal caucus blew off the hearings in Sault Ste Marie. Not even one Liberal showed up for that meeting. Shame on you and shame on your caucus for thinking you have the higher moral ground. Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

Mr Smitherman, you have no right to throw stones. I have here a list—

The Acting Speaker: I want to remind the member that I've asked that we refer to other members by their riding names.

Ms Mushinski: Sorry. Member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale, you have no right to throw stones. I have here a list of the sessions the member has missed in the 37th Parliament alone. In case you were wondering, you missed 42 sessions.

Mr Bartolucci: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: You have repeatedly informed the House that you are not going to entertain discussion about absenteeism in the House, and yet the member continues to speak about absenteeism. I believe she is in fact challenging the Chair, and I would ask you to rule to ensure she no longer does that.

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Hon Mr Stockwell: On two points of order, Mr Speaker: The first point of order is, it's fundamentally impossible to debate this bill that talks about attendance

in the House without speaking to the issue of attendance in the House. The second point of order is, the Liberals seem to be very touchy when we bring forward issues with respect to attendance. The member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale spoke about the attendance of the Premier in this House.

The Acting Speaker: I'll take those because I was kind of interrupted—I don't take two points of order from one member. But as I recall—I'll call the first one A and the second one B—neither is a point of order.

Mr Bisson: Would you take a third point of order, Mr Speaker?

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Timmins-James Bay on a point of order.

Mr Bisson: As you well know, the standing orders preclude members from referring to somebody's absence in the House. I try for a third time to bring her to order.

The Acting Speaker: That is a point of order. I'm ever so glad you brought that to my attention.

The Chair recognizes the member for Scarborough Centre.

Ms Mushinski: I'll speak to my track record. My constituents are proud of the fact I did not miss third reading on the Taxpayer Protection Act, the Safe Schools Act or the act to resolve the labour dispute between elementary teachers and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, something of course the Liberals voted against.

Yes, I'm sure that supporters are quite honoured that the Liberals are too important to attend sessions where their own caucus tried to pass motions on tuition fees or the Adams mine crisis. My constituents don't have that honour. I believe they deserve an MPP who truly represents them.

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I'll be sharing my time with the member from St Catharines and my colleague from Lennox-Frontenac-Addington. I think I missed one, but I apologize.

I won't refer to anybody's attendance record other than my own. When we look at the first session of the 37th Parliament, there were 166 votes taken within this Legislature and I'm glad to say that I made 148 of them or 89.1%. The best record in the House—I won't mention the individual, but he attended 160 of 166 votes. When you look at the leaders of the three parties—and I won't refer to any leader in particular—one leader attended 50.6% of the votes, another leader attended 48.1% of the votes and one leader attended 37.3% of the votes. That one individual was number 62 in the total ranking.

I had an opportunity to read a book by Graham White, *The Ontario Legislature*. In terms of members' attendance, media attention and the overall political import, question period is arguably the most significant proceeding of the Ontario Legislature. I think that says it all right there, that it is of extreme importance to be here. I look too at some research work that my colleague Richard Patten from Ottawa Centre has undertaken, looking at how democracy has been attacked in this province by this government: we look at the unprecedented con-

stant usage of time allocation to cut off debate; the frequent use of omnibus legislation; question period being made redundant by individuals not attending—some individuals have the lowest record in history of people who should be in attendance who, for whatever reason, choose not to show up; the number of committees has been cut and their input reduced; the rigging of sessional dates. When we have our evening sessions we should be having question period. Let's have an extra question period. That's not happening. The politicization of previously non-partisan aspects of House business; clauses and large bills which de facto eliminate the Legislature from the process, and it goes on and on. It's a very sad day to see how democracy has been attacked by this government, and they speak of accountability.

I think it's important to look back. Let's read from the Hansard of 1994. It's interesting to hear what one member had to say. "It is rather alarming when you calculate exactly the length of time that this government will be in session, being answerable to the people of the province of Ontario.... When this House is adjourned and we are not in our places here, there is a belief out there in the broader public that the government isn't in fact answering or doing the things it should be doing or answering the concerns of the private sector or us or the needs of the people ... This is the place where they must answer for their decision-making and come clean on issues and the latest issue that hits the newspapers and television stations.... 'Why is it you don't sit? Why are you not meeting? Why are you not dealing with the government?' I have no really good answer other than to say, 'These people don't want to be here.'"

Interjection: Who said that?

Mr Peters: You know who said that? The Minister of Labour. How can this government stand up and say today that they're accountable when seven years ago, in this very Legislature, they condemned the government for not speaking and not having this Legislature sit?

I think it's important that we support this legislation. I would like to see it taken beyond just the members of the executive. I think it would be important for our constituents to know the attendance record of all 103 members in this Legislature. As a municipal politician, when I arrived at a council meeting, the city clerk at that time would take attendance. I think it's important for our constituents to know what our attendance is within this Legislature.

I understand that there are individuals who have a heavy workload of things they have to do and that there are times when they can't be in attendance in this Legislature. But in a democratically elected Legislature as the one we sit in here today, I think it's incumbent on those who are the leaders of the government to be here and answerable and accountable to the citizens of Ontario. This is the only opportunity the opposition has to keep the government accountable, to question the government on issues that are put forward.

In my remaining time I'd just like to talk about a couple of other issues that this government has shown a

lack of accountability on. Why doesn't this government call an inquiry into what happened in Ipperwash? There's no accountability. I'd love to see an inquiry called into what transpired at the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, why this government left a gentleman by the name of Roland Carey hanging out to dry. I just can't believe it. There should be an inquiry held.

You want to show accountability? Support this legislation.

1130

Mr Bisson: I am in a bit of an odd position here. I understand where the frustration of the member comes from and I understand the member, as did the now Minister of Labour, who was then the finance critic when we were in government, gets frustrated when the Premier often doesn't show up for question period, or certain ministers of the crown, to be able to answer questions of critics. For example, recently there have been a couple of issues up in my constituency that I as the critic as well have been wanting to raise. I've had to put those questions on the back burner for the better part of two weeks because the Premier was otherwise engaged, travelling around the province. I understand the frustration, because you go back as a member and people in your constituency—

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Would you please—

Ms Mushinski: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It seems to me, if I recall correctly, that you were very quick to admonish both the Liberals and the government members for referring specifically to the absence of ministers and the Premier, and I would ask you to rule in this case.

The Acting Speaker: That is a point of order. You're absolutely right, and I will try to use the same judgment here.

The Chair recognizes the member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: Monsieur le Président, comme toujours, merci beaucoup. C'est un très grand plaisir d'être ici avec vous aujourd'hui.

As I was saying, I understand the frustration of the member, because recently I've been in a situation, as you well know. There's a huge issue in northeastern Ontario having to do with the ONTC and the ONR. People across northern Ontario, especially the northeast, are wanting to have questions asked of the Premier and other ministers about this particular issue, and I've had to hold off asking questions because the Premier—I can't say he wasn't here, because that wouldn't be parliamentary.

The Acting Speaker: There are other ministers, and I think I want to get past that. I think we all do.

Mr Bisson: OK, I do want to get past that, and if I'm just allowed a second, I'm about there. I'm just saying you have to hold back those questions. So I understand the frustration of the member.

However, I have a bit of difficulty, and I'm going to listen to this debate very intently before deciding if I'm going to vote in favour or opposed. But I want the mem-

ber to know that generally I'm opposed to this type of legislation. I remember the Conservatives having brought legislation to this House where they wanted to take pay from members when members had been thrown out of the House. I thought that was wrong because I felt at times government members and opposition members may get quite upset over an issue, emotions may take over and they may get thrown out of the House. They're doing their jobs; they're speaking up on an issue that's important to them and their constituency. I didn't feel then that it was right for the government members to introduce a bill that would allow a deduction off a member's pay for having been thrown out of the House.

As well, I'm not in favour generally of having to take attendance here in the Legislature. Listen, we're not doing ourselves a service here. Not every member of the Legislature can be in the House at all times. Premiers, critics, ministers, opposition leaders and backbenchers all have responsibilities that sometimes take them away from the Legislature. I do agree, however—the standing orders don't allow me to say that the Premier hasn't been here very much, and I won't say that. I just want to say that it is real that members do have to get away from here from time to time to deal with issues in their critic portfolios and their constituencies or within their cabinet areas. I wouldn't want us seen—

Ms Mushinski: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I notice that three Liberals have just left the House and I don't believe we have a quorum.

The Acting Speaker: Would you check for a quorum, please.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: Does this mean to say that the member doesn't know how to count, Mr Speaker? Boy, I thought they were good at that. But anyway, that's another story.

I generally am not in favour of legislation that basically is punitive, trying to give an impression that if a member is not in the House, somehow they are not doing their job. It is true that members have to be away from here at times in order to deal with issues in their constituencies or within their cabinet responsibilities or their critic responsibilities. So I don't want to leave that impression.

But I do understand the frustration, and I think that's why the member brings it forward. There are a whole bunch of issues that come into play here. I think one of the big issues is that this current system of parliamentary democracy doesn't work. I spoke on this a little bit earlier today and you will hear me speak about it some more. We are in a system that was designed over 300 years ago. We have an electoral system that's called "first past the post" that allows situations to happen such as have happened in this province for the last 100 years: a government gets elected with less than 50% of the vote but, because of the first-past-the-post system, they end up with better than 50% of the seats. For example, in

Ontario Bob Rae in 1990 was elected with 38% of the vote but got 65% of the seats in the Legislature. Mike Harris got elected with 42% of the general vote. He got over 60% of the seats in the Legislature. I think that's wrong. It doesn't reflect what democracy should be all about.

I would hope that as legislators at the beginning of this new millennium, we try to find a way to modernize our democracies so that we look at some of the examples where parliamentary democracies have modernized themselves, such as what has happened in Germany, New Zealand and in many other jurisdictions where they've kept parts of the old system intact, because people are used to the idea of electing their own representatives, but have looked at how you're able to create a proportional representation system that allows no government to have more seats in the House than the percentage they got in a general election.

So the Germans say, "If you, Mike Harris, got 42% of the vote, you only get 42% of the seats in the House." I think that makes sense, because it means that if this member has a bill he wants to bring forward, he would have an opportunity to do so in a much better way than currently is allowed under this system. We know what is going to happen this morning. The government, by majority, is going to get up and vote against this bill, and this bill will be quashed.

I want to support your bill in the sense of trying to give you support in what you're trying to get at, which is accountability. But this system is not going to allow this bill to go forward, and I think that's wrong. Under a PR system, if a member brings a bill forward, the government is not necessarily in control of everything that happens. In this case, if we had had the election of 1999—the Tories with 42% of the vote and the New Democrats and Liberals with the remaining 58%—we would have a certain say about what happens in this Legislature. I don't think this member would be bringing this bill forward, because the system would be more accountable. To me, that's the root cause of the problem. The root cause is that we have to change the system.

Our democratic system is over 300 years old, and we need to modernize it to make it reflect this new millennium. I think we have to stop looking at the past, when it comes to this democratic system, and keep our eyes on the future. We have to look at how we can make this place work, so that when Ontarians look in, either by way of television or by coming here to watch us in person, they're able to look at this Legislature and say, "Yes, this Legislature reflects me, and my views are being presented on the floor of the Legislature." As it stands now, if you're not a Conservative—and, I would argue, a very right-wing Conservative—your views are not being represented by way of legislation in this House.

Many things are under attack that we hold near and dear to us, such as our public system of education and our public system of health care, where now they're talking about privatizing hospitals. Because Harris got 42% of the vote in the last election and has over 60% of

the seats in the House, he can darn well do what he pleases and there is nothing the combined 58% of the opposition can do about it. Even though we got 58% of the vote between two opposition parties, we have no way of affecting the government in what they're trying to do. So I would argue that we need to change the system. It's not bills like this that will fix our frustration; we need to change the system. The system itself is flawed, and we need to look at how to modernize it.

I hope that if we were to bring this in to a committee, we would look at some other issues. For example, why should a Premier have the right to call an election whenever he or she feels? Why don't we look at set terms and create some stability? Say, "If we're going to have a PR system, there are set terms, four years," and on the first of July or the first of December, or whenever we want to make it, there will be an election every four years. Everybody can plan for it, everybody knows, it's a set rule. Basically that's the way it would work.

Why don't we look at the way we finance campaigns? In the last general election, I think all members would agree, there were phenomenal amounts of money spent by third parties trying to support the Conservatives and electing them in order to put forward their agenda.

Mr Garry J. Guzzo (Ottawa West-Nepean): Smart people.

Mr Bisson: Smart you, of course. You guys knew exactly what you were doing.

Hon Mr Stockwell: What about the unions?

Mr Bisson: That's my point; that's exactly where I'm going. I don't think it's right that we should allow the corporate world or the union world to contribute money directly to campaigns, contribute money directly to parties, so that in the end they're able to exact their will on the political party. We all know that the Liberals and Conservatives get a huge amount of money from Bay Street. It tells me, as a layman, that if you get elected, either as a Conservative or a Liberal, you are somewhat beholden to Bay Street. Conversely, New Democrats, who are financed to a large extent by unions—the reality is that most of our money comes from private individuals—but as a single group—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: No, no, it is true. I invite anybody to come and take a look at what we fundraise. In our riding, our campaign was about \$55,000, of which about \$45,000 came from private individuals—about \$10,000 came from unions, no question.

Hon Mr Stockwell: You too.

Mr Bisson: "You too," says Chris Stockwell. I won't even bite on that one.

But the point I make is, the Tories and the Liberals have the support of Bay Street, and when they form governments they tend to listen to Bay Street. Conversely, when New Democrats get elected—because, yes, we are a party of labour and we are supported by labour financially—we tend to listen to labour to a certain degree. I don't think that's the way we should allow democracy to work. I think we should take a look and

should say, "Shall we change the way we finance campaigns so that neither business nor labour is allowed to contribute and we have state-run elections?"

1140

Some people across the way will say, "State-run elections? Why should the taxpayers pay for elections?" Who do you think is paying for them now? If I give \$750 or \$1,000 to a campaign in Ontario, I get 75% back by way of a tax credit. The taxpayer is already subsidizing political parties and individual candidates by way of tax credits on the campaign.

What I would argue is, let's look at trying to set up a system that basically says campaigns will be run by the parties and the candidates, but they will have a set amount of money they can spend. Each candidate or party is apportioned, according to a certain formula, an amount of money they can spend as well as having the media report what's happening in the election in a non-partisan way, so that at the end of the day voters are not looking at glitzy ads but at the issues.

I say to the member who raises this bill this morning that I generally support your frustration. I have the same frustration. But I would argue that to fix this problem is not just to introduce this bill. I would argue that you have to change the entire political system. I would argue that you should be trying to work with us, the New Democrats, to find a way to get an all-party committee so we can look at how we can reform the electoral system and how we can reform elections generally so there truly is some democracy in Ontario and we're not in the situation where we find ourselves now.

In the few minutes I've got left, I want to make the point, because I think it is an important point to be made and, again, it speaks to the point of democracy: I said earlier that the Tories got elected with 42% of the vote and some 60% of the seats in the House. In the last election 42% of the vote was for the Conservatives and they got over 60% of the—

Hon Mr Stockwell: It was 45.

Mr Bisson: Forty-five. I don't care if it was 49, Chris. The point is, it wasn't 50, right? Thirty-eight for us; it wasn't right either. If you'd listen to the speech, you'd hear what I'm saying.

This morning I read in the paper that former mayor Crombie, who is now with the GTA, basically says the infrastructure of the cities around the GTA is starting to fall apart because there isn't the kind of support by the provincial government to make sure our cities develop properly and continue to grow in a way that's sustainable. He worries about where we are going and points the finger directly back at the government, saying, "You were wrong to download. You were wrong to do the things you did to municipalities."

It comes back to my point: both opposition parties, who made up 58% of the vote in the last election, and the same numbers in the previous election, would have stopped this kind of downloading, because both the opposition parties don't believe that downloading is a solution to dealing with financial problems. All it does is

transfer the problem on to a lower level of government which has no ability to deal with it.

Yes, the provincial government looks good because they got rid of the deficit. But all they've done is shove these problems on to the municipal government. Now you've got former mayor Crombie and others across this province saying that what you've done is created hell on wheels for municipalities and we're now starting to see the price. He goes on further: "We are watching the public school system being immeasurably hurt these days. It was the best system in North America but we can no longer rely and depend on it," he said, adding that the problem is the province. They are responsible, "because it controls education funding." Again, his argument is that they're going in the wrong direction when it comes to what they've done in education.

My point is, under a PR system they would not have been able to do that without having the support of one of the two parties. I don't believe New Democrats, for sure, and the Liberals would have supported the direction this government is going.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton): I'm very pleased to join in the debate on the member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale's bill. Having just listened to the member from Timmins-James Bay speak about accountability, you have to look back prior to the 1995 election when the NDP was in government. The year prior, they sat for nine days, and he stands up and talks about accountability. That is totally laughable.

Let's talk about the next joke of the day, which is the bill before us. It's not about accountability. There is not one shred of evidence that this bill is needed. The member doesn't come here today with clean hands. He wants this to apply just to the executive council. He doesn't want it to apply to him. He doesn't want to deal with his own accountability. This is pure political puffery. This is childish.

Let's deal with what the bill is about. It says that if a minister of the crown doesn't attend 60% of the oral question period held during the session, \$100 is to be deducted from their salary for each occasion. Where did he get that figure from? That's got to be pure pie in the sky—60%. Where did that come from?

Then he goes on to say that you'll be deemed to be present if you're too ill to attend. What about the member's family? What about the spouse, and they're not able to attend? What if there's an emergency in the riding? What if something is happening to that individual's family or in his riding, something he has to deal with? He's basically going to be docked pay to deal with his own family emergency. That's a hell of a way to deal with things. I apologize for that comment, but being a family member, I can tell you that it is outrageous to dock someone's pay for dealing with a family emergency, just outrageous.

He says if the minister is absent from the oral question period for more than 20 minutes, and where did he get that figure? That is total nonsense—20 minutes. I guess he gets that from the Smitherman rules of conduct.

Then he goes on to show how ridiculous this piece of legislation is. He says the record of attendance should be provided by the minister. We're talking about self-policing here. Is he really serious about what he's trying to accomplish here? I don't think so.

Interjection: It's an honour system.

Mr Tascona: He calls it an honour system across the way.

The bottom line is that this bill is pure political puffery. There's no shred of evidence it's needed. It borders on childishness. The mean-spiritedness of it is, if you have a family member who is sick or you have an emergency to deal with, you're not covered and you get docked pay.

This bill hasn't been thought through and it's obvious why. It's pure political puffery. The member doesn't even want to be held accountable himself. It's for somebody else. Arguably, on its face, it's discriminatory, but we'll leave that for the public to decide.

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): I'm very pleased to stand today to speak to the bill of the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale. I'm going to bring my remarks to this House from my experience as a mother. My husband and I have four children. Certainly they understand that my role here is to defend the democratic process. We've always tried to have our children understand the importance of what we do here, because they spend a lot of time without their mother with them.

Today we're talking about An Act to amend the Executive Council Act respecting an institution of democracy in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I'm going to keep my remarks to that bill. I'm not going to get into, "You were here and I wasn't," or, "I was here and you weren't," although I have to say to anyone who would like to consider my attendance record, feel free to do so, feel free to comment on it, because I have a responsibility to account to the people I represent and to my family for my record here in this assembly.

The bill is very simple. For people who are watching the proceedings this morning, it's not very complicated. It simply indicates that members of the executive council should be in attendance 60% of the time.

1150

When we speak to our children about their responsibilities, whether it's at their place of work or at school, or when we talk about our responsibilities as parents in our place of work or our other commitments, we stress the importance of commitment, that very regularly there are choices we can make about where we are at any particular time. We should, I believe, be setting an example for the people we represent, the people in our families, that—

Interjection.

Mrs Dombrowsky: The Minister of Labour would like to interject. I find that interesting. He might learn something if he was quiet.

The example is that we should take our responsibilities very seriously and be here. Reference was made by the

member from Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton that if a member of his family was ill, that would have an impact and he might even have to pay for that. That would be regrettable. I suggest the member might bring forward an amendment to this that would enable consideration of that important fact. I also remind the members on the other side of the House that if that's an issue for which you don't think people who work should be penalized, that when members of their family are sick, they should continue to be paid, then I think they should extend that to all segments of our society.

I worked in retail and I had scheduled hours and I had no union. When I was sick or my kids were sick, I took time off and I wasn't paid. I do agree. If family members are sick, workers should not be penalized for that. I think it's a point well taken, but if that's the argument, then fine, let's consider it not just for the people in this House, but for the broader public as well.

The bottom line is—

Hon Mr Stockwell: What a Liberal.

Mrs Dombrowsky: I'm so proud to be a Liberal, too. The bottom line is that this is about accountability. For me, it's about accountability. It's not about pointing at anyone on that side of the House or anyone on this side of the House and saying, "You're making the mark," or, "You're not making the mark." It's all about saying that if you are in a cabinet role in this Legislative Assembly, we believe it is reasonable to expect that you would be here in your role on behalf of the people of Ontario 60% of the time. That's all this bill is about, and as to the idea of the penalty, that's our example from you. You're ready to penalize everybody if they don't keep the law. If people who are ordered back to work don't keep the law, don't meet your expectation, you penalize them. If school boards don't follow your rules, you penalize them. So you need to look at the way you behave and the example you set and be prepared to live by the same standards.

That's my only point. It's very easy for me, in my riding, to defend supporting a bill that only expects accountability in this Legislative Assembly, and that's why I'm very happy to speak to it and support it today.

Mr Wayne Wetlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I'm a little surprised that the member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale wants to go down this road. Nevertheless, let me say that I've had experience outside of politics and I want to point out that when I was an executive working for a company, I used to get on an airplane on the first of March and it felt like I didn't get off until the end of September. That was because my duties took me out of the office. A lot of people in the office felt that I was just away, slacking it, if you will, and I remember a number of my neighbours used to say, "What do the Rockies look like?" Well, all I did was see them from the plane and they looked like a big rock pile.

I'd like to relate this to the Premier. The Premier has duties as the head of the province that are much more onerous than what I had as an executive of a company. He has an obligation to visit as many citizens in Ontario as possible. He is not capable of meeting all those

citizens only in a period of intersession, whether it be in the winter or the summer. He has to get out and meet the citizens of the province.

Also he has to get around the world. It is an obligation, as the Premier of the province, to go around the world, ie China, as he did recently with the Prime Minister, because that encourages investment in the province, encourages jobs in the province, and Lord knows, we've done very well with that, haven't we? We have created 840,000 net new jobs since our government came to power. That's thanks in large part to the Premier.

The Premier has a very onerous responsibility of ensuring that people get off welfare. We have alleviated many of the citizens of Ontario from that chain, if you will. Some 575,000 people are now off welfare. I think that is very well done.

The Premier must get around. He must.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): He's at a fundraiser in St Catharines tonight.

Mr Wetlaufer: Yes, I think he does go to fundraisers, and I think so do you. I say to the member from St Catharines, you go to fundraisers too. We all do.

The Premier works very hard to make sure that Ontario's working families get to keep more of their hard-earned money. We've had many—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I can't hear with the interruptions. I know that you're all going to want to be here a little later on. Please stay with us.

Mr Wetlaufer: The Leader of the Opposition, of course, also gets to go to England and Ireland. Does that mean that when he's not in the House, when he's away out there, he's not doing anything?

I'm a little bit surprised at the Liberals, because last week we had a vote on Bill 13, sending the students back to school in Toronto and in Windsor. I left my riding in Kitchener Centre to come down here and look out for the interests of the students in Toronto and in Windsor. To my figuring here, based on the legislative seating here, there are nine Liberals from Toronto in this Legislature, there are two from Windsor proper and four from the Windsor area in total. That's a total of 13 members. Of that 13, only four were here for the vote on third reading. There were a lot of government members from all over Ontario who were here who had more interest in the students in the city of Toronto and the city of Windsor than your own members did.

The member from Toronto Centre-Rosedale said, "I stand on principle and I'll vote in support of this legislation on the principle that kids can be back in the classrooms sooner. That's the most important principle that is at stake, in my opinion." He wasn't even here for the vote on second and third reading.

The Acting Speaker: We will not get into the specifics, not while either one of us is in this House. I'd ask you to withdraw that and continue if you want to.

Mr Wetlaufer: I will withdraw it, but it is a matter of public record in Hansard.

I do wonder sometimes how they respond to their constituents. I missed four or five weeks last spring due to an

injury—a rather stupid injury but nevertheless it was a serious one—and I wasn't here. I heard from my constituents the amount of time that I wasn't here. They saw it. How do you respond?

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Bradley: This legislation allows me the chance to deal with the issue of accountability, which I think is important. I want to look at it in the breadth of the system under which we operate. The accountability of a government, to a very large extent, comes in this Legislative Assembly. My objection is very strong when governments, whatever governments they happen to be, do not adhere to the parliamentary calendar. My problem was that the House sat, I think—Mr Speaker, you could help me if I'm wrong on this—to December 20 of last year. It was not reconvened until April 19. The federal House was back in January. Can you imagine—

Interjections.

Mr Bradley: And it's in session five days a week.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I want to be able to hear and I'd like you to stay, and if those two things are not compatible, then I'll solve the problem, believe me.

Mr Bradley: For a government to be accountable, I think it has to be accountable to the House. I was trying to imagine the absolute furor there would have been in the news media in Ottawa had the federal Liberal government announced that it was not going to bring the House back until April 19, not having sat since December 20. I suggest there would have been outrage, a furor. The National Post would have been running banner headlines seven days a week, or six days a week—they may not publish on Sunday. Mike Duffy, Tom Clark, the whole bunch of them would have been outraged by that happening. Here, nobody seems to mention it. Nobody in Ontario seemed to know this House wasn't sitting, because they could see the federal House in session. I think it's extremely important for governments to be accountable and to have the House in session. If you can put forward an argument that the people will accept in this House, and they see it on television or it's reported, then fine. I have no objection to that. But you must be accountable.

1200

The last time I had a chance to ask a question of the Premier was December 20 of the year 2000. The next time I had a chance to ask a question of the Premier—and he gave it to somebody else; I don't like that part—was May 1. So between December 20 and May 1, I did not have a chance, nor anybody else in this House, to ask the Premier a question. I don't think that's good for our democratic process. It's not as though the Premier doesn't know how to handle himself in the House. He's been here 20 years. It's not as though he should be afraid to be in the House or anything of that nature. It, to me, speaks of arrogance when whoever it happens to be who is accountable doesn't appear in the House to be accountable. That's an extremely important component.

I see an erosion happening because, first of all, the government has changed the rules of this Legislature to

suit itself. It is the majority; it changes the rules to grease the skids for government legislation. That has happened at least twice in this government, and the most draconian of changes have taken place under this government. What it has done is militate in favour of the Premier and the Premier's office essentially running the province—and perhaps some cabinet ministers, but even they do not have the same power, for instance, as Guy Giorno, who has the most power of all and is unelected.

You have been able to abuse public office through government advertising. I'm not going to use this as a prop, except to say this is the last one that came out. It's called "On." It cost over \$1 million for the people of Ontario. The Premier's photograph is in there. Everything is there to portray the government in the best possible light. To me, that is an abuse of the democratic system, allowing money to play a greater role in politics. You increase the amount people can contribute, you increase the amount people can spend in a campaign, and you exempt many expenditures. That gives the best break to the government in power or to those who have the most money to spend in the system. I think that is counterproductive to a good democratic system.

In addition to that, you have simply ignored the press gallery. They have an opportunity, when the House is in session, to be able to scrub the ministers much better than when the House is not in session.

So we have a concentration of power in the Premier's office. I think there must be much more accountability on the part of government.

Mr Tilson: This bill is about the Clerk taking attendance of members of the Executive Council. Some of the Liberal members, particularly the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London, have suggested that that even be extended to all members of this place.

I'm answerable to the people in my riding. I'm not answerable to you. I'm answerable to the people who elected me, and those are the people to whom I'm going to justify whether I'm here or not here.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale has two minutes to respond.

Mr Smitherman: To the member that just spoke, I say, right back at you. I think I've touched a nerve here.

I'd like to thank all of those great presentations. The member from Scarborough—

The Acting Speaker: Order. I'd ask the member to keep his remarks within what I would consider parliamentary, and I don't consider that parliamentary.

Mr Smitherman: The members from Elgin-Middlesex-London, Timmins-James Bay, Barrie-Simcoe-Brampton, Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, Kitchener Centre and St Catharines: thank you. You've helped to make my point. Especially to the government members, I agree. I agree with much of what you've said, which is that we all ought to be held to a higher level of accountability. I stand in answer to the member who spoke last and say that I agree. I'm making the same point. If we have done anything in the course of this hour this morning, we have helped to highlight the fact that we all need to be held accountable, but you've missed a very

important point. The point is that for that one hour a day called question period, ministers of the crown, who are given more money and more responsibility, are asked to be here to be held to account for the responsibility that they have been granted on behalf of their province. That is the essence of this bill.

The members opposite talk about holding all people accountable, they reference votes that I have missed, and I'm happy. I'm happy to have my constituents be made more aware of that. I would make the point to the member who spoke that they have missed the entire point, which is that cabinet ministers have more responsibility and accordingly more is asked of them. That one hour, that sacred one hour called question period, has been diminished as a result of the deliberate actions of this government.

Anyone who's been following this debate knows, Ontario's working families know and you all know, that when it comes to attending his duties at question period the Premier of this province has a failing grade, and this bill seeks to improve that.

The Acting Speaker: That is out of order and I ask you to withdraw it.

Mr Smitherman: Mr Speaker, no one else who made comments like that was out of order or was asked to withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: I ask the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale to withdraw that comment.

Mr Smitherman: Happily, sir.

The Acting Speaker: No, I just ask you to say, "I withdraw," or—

Mr Smitherman: Withdraw.

The Acting Speaker: The time for private members' business has expired.

HORSE RIDING SAFETY ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CAVALIERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): We will deal first with ballot item number 3. Mrs Molinari has moved second reading. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This is the first item. We will deal with the voting of it after.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CONSEIL EXÉCUTIF

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): We will deal now with ballot item number 4. Mr Smitherman has moved ballot item number 4. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We'll call in the members. I'd like to remind you this will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1207 to 1212.

HORSE RIDING SAFETY ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CAVALIERS

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Mrs Molinari has moved second reading of Bill 12. All those in favour will please rise until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Gill, Raminder	Molinari, Tina R.
Arnott, Ted	Gravelle, Michael	Munro, Julia
Baird, John R.	Guzzo, Garry J.	Mushinski, Marilyn
Barrett, Toby	Hardeman, Ernie	Newman, Dan
Bartolucci, Rick	Hastings, John	O'Toole, John
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Bradley, James J.	Hudak, Tim	Patten, Richard
Bryant, Michael	Jackson, Cameron	Peters, Steve
Caplan, David	Johns, Helen	Phillips, Gerry
Chudleigh, Ted	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Cleary, John C.	Klees, Frank	Smitherman, George
Clement, Tony	Kormos, Peter	Spina, Joseph
Coburn, Brian	Kwinter, Monte	Stewart, R. Gary
Colle, Mike	Levac, David	Stockwell, Chris
Crozier, Bruce	Marchese, Rosario	Tascona, Joseph N.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Marland, Margaret	Tilson, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	Martel, Shelley	Tsubouchi, David H.
Duncan, Dwight	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Dunlop, Garfield	Mazzilli, Frank	Wilson, Jim
Galt, Doug	McGuinty, Dalton	Witmer, Elizabeth
Gerretsen, John	McLeod, Lyn	Wood, Bob
Gilchrist, Steve	Miller, Norm	Young, David

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): The ayes are 66; the nays are 0.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Shall the bill be ordered to the committee of the whole?

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): I move that Bill 12 be sent to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

The Acting Speaker: Agreed? It is agreed.

The doors will be open for 30 seconds.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CONSEIL EXÉCUTIF

The Acting Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): Mr Smitherman has moved second reading of Bill 21. All those in favour will please rise until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Dombrowsky, Leona	Martel, Shelley
Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	McGuinty, Dalton
Bountrogianni, Marie	Gerretsen, John	McLeod, Lyn
Bradley, James J.	Gravelle, Michael	Patten, Richard
Bryant, Michael	Hoy, Pat	Peters, Steve

Caplan, David	Kennedy, Gerard	Phillips, Gerry
Cleary, John C.	Kormos, Peter	Pupatello, Sandra
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Smitherman, George
Crozier, Bruce	Levac, David	
Di Cocco, Caroline	Marchese, Rosario	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hastings, John	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Jackson, Cameron	Spina, Joseph
Chudleigh, Ted	Johns, Helen	Stewart, R. Gary
Clark, Brad	Klees, Frank	Stockwell, Chris
Clement, Tony	Marland, Margaret	Tascona, Joseph N.
Coburn, Brian	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tilson, David
Dunlop, Garfield	Mazzilli, Frank	Tsubouchi, David H.
Galt, Doug	Miller, Norm	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Gilchrist, Steve	Molinari, Tina R.	Wilson, Jim
Gill, Raminder	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Guzzo, Garry J.	Mushinski, Marilyn	Wood, Bob
Hardeman, Ernie	Newman, Dan	Young, David

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): The ayes are 28; the nays are 39.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now leave the chair. The House resumes at 1:30.

The House recessed from 1220 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

FIRE IN TORONTO

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I want to talk about the devastating fire that occurred in my riding yesterday at Dufferin and Lawrence at the new Liberty Walk townhouse project, where 180 new townhouses went up in flames. It was one of the worst fires in recent memory in Toronto. It's also a terrible shame and a terrible loss, not only of \$20 million and 180 homes, but also a tragic loss of people's hard work and hope.

These new townhouses were welcomed by the community. They were affordable and were an infill development that replaced fallow industrial land, exactly the type of new housing my community and the city of Toronto needs. Not too ago I was there at the groundbreaking with great hope and celebration, and I was there yesterday in sadness watching the loss. It was heartbreaking to see all this hard work, time and dreams go up in smoke. Fortunately, because of the great work of Toronto Fire Services under Chief Speed, there was no loss of life and injuries were limited. I want to take this opportunity to thank the 160 members of the Toronto fire department who helped put out this massive fire at great personal risk. It takes a tragedy like this to remind us all that we should not take for granted the importance of fire services and keeping our homes and workplaces safe.

It also reminds us of the tragic loss we had this week of a great friend of Toronto and of all of us who knew him in the old city of York, Captain Patrick Carey. What a loss at such a young age. Let's not forget.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): In early January, Minister of Transportation David Turnbull announced the investment of \$550,000 to assist more than 100 community groups across our province in an effort to target aggressive and unsafe driving behaviour. The aggressive driving community support program provides funding to local, regional and provincial road user safety groups in support of education and awareness campaigns that address aggressive driving at the community level.

Yesterday evening, I attended the official launch of the Oro-Medonte community policing committee's mobile radar board. A radar board is used in designated areas across the township. It is set up on a daily basis by the OPP and is left for a specific time. As drivers approach the board, it records and displays the actual speed of the vehicle. The board doesn't require the attendance of an officer. It is used to measure traffic volume, and it acts as a deterrent for those speeding on township and regional roads. The project cost to the Oro-Medonte community policing committee was just over \$10,000, with the province contributing approximately 50%.

I'd like to congratulate Joan Fitzgerald, chairperson of the Oro-Medonte community policing committee, and all of her volunteer committee members; Mayor Ian Beard and the township of Oro-Medonte council and staff; John Warkentin, regional planner, road user safety branch of MTO; and Staff Sergeant Len Hassberger of the OPP for all their hard work and fundraising efforts in seeing this project completed. I believe the aggressive driving community support program is an overwhelming success.

ANNIVERSARY OF POLISH CONSTITUTION

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): It is with great honour I rise on behalf of, I believe, all members of this House, particularly in our caucus, to commemorate the May 3 Constitution Day, an important day not just for Polish Canadians, but for the entire people of Canada.

I would like to remark that about an hour ago this flag was raised in front of this Legislature in appropriate commemoration of the efforts toward freedom that have been made from the Polish nation under the May 3 Constitution auspices.

I'd like to recognize for all of us here today the contribution that has been made toward freedom, toward a stronger Canadian society and a stronger country in Poland by the people who have been part of this strong and proud Canadian Polish community. Today, we have with us Professor Andrej Mrozewski, chair of Canadian Polish Congress Council in Sudbury; his wife Janina

Mrozewski; Wojciech Olbrycht, who is with the Polish Veterans Association; and also a number of people from similar army formations: Krzysztof Szywłowski, Marc Ostrowski, Vera Wiktorczyk, Władysław Jagiełlicz, Jerzy Burski, Bolesław Rybka, Walter Szymbczak, Bolesław Chamot, Mieczysław Szczęcinski.

As well, we have Maria Taborski, with the Polish National Union; other members of the Polish National Union; Marian Pietruszewski, with the Polonia brass band; Krystyna Krywoj, Mihail Michalski and Bogumil Nowinowski.

I would like on behalf of all members of this Legislature to pay appropriate tribute to the Polish community in their efforts made here in Canada.

FISHERMEN'S MEMORIAL

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Commercial fishing has been a way of life for many in Port Dover for over 150 years, and most families have had at least one person working in the industry. Many have worked on the docks or in the fish plants, and hundreds of others have cast their nets along the lake.

Fishermen and their families understood the dangers of the unpredictable waters of Lake Erie, but carried on. Last May, I attended a ceremony in my hometown of Port Dover where the eastern Lake Erie fishermen's memorial was unveiled. The monument features three fishermen pulling a net. With this piece, Waterford sculptress Kathryn Hogg truly captured the essence of those involved in the commercial fishing industry. Most important, the monument celebrates the heritage of Ontario's fishing towns and pays tribute to those who have lost their lives on the lake.

This month the project will be complete with the laying of the last 50 bricks.

This memorial would not have become a reality had it not been for the efforts of local residents Rosemary Murphy and Dorothy Hoskins. Together, the pair held walk-a-thons, draws, a fish fry, a golf tournament and a concert to ensure their longtime wish would become reality. I commend and congratulate both of these women for working so hard. They have created a tribute that is so important to fishing families along the lakes.

ARTS AND CULTURAL FUNDING

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): The Ontario government's investment per capita on culture places it last among the 10 provinces. In 1996-97, the federal government spent \$103 in Ontario per capita, municipal government spent \$54 per capita in Ontario, and the provincial government spent \$39 per capita in Ontario.

A report for the Arts in the Community Task Force states that arts and cultural activities in the school system have been slashed. We have fewer opportunities for students to participate in music, in theatre, in art, because the Harris neo-Conservatives see these educational disciplines as frills.

The foundation of development for culture begins with accessibility in our schools. Education in the arts helps our society achieve broader education, economic and social goals. Ninety-two per cent of Ontarians say the arts enrich the quality of their lives. Investment in the arts projects an image of a modern, innovative and creative province in the global marketplace.

The Ontario Liberal caucus is a strong public voice which believes in the tangible and intangible values of culture and heritage for working families in our communities and across this province. The federal government has had the courage to reinvest in culture. Where is the provincial portion of cultural investment in Ontario?

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Sing Tao Daily is a Chinese-language daily newspaper published here in the city of Toronto, very profitable, you should understand, which in no small part helps to explain why Torstar Corp purchased the majority ownership of it back in April 1998.

Sing Tao Daily's 110 workers organized into a collective bargaining unit. They organized a union at their workplace, CEP local 87, SONG, and attempted to negotiate a first contract. What they sought was some modest parity with similar community-based newspapers also owned by Torstar Corp.

1340

Well, here we are, months and months later, and yesterday morning those workers picketed the King Edward Hotel, where Torstar Corp was holding its annual general meeting, to protest the racism of Torstar Corp, because Toronto Star John Honderich and his Liberal friends seem to think it's OK to pay Chinese-speaking workers less than you pay English-language workers. John Honderich and his Liberal colleagues at Torstar Corp seem to think it's OK to try to crush workers and smash unions. Well, New Democrats were there with the workers from Sing Tao Daily, members of CEP local 87, or SONG. Howard Hampton and I attended on behalf of this caucus and New Democrats across this province who are proud to stand with workers, proud to stand with trade unionists against people who call themselves Liberals but who act like Tories, people who want to smash unions and smash the lowest-paid workers in this province.

BRICK STREET SCHOOL

Mr Bob Wood (London West): We have with us today 45 students from Brick Street School in the great riding of London West.

Brick Street School, part of the Thames Valley District School Board, is located on Commissioners Road in London. Commissioners Road ran from Windsor to Hamilton in the 1800s and was used as a stagecoach route. There has been a school building in the immediate vicinity since 1817. Brick Street School was built in 1954. Commissioners Road was nicknamed "Brick

Street" because of the 16 brickyards that existed in the area many years ago. None of them remains today.

On the front lawn of the school is an old school bell. It was made to be used for the original 1817 school and now sits in a small bell tower structure on the front lawn of the school. The Brick Street School logo features the bell and structure.

Brick Street School has approximately 380 students from JK to Grade 6.

The visit today is part of Education Week activities. This year's theme is "Excellence in school performance, excellence in student learning."

I know that among this group there are at least one future Premier, three cabinet ministers and at least two maverick MPPs.

I ask the members of the assembly to join with me in welcoming the Grade 5 students, teachers and chaperones from the classes of Shirley Parkin-Bobier and Chris Vertz of Brick Street School.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): I stand today to offer congratulations to Durham region council. Last night Durham region council sent a stern rebuke to the Deputy Premier and the Minister of Education, who have been lobbying aggressively for the municipal taxpayer in Durham region to pay for hospital construction. Last night, Durham region council, led by a variety of mayors like John Mutton from Durham, Nancy Diamond from Oshawa and Steve Parish from Ajax, said no. They said no to being the tax collector for Mike Harris's downloading, and they said no to being the tax collector for Mike Harris's chronic underfunding of hospital expansion in the greater Toronto area.

Mayor Parish said, "The province is responsible for health care and we should be working together to urge the province to fund it properly." "Hear, hear," we say to that.

Mayor Diamond said, "This would be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back," as she argued against this imposition of further tax on the municipal taxpayer in Durham region.

We want to applaud those courageous souls on Durham region council for standing up. We know that those two government ministers from Durham region lobbied aggressively to ensure that this would go through, and Durham region council said no. They said no to them, even though the province has imposed more costs on hospitals than ever before. They know that \$100 million is beyond the capacity of the Durham residential property tax base. Hospital funding, downloading, these are the issues that came home to roost last night in Durham region, and Durham region council said no.

EVENTS IN YORK REGION

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I rise in the House today to speak about an event that is going to take place next week in my riding of York North. The York Region

Volunteer Summit is a two-day event on May 7 and 8. Day 1 will feature a presentation of Ontario's Promise in the morning, followed by a student summit in the afternoon. Day 2 will include representatives from business, government, community agencies, citizens' groups and student bodies.

The York region community summit is our opportunity to explore the challenges and opportunities affecting voluntary action in York region. The Ontario's Promise component of the summit will feature corporate and community partners from York region.

Ontario's Promise is all about our five promises to the children of Ontario: a healthy start, an adult that cares, safe places to learn and grow, the tools to succeed and a chance to make a difference.

Speaking about being an agency of promise will be Rob Black from 4-H Ontario, Kathryn Henderson of Big Brothers of York, and Curt Harnett of the Sport Alliance of Ontario.

In my riding of York North there are thousands of volunteers who donate their time to enhance the quality of our lives. It is my hope that the York Region Volunteer Summit will encourage all sectors of our community to work together to make York region the very best community in Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING INCENTIVES ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR LES STIMULANTS AU LOGEMENT À PRIX ABORDABLE

Mr Caplan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act to create affordable housing by enabling municipalities to offer incentives for development and re-development of properties / Projet de loi 37, Loi créant des logements à prix abordable en permettant aux municipalités d'offrir des stimulants pour l'aménagement ou le réaménagement de biens-fonds.

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

The member for a short statement?

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): Once again, in the absence of leadership by the Harris government, it falls to Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party to provide that leadership, to provide a positive vision for Ontario's working families.

Section 111 of the Municipal Act prohibits a municipality from granting any financial assistance to any enterprise. The Affordable Housing Incentives Act creates an exception to this rule, enabling municipalities to provide financial assistance to an affordable housing project in that municipality.

This bill allows municipalities to define what types of affordable housing projects will qualify for assistance,

and a local board can be established by the municipality to administer the program to provide financial assistance to affordable housing projects. I urge all members of the House to support this bill.

RENT FREEZE ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR LE GEL DES LOYERS

Mr Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to amend the Tenant Protection Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 38, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la protection des locataires.

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

The member for a short statement?

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The bill freezes the amount of residential rates for a period of two years. Notices and applications for an increase to take effect after the bill passes will have no effect. No rent increase will be permitted on renting to a new tenant. Landlords will be required to give tenants a statement certifying the amount of rent last charged for the unit. Landlords who give false statements or fail to give the statement will be subject to prosecution. Landlords will no longer be permitted to increase the rent charged for the maximum rent allowed when part VI of the Tenant Protection Act, 1997, came into force. Finally, the bill establishes a rent registry. Landlords are required to file a statement with the registry that sets out the lawful rent for each rental unit to which the act applies.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

AMENDMENT ACT

(RAISING THE MINIMUM WAGE), 2001

LOI DE 2001 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI (AUGMENTATION DU SALAIRE MINIMUM)

Mr Hampton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 39, An Act to raise the minimum wage to ensure that everyone shares in Ontario's prosperity / Projet de loi 39, Loi augmentant le salaire minimum pour que toute la population puisse bénéficier de la prospérité de l'Ontario.

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

The leader of the third party for a short statement?

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): This bill will do something for the hundreds of thousands of women and men struggling to support a family on take-home pay of less than \$250 a week. It will raise the minimum wage in Ontario to \$7.50 an hour, the first increase in our minimum wage in six years. It will put us on par with our major trading partner. It is a simple step that will give working people a chance. It's the right thing to do, and it's long overdue.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WELFARE REFORM

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for children, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Six years ago, the Mike Harris government set out to reform welfare in the province of Ontario. We wanted to move more Ontarians from welfare to work. The problem was that while Ontario was the most prosperous province in the country, we also had the highest number of people per capita on welfare.

Under the old money-for-nothing welfare system, case workers had become cheque dispensers. They weren't able to offer welfare recipients the support they needed to help break the welfare trap. When we were first elected, we wanted to turn the welfare system from a trap into a trampoline. We wanted to create a welfare system that helped people get the skills and experience they needed to move into paid employment.

I'm happy to report that our government has had some success. As of March this year, more than 578,000 people have left the welfare rolls since we were first elected in 1995. But our work is not done. With more than 437,000 people still on welfare, it's clear that we have more to do.

In the throne speech on April 19, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario told this House that the government will announce details to help get people off welfare and into jobs. That's why I rise today to share our government's five-point action plan to continue to move forward with welfare reform. When a prospective employer calls with a job offer, we want people to be able to say, "Yes, I'm ready." Our government will implement our five-point action plan to see that Ontario Works becomes even more responsive to the needs of recipients. I want to share with the members here today our five-point action plan.

We recognize that literacy is a basic yet important skill in today's marketplace. We know that if you can't read the job ads, it can be tough to get off welfare. We agree with the Human Resources Development Canada report that says lack of adequate literacy skills is the number one barrier to employment. Already through Ontario Works, thousands of people are getting literacy training. For example, Ontario Works participant Barb Muir, from near Kingston, has been getting help from the North Frontenac literacy program. She says it's helping make a real difference for her in her life: "I now have the confidence and self-assurance to speak and demonstrate my learning skills to others. Ontario Works is not something I chose to be on. However, it has allowed me, through participation in upgrading and community placements, to move on to another career with confidence and with pride in myself."

It's stories like this one that confirm our government is on the right track. But I don't think we can become complacent. That's why in our Blueprint we promised to provide remedial training for any welfare recipient who can't pass a basic language and math test. While some may not agree, our government believes that an important part of many of our welfare reforms is the mandatory component. If a welfare recipient can't pass a basic language and math test, they will be offered help. If they refuse help, they will have made themselves ineligible for welfare in Ontario. The government will help welfare recipients who struggle with reading, writing and math by introducing mandatory literacy testing and training. Taxpayers want to help; our government wants to help. As well, we believe people on welfare have a responsibility to take advantage of those programs and to help themselves get job-ready.

The next critical piece of our government's five-part action plan is the continued expansion of Ontario Works placements. We recognize that sometimes the greatest barrier to employment is simply a lack of experience. That's why we're—

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Stop the clock, please.

Mr Caplan: I refer to section 35(d) of the standing orders, where it says that after any policy statement during ministerial statements, the minister "shall"—the operative word—table a compendium of background information. All week, we have had statements by ministers, and yet none of this kind of information has been tabled with this Legislature.

I seek from you, Speaker, what the redress and what the penalty is for ministers who have, in my view, and in the view, I believe, of the official opposition, not followed the standing orders of this place. I would seek your guidance and your ruling.

The Speaker: I thank the member for his point of order and I would ask the Minister of Community and Social Services whether indeed this is a policy statement.

Hon Mr Baird: I'm not sure, Mr Speaker. It's a statement outlining some actions the government intends to proceed and follow forward with. I would be very pleased to table a copy of our action plan with you at the end of my statement.

The Speaker: I'm afraid that's too late. You won't be able to continue. If it is indeed a policy statement, you need to table that per the standing orders, which are very thorough. What I would ask you to do is to follow those procedures and then we can proceed. I apologize to everyone for the inconvenience and I thank the member for his point of order.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Just before we begin question period, I want to let all the members know that this is the last day for this wonderful group of pages we

have. I would ask that you join me in thanking this first group for their efforts on our behalf.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: We were told the Minister of Health would be present in the House today. We were not informed that he would be absent. If he's present, we would like to ask a question of the Minister of Health.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): It's my understanding the Minister of Health is on his way and should be here very shortly. My apologies, Mr Speaker. If they want to stand down that particular question—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): What you may want to do is stand it down. I believe he is on his way.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Here he is.

The Speaker: As we speak. We probably know who gets the first question, then.

TUITION FEES

Mrs Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Minister of Health. Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals would like to know if yesterday, after the Premier finished answering the question of Dalton McGuinty regarding the medical school students who were here in the House, you, as Minister of Health, pulled him aside and said, "Smarten up. What kind of a kiss-off was that to give to medical students who are experiencing some real financial difficulties getting through the system and becoming medical doctors?"

Yesterday in this House he said some quite unbelievable things, but specifically we'd like to know if you agree with the Premier in his very much of a rebuff to medical students, and that medical school today is becoming a place where only rich families can consider sending their young people. I'd like to know if you agree with the Premier, or did you pull him aside yesterday and tell him to smarten up?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): In answer to the question, I do agree with the Premier that we, the Mike Harris government, have created an unprecedented level of student support by virtue of our matching of bursaries and student support in terms of the way we are revamping and seek to revamp OSAP. Our position is that if you're Conrad Black's daughter, you can pay your own way.

Mrs Pupatello: We are talking about working families in Ontario who want their children to have every opportunity, including those who do not have the bank account of Conrad Black. That's what Ontario Liberals stand for in this House.

Yesterday the Premier, in answer to Dalton McGuinty's question, suggested these students can pay back their

loans within the first few months of working. We know these university grads get their bachelor or honours degree after three or four years of school and then apply to medical school already with \$28,000 in loans.

1400

The OMA confirmed for us today that first-year residents in fact make about \$30,000 after tax in those first few years of working, that debt service, interest and principal costs are \$14,000 on a standard \$100,000 loan. Minister of Health, do you agree with the Premier when he stood in the House yesterday and said that these medical school students can pay back their loans in the first few months of working?

Hon Mr Clement: I agree with the Premier when he indicated to this House, which is a verifiable number, that currently our government—the government you so deride—provides more than \$22,000 per year per student enrolled in our province's medical programs. That's what we do now. If you're asking me, should we spend an extra dollar on that program—\$22,000 already—rather than spending it on other forms of health care reform that we have to do, my vote is for other forms of health care reform that we have to do.

Mrs Pupatello: We're quite amazed to hear the comments from the Minister of Health. Do you honestly think the Ontario government is prepared to just make allowances for Conrad Black's daughter to go through medical school? We're talking about Ontario's working families, and what we know is that what the Premier said yesterday in the House is that for tuition and ancillary fees, they can get all the help they need from universities. Now you're saying you agree with this. What the OMA tells us is that the CIBC alone carries \$100 million in debt for medical students. That's just one bank and that's obviously in addition to OSAP or help from Ontario universities. Are you still going to stand by your Premier when he gives these medical students short shrift, when yesterday he literally gives them the kiss-off and doesn't understand for a moment that Ontario working families are having trouble sending their students to medical school? He said a number of things yesterday.

Tell us in the House today that as the Minister of Health, facing doctor shortages in 109 communities—to date you have open resident spaces for medical students who want to practise family medicine because those students aren't selecting family medicine, so that you are having real problems today in our system—you could honestly stand by and agree with the Premier?

Hon Mr Clement: I have four million answers to that question because \$4 million is the amount of free tuition we allocate as part of the Mike Harris team's budget to ensure that medical students who seek to practise in under-serviced areas get free tuition. Did you hear me? Free tuition. That is the government's policy. If you are paying more in tuition than \$4,500 plus ancillary fees, we help you out. We have the bursaries; we have the loans; we have the grants; we are there for you. We are there for the medical students who need the help.

But if you're asking me whether the rich and exclusive should get free tuition or freer tuition in Mike Harris's

Ontario, I don't think so. I don't think that's a proper use of government money and I think we have to offer the leadership to make those tough decisions that clearly they know nothing about on that side of the House.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): My question is for the Deputy Premier. It wasn't just Durham regional council yesterday that was added in repudiating your government for its inadequate funding for municipalities in the greater Toronto area. We also have David Crombie, a former mayor of Toronto, a Tory and a trusted adviser, who in releasing the Vital Signs project, a partnership of academia and government working on government statistics, said, "It is no longer possible for federal and provincial governments to decide they're not going to be responsible for urban issues."

I'm wondering if you can address—are you having difficulty hearing me? I just read a quote from David Crombie. Yesterday he said, "It is no longer possible for federal and provincial governments to decide they're not going to be responsible for urban issues." Can you tell us what your government is going to do to address what happened yesterday in Durham region, repudiating your government's funding formula for hospitals, and what you're going to do in response to the Vital Signs project announced yesterday?

Hon Jim Flaherty (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): As you know, there was a major issue in Durham region that the regional councillors, as I understand it, dealt with yesterday. I regret that there's this quite remarkable difference of opinion with respect to the capital needs of the Rouge Valley Health System and the Lakeridge health system in Durham region. I've heard the views of some of the councillors but I've also heard the views of the members of the board and the CEOs of the hospitals.

As you know, there is a practice in the regions outside of Durham region to contribute some capital funding to support capital expansion of hospitals. The provincial government has committed more than \$200 million to those projects in Durham region.

These are difficult issues for local hospital officials and local councillors to deal with. I understand the result yesterday was negative in terms of additional funding for the hospitals, and that's something that will have to be resolved in the local region.

Mr Smitherman: I see, Deputy Premier, that you've chosen to focus only on the Durham aspect of the question I asked. I find it interesting that you take this nonchalant approach in answering the question. It speaks little to the efforts you made, which were repudiated.

I gather you, along with those hospitals, have been involved as a lobbyist in an attempt to get regional councillors in Durham to support the imposition of extraordinary taxes on local taxpayers.

In addition to having been turned back in your attempt to pass your responsibilities and the broad base of the

provincial tax-gathering capacity to municipalities, we also have this Vital Signs report that was released yesterday, speaking to the vitality of the greater Toronto area.

I think you would understand that the economic prospects for the greater Toronto area are funded in large measure on quality-of-life measurements. This has always been Toronto's economic advantage. I'm wondering what efforts you're taking specifically to address the concerns raised in this report to get back to the point where the municipalities in the greater Toronto area are providing an enhanced, rather than diminished, quality of life for their residents.

Hon Mr Flaherty: I must say I find the quality of life in the area of the province that I represent, Durham region, to be a very high quality of life and I think my constituents feel that we have a very high quality of life in Whitby and Ajax.

Having said that, there are important issues surrounding smart growth, our government's policy with respect to planned growth in Ontario. There are important issues relating to the 400-series highways; important issues relating to various types of transit—rail, light rail and other types of transit. There are issues relating to other types of infrastructure, as the member opposite, I'm sure, appreciates.

A number of those issues of course are vital, not only to urban life in the greater Toronto area but in the entire Golden Horseshoe. Not being too Toronto-centred, if I may say that, these issues also affect Kitchener-Waterloo, Barrie, Orillia, Peterborough, Cobourg, Port Hope and St Catharines. Many of these issues are matters that we've been considering and listening to in budget preparation. The budget is next Wednesday.

Mr Smitherman: We heard a lengthy answer from the Deputy Premier about his capacity to listen and we've heard that from the Minister of Transportation and other ministers of the crown, trying to gather some energy and steam behind these hollow words of "smart growth." But you said nothing in your answer except to say that quality-of-life issues for residents in Ajax are high.

I would turn your attention to the matter of transit and road gridlock and to the matter of yesterday's rejection of municipal taxpayers being forced to pay a disproportionate and unwieldy share of capital funding for hospitals. What in specific terms are you prepared to do to reverse this trend toward more gridlock on our roads and toward hospitals with too big a portion of their capital costs being borne on the backs of local property taxpayers?

Hon Mr Flaherty: I think the honourable member probably does know—if he doesn't know, he should know—that many municipalities in Ontario contribute to capital funding of hospitals. So this is not a blanket situation, as he seems to be trying to portray it with respect to Durham region.

Having said that, traffic concerns, transit concerns, GO Transit concerns, gridlock concerns are very important to the quality of life of all of us who live in Ontario.

These are issues not only in the greater Toronto area but in the Golden Horseshoe area and also, quite frankly, in the Ottawa area, the Kitchener-Waterloo area, the Hamilton area, and some gateway issues in Niagara and also in the Windsor area. We're reviewing all of these issues. I certainly have heard a great deal about them as part of our extensive consultations in preparation for the provincial budget. Stay tuned for May 9.

1410

AIR QUALITY

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. I'm asking you to put lives ahead of profits and order Ontario Power Generation to stop exporting dirty, coal-fired power during smog alerts. On hot, smog alert days like today, people all over the United States crank up their air conditioners. They force up the demand for power, and thus the price for power. Then Ontario Power Generation cranks up their coal-fired stations to export more power. Will you use your authority to order Ontario Power Generation to stop the export of dirty, coal-fired power to the United States on hot, smog alert days like today?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of the Environment): As the leader of the opposition knows, we have taken steps already to ensure that we reduce the emissions into the air. We have indicated that Lakeview needs to stop burning coal by April 2005. We also have put in place reductions in emissions for nitrous oxides and sulphur oxides.

Mr Hampton: Minister, the Lakeview issue is important, but this is a separate issue. It's a simple story: on hot, smog alert days, people in the United States crank up their air conditioners. The demand for power goes up, the price goes up and Ontario Power Generation cranks up their coal-fired stations to feed that market. What's the result? More smog, right here. During one smog alert day last May, Ontario Power Generation cranked up its coal-fired generating stations to an extent that it was equal to putting 800,000 more smog-spewing cars on the road right here. You've got the power to prevent that, Minister. Will you do it?

Hon Mrs Witmer: As the leader of the third party well knows, 50% of all air pollution in this province comes from the United States. Having said that, as you know, we very successfully were able to intervene in a Supreme Court case that forced some of the other American states to move forward with their environmental plans, and eventually we will see a reduction of about 20% in this province.

Having said that, we're still accountable for the other 50%. As the leader of the third party knows, we have been moving forward to take the appropriate steps. We started with the anti-smog plan. We have moved forward with Drive Clean. Most recently, as I indicated to you, we have moved forward to cap coal burning at Lakeview. By the way, that's a decision your government could

have made as well, but you didn't take any steps whatsoever to do so.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Final supplementary.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): The reality is that air pollution has got worse under your government. That's a fact; it's in the records. We are asking you to do something today. You can do something now. There are long-term solutions that we bring to your attention time and time again, like bringing in our transportation trust fund. Funding public transportation needs to be done again. But what we are asking you to do today is to save lives now. So I'm going to put it to you again: will you protect people's lungs from smog and tell the OPG not to export coal-fired power during smog alerts like today, or is it more important to you to let people suffer so the OPG can make greater profits? Minister, which is it?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I refer this to the Minister of Energy.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): We do take into consideration the air quality when running our coal-fired plants and we do curtail their use during smog alert days. The Honourable Minister of the Environment is also quite correct: most of the air pollution comes from the 205 coal plants that are in our air shed in the United States. We have five coal plants. Today our emissions standards and the tough new environmental standards the Minister of the Environment announced—but even today, before those standards come into effect, we have the cleanest electrons in North America, a record that this government is proud of.

COMPETITIVE ELECTRICITY MARKET

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): We'll try again with the Minister of Energy. You told us last week that your dirty deal to sell off Ontario's electricity system wouldn't result in massive exports to the United States. You said there weren't the transmission lines to do that. But then US Vice-President Dick Cheney came here this week and said he'll build the transmission lines so that our power can be sold in the United States. Then your Premier tells us that he thinks that's a fine idea. In fact, he thinks it would be OK to build more nuclear plants in Ontario to feed the American market.

Minister, I want you to tell us and the people of Ontario again that a massive sell-off of Ontario's electricity generation capacity to the United States and corporations there isn't going to happen and that it won't increase the price Ontarians have to pay for power.

Hon Jim Wilson (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): The only plant we've put into the hands of another company is the Bruce power plant, which is now owned by British Energy, which is Bruce power and the Power Workers' Union and the other union, which is the society of electrical professionals. So if the honourable member doesn't think that's a good deal, then he should say so and should talk to his union counterparts, who

have an equity position, who want the jobs and who agree it's a very positive step that we've taken. The people of the Bruce Peninsula and the Bruce riding think it's a very positive step we've taken. Hundreds and hundreds of jobs have been saved in that area.

Yes, we will sell excess power to the United States, as his government did, as the Liberals did and as Bill Davis did when the plants were built. The people of Ontario will be looked after first, and the excess power will be sold.

Mr Hampton: You tried to tell us last week that there are rules which would prevent our electricity from being sold off for a higher price in the United States and that Ontario consumers would be protected. We talked with officials in your ministry who said that's just not the case. There is no authority to prevent that. Then the Premier told us here yesterday that he's all in favour of massive exports. So if you're going to sell the stations, if Ontario doesn't own them any more, if private corporations own them and your Premier is in favour of massive exports and the Americans want to build the transmission lines and those private corporations want to sell it in the United States so they can get a higher price and more profit, who is going to look after the consumers in Ontario? Your Premier isn't, the Americans aren't and you don't have the power to do it. How are you going to stop power prices in Ontario from rising to the price they're now at in New York—doubling, tripling? How are you going to prevent that?

Hon Mr Wilson: Mr Speaker, he's the only one in the province who seems to have these theories. He's an island unto himself with respect to this debate, and he simply doesn't listen to all the answers I've provided over the last three weeks.

Let me give you the purpose of the Energy Competition Act and one of the responsibilities of the independent market operator. By the way, if Mr Cheney wants to build hydro lines, he'll have to get a licence not only from the independent market operator but also from Floyd Laughren of the Ontario Energy Board. Ontarians will decide how much power goes to the United States and how much we'll participate in a continental energy policy that Jean Chrétien is spouting with Mr Bush. By the way, I, as chair of Canada's energy ministers, have yet to be consulted on this whole scheme.

The act is clear. I don't know what officials in my ministry—you probably asked them one question and me another. That's what you usually do, Mr Hampton. It says one of the purposes is "to protect the interests of consumers with respect to prices and the reliability and quality of electricity service." In the—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker: Stop the clock for a moment, please.

Mr Hampton: Could I ask for unanimous consent for the minister to read the next paragraph, please?

The Speaker: We're not getting into that.

I do beg the indulgence of the House: earlier on the point of order when the Minister of Community and Social Services rose, I understood him to say the compendium will be coming. Apparently, he did have it in his hands and did say he had it, so we are going to allow the statement to continue. He had 16 minutes and 41 seconds. Then of course, we will have the replies from the critics as well. The clock will revert. We're keeping the time on the clock.

1420

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Speaker: With the greatest of respect to you, I understand what you've just said and I appreciate the misunderstanding. But with respect, sir, it's my submission to you that the Speaker does not have unilateral authority to alter the course of events of the day.

I appreciate what you said and I appreciate, with the greatest respect, that perhaps it was a misunderstanding, and I appreciate quite frankly that this puts the minister in a difficult position. However, I repeat to you, sir, that the Speaker is bound by the standing orders just as we are. There is nothing, in my submission, in the standing orders—and I appreciate what the Speaker is trying to do and I can't suggest that it's unfair in and of itself. But I put to you that the Speaker in this assembly has no remedial power or residual power to unilaterally do what the Speaker is proposing to do today, in other words, to upset the course of events.

Once ministerial statements is over, they're over; we then proceed. Of course, unanimous consent can be sought from the House to upset the orders of the day, but, with respect, I submit the Speaker doesn't have that residual power. Notwithstanding your intent, you are beyond your jurisdiction in attempting to do what you're doing.

The Speaker: I thank the member. I do not believe I am beyond. I'm going to exercise the power and the minister is going to make the statement. Minister.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WELFARE REFORM

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for children, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Speaker, I appreciate your time.

We recognize that sometimes the greatest barrier to employment is simply the lack of experience. That's why welfare placements remain a very important part of our welfare reform initiative. Our government believes that one of the real successes of our reform has been our placements, which have allowed people on welfare to acquire the new work skills, gain valuable job experience, get work references and find paid employment. Our government intends to see through on our commitment to

double the number of placements by the year 2002 so that more people will have the opportunity to benefit from this important part of our welfare program.

I'm pleased to report that the early indication is that we are well on our way to meeting that commitment and that our government will intensify its efforts to make certain that people who need a work placement to get job-ready will have one.

One of the reasons I'm confident we'll reach our target is that the Harris government is now leading by example. One of the biggest problems with welfare in the past was the lack of leadership from within the Ontario government. The latest numbers across the province government show that we are exceeding our own targets by more than 300 placements.

The next point in our five-point action plan, and another key Blueprint commitment, is caseworker training. Effective caseworkers are essential, I believe, to our welfare reform efforts, and I have seen this in every part of the province. It's caseworkers who are on the ground each and every day working with participants, helping them get the skills and the experience they need to break down the barriers to employment.

We know the job of a caseworker has changed a significant amount over the past six years. It used to be that much of what they did was about handing out cheques. Now they have the tools to give welfare recipients the hand up they need to move from welfare to work. The great news is that caseworkers are excited about their jobs again. I met a caseworker recently in Parry Sound who was positively bursting with excitement when she told me how good she felt helping someone she was working with get a job that actually paid more than she was making.

Any success the government has had in reforming the welfare system is due in large part to and dependent on the excellent job being done by Ontario Works caseworkers right across the province. Good teamwork is essential and nowhere is this more important, in my judgment, than in welfare reform. Welfare caseworkers have responded to the challenge of welfare reforms and have been instrumental in helping people move from welfare to work.

Building on their success, the government will launch an exciting new training initiative that will help equip caseworkers to help even more people realize the dignity that comes with a job and the pride that comes with independence. We'll provide an advance training program for caseworkers on the new focus of their profession, which is helping put people back to work.

The next point in our action plan is to provide \$10 million to help those individuals with multiple barriers to employment. As our caseload declines, there are some people on welfare who have increasingly complex barriers to employment. Our government believes that no one should be left behind. That's why we want to provide additional support to people who've been on welfare for more than two years or have one or more obstacles between them and a job.

We will be asking municipalities to submit proposals on how they can help these people, those who are most in need, get ready for work. Breaking down the barriers to employment for these individuals may be our government's biggest job, but it's a job that we're committed to tackling.

The final point in our action plan is mandatory drug treatment. Our government completed consultation with more than 600 individuals and groups and is moving forward with our Blueprint commitment to help those people move from drug dependency to self-sufficiency. The government wants to help people on welfare get ready to work. We want to break down the barriers to employment so that people can answer the call of a prospective employer. Whatever stands in their way, whether it's the lack of experience, whether it's poor reading skills or whether it's an addiction to alcohol or drugs, we think the government should help.

Senior ministry officials and I met with a good number of people regarding our mandatory drug treatment policy. We spoke with Keith Norton, the head of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. I spoke with Alan Borovoy, the director of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. I spoke with Sid Ryan, the Ontario president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I spoke with welfare recipients who have been addicted to drugs, I spoke with addiction treatment providers and I spoke with caseworkers. We listened and we learned.

In truth, we met a lot of really passionate and dedicated individuals who are doing an excellent job each and every day to help people in this province beat addictions to alcohol and drugs. The input of these people really made us sit back and carefully consider our next steps. We know that addiction isn't easy to solve. Often there are complex social and health issues involved. Addiction impacts the whole family. Its destructive force isn't isolated on the user.

We also learned about the genuine fear a lot of alcoholics and drug addicts have of dealing with the underlying reality of their addiction and how it can become a coping mechanism for them.

These talks helped shape our policy. We heard that to focus only on illicit drugs would miss the point, as many people in fact are addicted to more than one substance. That's why we've chosen a comprehensive approach that will include alcohol and prescription drugs as part of the program. We heard that chemical tests demonstrate use, not abuse. That's why specialized staff in welfare offices will complete an initial screening and, if necessary, clients will be referred to more comprehensive assessment services. We heard that few go into addiction treatment voluntarily. That's why our program will be mandatory, and those who refuse treatment will cause themselves to be ineligible for welfare.

We heard treatment is a long-term process, that it often takes someone several attempts to quit. That's why the program will not tie welfare benefits to success. If someone makes an honest attempt to deal with their addictions and they fail, we'll stick with them and we'll try again.

We heard that we should use a phased-in approach to ensure we have the time to get it right. That's why we will start our mandatory drug treatment program in three to five municipalities early in the new year and we'll extend it across the province to all 47 municipalities over 47 months.

In shaping this policy, our government has listened to a lot of different people. We heard a lot of people talk about what they would like to see in our policy. We also heard people talk about what they didn't want to see in our policies. But at the end of the day, some individuals we'll respectfully disagree with.

One of the more compelling stories we heard was how people addicted to drugs or alcohol almost always need a push to finally go and get help. Sometimes that push comes from a spouse or other family member. Sometimes that push comes from employers. Sometimes that push comes from a friend. Unfortunately, that push has never come from the welfare system. We think that's wrong. We think it's time that the welfare system in Ontario is there to help people whose addiction to alcohol or drugs is a barrier to their getting a job.

Having completed extensive consultation and study, the government will introduce mandatory addiction treatment for welfare recipients. To turn our back on just one of these people, in my judgment, would be wrong. Our five-point action plan on welfare reform is a further attempt by our government to ensure that people on welfare are ready to work. We want to help caseworkers get the skills, we want to help welfare recipients remove the barriers and we want to help employers fill the positions so we can continue to make Ontario the very best place to live, work and raise a family for all of us.

1430

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): What an appalling ministerial statement. It's just unbelievable, really nothing more than another attack on the poorest citizens in our province who have been under attack by this government from the moment they came into power.

What is astonishing is that from the moment this minister went into a press conference in November and took a box filled with syringes and poured them on the table, he made it very clear what his intentions were: he was going to define poor people and people on social assistance as drug addicts. Clearly he's determined to go ahead.

Today he's added one other element to this that needs to be mentioned. He's talking about mandatory literacy tests. We know that people want as much help as they can get in terms of literacy. That service is being provided. But now they're saying they're going to kick people off welfare unless they agree to mandatory literacy tests and they pass or fail. That is just another cruel attack on poor people.

Let me get back to the mandatory drug testing, though, because the truth is that what the minister announced today, and I hope it was noticed by everyone, may actually be worse than what he was talking about back in

November. He's acknowledged that urine testing and chemical testing are actually pretty tricky stuff. So what they're going to do now is have screening tests that are essentially paper screening. What he seems to be setting up, and I look forward to talking about this some more, is an opportunity or a demand on his part for people to answer these questions—I've seen some of these screening tests—and if you don't answer the way you're supposed to, you're going to be told you're going into drug treatment whether you like it or not.

You know something? There's not one penny announced here for addiction treatment centres—nothing at all—and nothing at all in terms of literacy testing as well. There's nothing there at all. It's one of those vague opportunities they want to use to bash people.

He talks about a consultation paper or the consultations he did with 600 people. You say you've spoken to Keith Norton. I'll tell you, Minister, I'd like to know how recently you've spoken to Keith Norton. I spoke to him very recently and I certainly didn't get the impression you had given him an opportunity to respond to this. This is ultimately a way for you to try and get around the fact that this is a human rights violation. People with addiction and drug abuse and alcohol problems are people who have disabilities in very many cases. The fact is that you are trying to get around that by doing it in this fashion, and you know that. So I certainly would like to know that.

This consultation paper: you talked to Alan Borovoy. I'll tell you something, I think you should release that consultation paper to the House. I think we should have an opportunity to look at that consultation paper to see exactly what came out of that, because that is obviously something you don't want to release. Do you know something? We've spoken to a lot of people as well and they were very clear. You give a passing mention to the fact that not everybody agrees with you. The fact is that the vast majority don't agree with you and I think you know that. You're just so darned determined to go ahead with this, no matter what, and to try to paint the poor people of our province in such a fashion.

The truth is that you have an opportunity to help the poor people in our province, to help those who are living in poverty, and you've done nothing but attack them from the word go.

Let me make one quick reference as well to the hard-to-serve population. You've got dollars attached to that which you're going to give to municipalities. Ultimately those are just code words for a way to try and get those people off the system as well. It's another attack on the people who are more hard to serve, and it's absolutely upsetting to see it framed in that manner. "We're going to basically give the municipalities some money so they can do our job for us." There are already so many stories out there of municipalities being put into a terrible position in terms of the work they have to do to follow through on the minister's mandates.

A couple of weeks ago we asked this government and this minister and the Premier to look at doing a social

audit. You want to talk about your process, about your policies working. We think you should at least do—they even do it in the States, by the way. You like to follow the Americans. At least they make sure there's a legislated obligation that when you do major social reforms, there has to be an outcome evaluation done. We think that needs to happen as well.

We call on you to do a social audit, to be able to see whether or not your programs are working. If you're not afraid of the policies you've put forward, surely you will accept that there should be an evaluation of them. Are more children living in poverty? Is it more difficult for people on social assistance to survive? We know it is. We know that shelter costs are skyrocketing; we know that home heating oil is skyrocketing; we know that the price of gas for our car is skyrocketing. You make no mention of that at all. You continue to simply ignore that.

Your announcement today is offensive. You've added one more insult to the poor people in our province by making it clear that people have to take mandatory literacy tests or else they're going to get kicked off the system. It's another little wedge you're pushing in there.

I think, Minister, you know well that we want to see the consultation paper you've put out there. I think it's our right to have it. We think what you're doing is actually sneakier and more dangerous ultimately and is going to hurt more people. I sure want to know whether Keith Norton of the Human Rights Commission has had an opportunity to see this in advance, because I'd be very surprised if he can accept this. This is a violation of human rights and you should be ashamed of yourself.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): The most telling indicator that welfare was and continues to be a dismal failure was the action by this government to bribe municipalities, that they would get more money if they could exceed their welfare target. The sad reality is that this government has downloaded so many costs on to municipalities for so many services that some municipalities have actually had to do that.

We know that the majority of welfare clients are not in placements that will lead to full-time, permanent work. They are being registered in upgrading or they are being registered in résumé writing. They are not in positions that will lead to full-time employment to get them back into a productive place in the economy. If the government wanted to do something about upgrading and remedial work, it would fund adult education in the province of Ontario again.

The minister says that the Ontario government has exceeded its placement by 300 jobs. I ask the question, Minister, how many of those jobs were formally OPSEU-paid jobs, where people have been laid off and are now being replaced by Ontario Works clients? We had a call from someone in North Bay who said they had a new client come into their office yesterday who is taking a position. They were asked to welcome her as an OW client. She is replacing someone who was laid off from a position two years ago. That's what's happening. If that's what you're doing in the public service, imagine the

message you're sending to your friends in the private sector, which is, "Go ahead, lay off your workers. Use workfare. Get money from this government to put workfare clients in your place of work. After they finish your placement, fire them and let's start again." That's how we get rid of full-time, hard-working people so the government can hit its workfare targets.

We also know, with respect to the supports needed to make workfare work, that the child care component has been a dismal failure too. KPMG in 1998 told this government that there would have to be a massive increase in funding for regulated child care for workfare to work in this province. What did this government do? It has cut regulated child care funding by over 15%. This government was actually spending \$43 less per child in regulated care between 1995 and 1998.

We also know that municipalities that are oh so desperate to exceed their targets in order to get some more money to deal with their other downloaded costs are now bumping working families who are on subsidized waiting lists by workfare clients. They are doing that, bumping those hard-working families out who are on a waiting list for subsidized care, because the more people they can get into child care, the more they can bump up their numbers and hopefully the more money they can get. We heard an example of that when we were in Niagara of a working mom, Marney MacLean, who could not get a subsidized space, but if she was forced on to OW, would go to the top of the list in Niagara for a spot, and she was working.

With respect to the announcement re drug testing and mandatory assistance, I would like to know what Keith Norton had to say. I bet he told the minister this violates the Human Rights Code. I would like to know what Alan Borovoy told this ministry. I bet he told you, Minister, that this violates any number of civil liberties. I'd like to know what Sid Ryan said. I hope he told you that his workers are not going to impose testing on workfare recipients in their offices.

There is no evidence, absolutely none, that welfare recipients use drugs or alcohol to a greater extent than anyone in the general population—no evidence whatsoever. The testing we're going to need to have mandatory treatment will require, obviously, mandatory testing.

I ask these questions: who pays for it? Addictions research has already told this government that it will cost at least \$2,000 to do a real test to determine if someone is actually addicted. Who's going to pay for that? Who will do the testing? You're asking people who work for municipalities to pit themselves against their own clients, for goodness' sake, to think that they might be on drugs and then to go forward with the testing. Where are people going to get treatment? We know there are any number of programs across this province for drug and alcohol treatment that have huge waiting lists now. The government says nothing with respect to who's going to pay or where the treatment is going to be provided.

The most important question, though, is, why is the government doing this? The answer is that this is one more opportunity for this government to bash welfare

recipients, to attack the poorest Ontarians, to vilify the poor, because you're not talking about mandatory testing or treatment for anyone else who gets public money for their livelihood. You're not talking about testing MPPs or doctors or nurses or police officers or judges or OPSEU staff or anyone else. No, you're accusing only welfare recipients because it makes you folks oh so happy to bash the poor. It's a disgusting announcement; it's a disgusting action. Shame on all of you for supporting any of this.

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ORAL QUESTIONS (continued)

TUITION FEES

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The Ontario Liberal Party is committed to accessibility to medical school for all students. Yesterday in question period, the Premier, and earlier the health minister, made a number of statements that were incorrect and need to be corrected. I'd like to set the record straight.

Ontario's medical school tuition is the highest in the country. Next year's tuition will reach \$15,000 a year in some schools. Other provinces still offer tuition under \$5,000. The \$22,000 that the health minister referred to earlier does not go to the students, it goes to the institutions. It does not go to offset their loans, it does not go toward their tuition.

We are losing our students to other jurisdictions. Last year, 41% of University of Toronto out-of-province applicants went elsewhere. Why wouldn't they, with tuition being one third of the cost? Unlike what the Premier was purporting yesterday, at the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario, 25% of the students will graduate with a debt of \$100,000 and more, not the \$28,000 that the Premier purported yesterday.

The facts are clear: medical tuition has doubled, and in some cases tripled, since deregulation. This government's policies ensure that only the wealthy will be able to become doctors. Minister, will you commit today to capping tuition for medical schools until you have put in place adequate funding mechanisms for all students?

Hon Dianne Cunningham (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, minister responsible for women's issues): I thank my colleague for the question. I would like to start with the point of adequate assistance for the students. I believe we have done that. As a matter of fact, we have been advised that at the University of Western Ontario assistance is available for any student who goes for assistance in any course, but especially medicine. I will tell you now that one third of the tuition is set aside for medical students and other students. Each medical student has a consultant or counsellor who works with them, and they go and they apply. There are three

different funds: they have OSAP, they have the set-aside fund and they have a grant. They are taken care of.

Yes, it is a fact that students do graduate with different levels of debt. Year by year, we forgive the amount of money over \$7,000 that students in fact—

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

Mrs Bountrogianni: The Premier also said yesterday, in his own special way, that if there is any student who is not accessing medical school because of financial difficulties, to call his office. He made a similar promise last year to families who couldn't buy Christmas presents for their children. When the families called, he referred them to local charities. Is that what your generous Premier is going to do if medical students do take him up on his offer and call—maybe refer them to the nearest food bank? Do you support your Premier and his empty and vacant promises?

Hon Mrs Cunningham: As I have already stated, if a medical student is having difficulty, they have been assigned counsellors at the medical schools in the universities to assist them. I will say that the disappointment of this debate is implying that students who are qualified to go to medical school and who in fact get into medical school have to have money. That is not the case. In fact, at the University of Western Ontario, the one I know best, the provost actually stated in a survey they did that this is not the case, that the amount of money parents have has nothing to do with young people who want to go to medical school.

My message today to young people who want to go to medical school is, get good marks, pass the tests and you will be accepted, and this government will help anyone who needs assistance.

LABOUR AGENCY REFORM

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): My question is for the Minister of Labour. In February, your ministry released a white paper entitled Looking Forward: A New Tribunal for Ontario's Workplaces. This document put forward some proposals that would address concerns that have been raised for some time about the various agencies that deal with workplace issues.

I understand that you have been very busy over the past two months consulting with stakeholders involved with the agencies affected by this proposal. Would you please take a moment to tell this House about some of the input you have received during these consultations.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I appreciate the question from the member and hope to have many more, actually. Thank you very much.

I personally have attended seven round table discussions outside Toronto on this particular issue—Thunder Bay, Windsor, Ottawa; 20 consultation sessions in Toronto. We've met with over 250 representatives from both sides of the bar, people who use the various agencies on a very regular basis, and the ministry has been meeting on

a regular basis with the other five ministries that have been affected.

The key features to this particular approach to agency reform are to return to the initial mandate of the tribunals, which is expertise, quick decisions, at a reasonable cost. The obvious next matter is to provide single-window access for appeals; to improve regional delivery; and to reduce the multiple-forms appeals.

We hope to have this legislation ready for this session to introduce in this House and begin second reading. I'd be very interested to hear the concerns and issues brought forward by the members of my caucus.

Mr Miller: Thank you. Can you expand on the time frame for the proposed legislation, please?

Hon Mr Stockwell: We'll continue with discussions with the stakeholders. I'm very proud of the fact that we met with a number of stakeholders before this legislation would come forward.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Stockwell: It's important to deal with the issues.

The member opposite said we met with friends of the government. He's right. We've met with CUPE representatives; we've met with OPSEU representatives; we met with the CAW; we went to Windsor to meet with a series of union executive leaders; we invited Wayne Samuelson to meet with us. When we have these kinds of discussions we invite all our friends, and they're our friends because they want to see a strong Ontario too. A strong Ontario means jobs and reasonable access to tribunals.

The member from Hamilton shouts out once again, "Only the friends get access to this government." He's right. All Ontarians are our friends because a good Ontario is good for them and good for us.

MANDATORY DRUG TESTING

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, from the moment that you took that box of syringes and turned them upside down for full display on the table, you were determined to go ahead with mandatory drug testing, despite the fact that all those who work in the field told you it was a bad idea, including, may I say, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, a government-funded agency who spoke up. And may I say also Keith Norton, the head of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Can you tell us today, Minister, what position the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health is taking on your announcement today, and for that matter, can you also tell us whether you have spoken to Keith Norton and got his position on this as early as today as well?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for children, minister responsible for francophone affairs): The first one, I suspect, is against; the second, I suspect, doesn't give rulings in advance of seeing the policy's

implementation. I think the human rights commissioner is not going to take a government press release or a government policy position paper and make a ruling on the scene. It would be inappropriate for him to do so.

I can tell the member opposite that we engaged in extensive consultations. The ministry met with more than 600 individuals, with groups. We met with a wide range of opinion on the issue. We did meet with Mr Norton. He raised a good number of concerns.

I think the policy position that we've tabled today, the position that we'll move forward to implement, is a better policy as a result of those decisions. Particularly the biggest part of the policy, which is tying someone's ability to participate in Ontario Works to their participation requirements will be a good policy. Our motivation is to try to help people move from welfare to work. It can be tough to get a job if you're facing a drug addiction. We want to help people combat that and defeat it.

Mr Gravelle: It may be a better policy from their perspective, Mr Speaker, in terms of kicking people off welfare, simply because of the fact that they've changed the policy and have now done it through a screening process that will actually make it easier for them to eliminate people from the system.

In other words, you did not decide or choose to contact the human rights commissioner and say, "Mr Norton, this is the position we're going to be taking. What are your thoughts on it?" Surely, that would have made some sense. You obviously are not clear on what the position is for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

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You have spoken about your consultation. You've spoken about the 600 people. You've even mentioned some names. Don't you think the least you can do is allow us to see this consultation paper, to let us see what people have said about this? Rather, you just take this and make your decision based on this, as you are determined to do. Will you release that consultation to the members of the Legislature today so we can actually see what positions were taken outside your thinking?

Hon Mr Baird: There was no production of a global report pertaining to this policy. What we did was go out and speak to a whole lot of folks, people who provide treatment right across the province. We talked to caseworkers. I talked to one caseworker in a part of the province who said that someone, an Ontario Works recipient, had been coming into her office for a good number of years, obviously combating a drug addiction, and she was absolutely powerless to do anything about it.

My mandate as Minister of Community and Social Services is to provide the supports to people to help them get a job. It can be difficult to get a job if you're facing a drug addiction. I appreciate that the member opposite disagrees with the policy. That disagreement and that objection were not very loud during the election in 1999. We consulted broadly with the people across Ontario back in 1999, and I know this was a big issue in the provincial election campaign. This is a government that keeps its election commitments.

PHARMACARE

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The minister is well aware that before the 1997 federal election, the Liberal Party of Canada printed a red book that contained a commitment to a national pharmacare program that would ensure that "all Canadians have access to medically necessary drugs within the public health care system." They continued by saying—again this is a direct quotation from the federal Liberal red book—"We will develop with these groups the timetable and fiscal framework for the implementation of universal public coverage for medically necessary drugs."

It's been almost four years and two federal elections later and we have yet to hear any concrete details about the pharmacare program from the federal government. Will the minister provide this House with an update on the status of the government of Canada's promise to provide a pharmacare program in relation to what Ontario's patients need?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I thank the member for Waterloo-Wellington for the question, and indeed I have heard nothing in my deliberations with the government of Canada to indicate that this has been discussed or that they wish to discuss it with us. We've signalled our intention to fully engage in the national dialogue on health care reform that is being headed up by Roy Romanow. We want to work with Mr Romanow. We want to ensure that publicly funded, universally accessible health care remains viable and sustainable, not only in the short run but in the long run. We believe that pharmacare, a national program, should be discussed because we've maintained that everything should be on the table for discussion. As long as Mr Romanow sticks to his plan to keep an open mind, which I think he will, we look forward to contributing to that national debate.

Mr Arnott: I want to thank the minister for his answer and indicate—I can report from my own experience—that the government of Canada will not even acknowledge what seemed like a grand design for a pharmacare program, and now it seems like just another broken Grit promise. I wrote to Prime Minister Chrétien on February 23 of this year, about two months ago, asking if it was his government's intention to move forward with pharmacare. More than two months have passed and I have yet to receive a comprehensive reply, except for a note from one of his staffers indicating they had received my letter.

Just over a year ago, all parties of this House provided support for my private member's resolution calling for the restoration of the federal health care funds that the federal government had cut, and for the establishment of an escalator clause to ensure the increased funding kept pace with the rising costs of operating our health system. Published accounts say that the Premier of Ontario has now written to Roy Romanow requesting that the royal commission on health care make an interim recom-

mendation for an immediate escalator to the Canada health and social transfer, the federal program that supports health care in Ontario.

Could the minister update the House on Ontario's health care priorities and our expectations with regard to those areas where the government of Canada persists in underfunding our province's health care system?

Hon Mr Clement: I think we should acknowledge in this House the work of the member from Waterloo-Wellington.

Applause.

Hon Mr Clement: He has done a commendable job of reminding the federal government of a very important Liberal campaign promise, and he deserves every amount of that applause.

I want you to know that Premier Harris has been the strongest advocate of all of the Premiers for equitable health care funding for the health care system delivered by the provinces. We believe that the federal government could do more and should do more for fairer funding of our health care system. We have called for at least \$1.2 billion in additional funding from the federal government, and that simply brings their contributions up to the 1994 levels, a far cry from the 50-50 funding formula promise that is so remarked upon with an amount of pride. The Canada Health Act is a matter of pride by the federal government, but they're not living up to their funding commitments. We have called for an immediate cost escalator, with the federal government paying for 50% of any annual increases in health care costs. Perhaps the brave actions of the member from Waterloo-Wellington could be repeated on the other side of this Legislature.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, as you prepare your budget, I ask you to stand up for minimum wage earners. Today, the Centre for Social Justice released a damning report. It shows that visible minority workers are four times more likely to have a university degree than the rest of us, yet they get paid 30% less.

You can do something about that, Deputy Premier. Will you raise the minimum wage to \$7.50 an hour to help address this problem?

Hon Jim Flaherty (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): I refer this to the Minister of Labour.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I understand the member opposite introduced a bill again today with respect to the minimum wage. We must examine the minimum wage in the context of the decade of, say, the 1990s, rather than individually in selective years that he simply chooses to quote from.

During the 1990s, the minimum wage was raised by 37%. There was a fairly substantial increase to the minimum wage at that time. We understood that fact. When we came into government, there was a 37% increase. We are very competitive with neighbouring jurisdictions. We

rank third in Canada, and we're very competitive with our neighbours to the south.

The arguments that you continue to put forward are premised on I'm not sure exactly what. From our comparative notes and studies that we've done, we are not at the top, agreed, but we aren't anywhere near the bottom of the minimum wage in this country. We are at the top third of provinces in this country. So as far as I'm concerned, the minimum wage needs to be at a competitive rate. The competitive rate that we have pegged it at, at this point in time, we think is competitive and, by jurisdiction, a fair remuneration.

Mr Hampton: The Minister of Labour knows full well that our major economic trading partner is the United States. The minimum wage in the United States, expressed in Canadian dollars, is now a little bit in excess of \$7.50.

But he should look at this report, because what it shows is that the worst situation is in our cities, where visible minorities now make up to 75% of the population. Too often, they're segregated into low-wage jobs, under-employed and undervalued.

Your government says that it cares about jobs and about prosperity. You and the Deputy Premier can do something about this in the budget next week. You can raise the minimum wage so that it is equivalent to the minimum wage of our major trading partner, the United States: \$7.50 an hour. What do you say, Minister of Labour? What do you say about having a similar minimum wage to what they have now with our major trading partner, the United States?

Hon Mr Stockwell: There are variable rates in the United States with respect to the minimum wage. In some jurisdictions they are marginally higher than us; certainly they are. In other jurisdictions they have less than us. In Ohio, at certain levels they equate to less of a minimum wage than we offer in this province.

The difficulties with your misguided policies when you were in office were that you just simply ignored the prevailing issues and concerns out there when it came to competitiveness and job creation. You created a huge deficit, you priced us out of the marketplace in certain sectors, so therefore we lost jobs, we lost tax dollars, we lost the opportunity to fund health care, we lost the opportunity to fund education.

If you're asking me to adopt your misguided financial approach to government, I won't do it. More importantly, not only will I not do it, I will stand up and proudly proclaim that I will not adopt Bob Rae's misguided financial approach to administrative government. I'm not going to apologize for that. In fact, I will celebrate it.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): You're a sick man.

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask the member for—I'm not certain of her riding, Riverdale—

Interjection: Toronto-Danforth.

Hon Mr Stockwell: —Toronto-Danforth to withdraw that comment. I found it inappropriate and offensive.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I didn't hear it. I was listening to the question. I understand she did say something and it's—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The table did hear it. I will ask you to withdraw it.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I withdraw.

The Speaker: The member for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington may continue.

Mrs Dombrowsky: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. In February 2000, your task force on intensive farming asked Ontarians for input on intensive farming. I made a submission to this task force on behalf of my constituents and indicated that your government must enact provincial standards, and that the cost of implementation, monitoring and enforcing these standards should not be downloaded to farmers or municipalities.

Today in my riding, almost a year and a half later, farmers are waiting, residents are waiting and at least two municipalities—Stone Mills and Loyalist township—are still waiting for you to do what you promised. They are waiting for you to introduce an agricultural operations act.

The Walkerton tragedy has alarmed and alerted the entire province about the need for provincial standards, regulations and enforcement to protect our groundwater and ensure that Ontario families are safe. When will you introduce what you have promised: an agricultural operations act?

Hon Brian Coburn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I thank the member opposite for the question. I want to assure all members of the House that we are committed to ensuring that there is safe, clean drinking water throughout Ontario for everyone. As part of this commitment we have been working, and working diligently, with our stakeholders to develop the best possible approach to address the agricultural operations and the rural environment.

This is a complex issue that affects many people and businesses, and that's why we're working very closely with our stakeholders, with the Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Municipal Affairs, farmers, the stakeholders in agribusiness, municipal stakeholders and environmental stakeholders. It's important that we get this legislation right, that consultation is extensive and that it continue so that we get the appropriate legislation to deal with it.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): It's very interesting. I knew the exact words you were going to use today because "taking the time to get it right" was

a valid comment one year ago. You consulted with farmers, organizations and municipalities. But on July 7, 2000, Minister Hardeman made the commitment to legislation with regulations. I urged you, though, yesterday, to change those key words from "strategy" to "guidelines." A guideline is very different from a regulation and a strategy is a far cry from legislation.

Welcome to the world of Mike Harris, where a minister who was going to do the right job gets shuffled out for doing the right thing. I know very well that the message you delivered yesterday, the statement that was delivered yesterday, Minister, came from the centre. We know who's pulling the strings in this province, and that's the centre.

But I think it's of extreme importance that you clarify to Ontario's agricultural community today why you have retracted, why you've backtracked on that original commitment the previous Minister of Agriculture made. Why are you going backwards? Why strategy? Why guidelines? Why not legislation? Why not regulations?

Hon Mr Coburn: As I indicated in my previous answer, we are consulting extensively with the stakeholders, who have a lot vested in this, whether you're an environmentalist or you're a farmer, on how you protect the land and how you protect their water and how we enhance that—consultation on a complex issue. We've had a variety of suggestions from those stakeholders. We are continuing to work with them to find the best possible solution so that we can enhance the water quality and protect and provide broad sustainability of agriculture and our environment.

WELFARE REFORM

Mr Wayne Wetlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I have a question for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Over the last four months during the inter-session—the Liberals seem to think we don't do anything during those intersession periods—I spent that time meeting with hundreds of my constituents.

Many of those constituents complimented our government, under the leadership of Premier Mike Harris, for the hundreds of thousands of Ontarians who have been able to leave the bondage of welfare and obtain the dignity and independence of a job, and they've complimented us for the 800,000-plus net new jobs we've created.

While these Ontarians who were on welfare are now earning money and enjoying the responsibilities and rewards, including the interpersonal relationships that go along with employment, many constituents wonder whether Kitchener has benefited.

Minister, could you tell my constituents in Kitchener how successful Ontario Works has been in our community?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for children, minister responsible for francophone affairs): When we took office in 1995, the welfare system in this

province was a mess. It was a disgrace, and the people of Ontario asked for a government to take action and clean up a system that wasn't working for people any more.

In the last year, over 50,000 people have participated in community placements, and that's doing a tremendous amount to help people get the skills and experience they need to move from welfare to work. It can be as simple as getting a job reference. It can be as simple as improving your self-esteem. It can be as simple as having something to put down on the "recent job experience" part of a job application.

I am pleased to say that more than 1,100 people took advantage of that opportunity in Kitchener-Waterloo, and that's a tremendously important accomplishment. More than 807,000 net new jobs have been created, and more than 578,000 people have left the welfare system since 1995. That's a record that the people of Ontario are very proud of.

Mr Wettlaufer: That's fine, Minister, but you still didn't tell me what it meant in Kitchener in terms of the number of people who have left welfare. I have talked to a number of constituents who need more supports to help them get back into the workforce, and I'm concerned that they may not benefit from Ontario's economic strength.

This government needs to do more to help these people get back into the workforce. What will you do to address the situation in Kitchener, as well as across the province?

Hon Mr Baird: Over the last fiscal year we saw for the first time in many years the number of people on welfare in Kitchener-Waterloo fall below the 50% mark. More than 50% of the caseload has been able to leave the welfare system, and that's good news.

I'll tell you what we can do to help provide more support for people on social assistance in Kitchener. We'll provide mandatory literacy training to help people beat what can be one of the biggest barriers to their getting a job: the ability to function and use basic math skills. We'll help expand work for welfare, to provide more placements to more people so that they can realize the dignity that comes with a job and the pride that comes with independence.

We'll provide more caseworker training to equip caseworkers, the real heroes in our welfare system, with more skills to be able to provide even more support. We'll provide \$10 million to provide special support to people who have been on welfare for more than two years. Finally, we'll provide help to people who need the services to defeat and to beat drug addiction.

ECONOMIC POLICY

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): My question is to the Minister of Finance. The May 7, 2001, issue of *BusinessWeek* carries an article entitled, "The US Spreads the Pain." The article points out that US imports tumbled by 4.4% in February. Significantly, the import drop was broad-based, encompassing both consumer and capital goods, especially in the automotive sector.

The impact of slower US import demands puts us at risk. You know, Minister, or you ought to know, that we depend on US imports for our economic well-being. With the US teetering on the edge of recession, Japan still mired in weakness, and growth in Europe slowing, that impact could be considerable.

Your government has consistently mistakenly stated that the recent prolonged economic growth in Ontario has been as a result of your tax cuts. The evidence clearly shows that the buoyancy of the US market and our ability to access that market has been the greatest single factor in our economic growth.

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Could you tell us what your plans are to counter the impact of the US contraction of imports that will undoubtedly have an impact on Ontario's economy?

Hon Jim Flaherty (Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance): I thank the member opposite for the question. There's no question that there has been some slowing in the manufacturing sector in Ontario. There's also no question that there's been some slowing in the IT sector. Fortunately, since 1995 we have been growing, through useful government policies, a diversified economy in Ontario, so that we have not only a diversified economy but an economy that is resilient. We have substantial secondary and services sectors—our wholesale and retail trade sector at 13%, our finance sector at 17%, and our construction sector, which continues to boom, at 4.5% of our GDP. Our GDP has grown over that period of time in excess of 20%, as the honourable member opposite knows.

We have growth in Ontario; we have significant growth in Ontario. We do not have the high rate of unsustainable growth that we had in recent years.

Mr Kwinter: We've got to talk about competitiveness, and competitiveness is more than tax cuts and the low Canadian dollar. Of your 166 vaunted tax cuts, 132 went to corporations, yet recent studies have shown that we are slipping in global competitiveness and that most Ontario companies have not become global competitors, industry leaders or even especially innovative. The manufacturing sector is under severe pressure and it's evidenced by the loss of 46,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario since January. There are also record levels of inventories. Minister, when are you going to stop putting politics ahead of economics, endangering the economic prosperity of Ontario?

Hon Mr Flaherty: I take it from the comments of the member opposite that he is opposed to tax cuts stimulating the economy in Ontario. I know his leader, Dalton McGuinty, is opposed to tax cuts because he has said so. But it does depend on which Liberal you talk to.

If you speak to the Liberal who actually has fiscal responsibility in this country, the federal Minister of Finance, Paul Martin, he says, "Grassroots Liberals from coast to coast support the necessity of bringing down tax cuts." He says, "Tax reduction is essential to secure strong and sustained economic growth." He says, "Obviously we are concerned by the implications of the

slowdown in the United States. The fact is that the very large fiscal stimulus of tax cuts and spending on things like health care is exactly the tonic required."

It depends which Liberal you speak to.

RURAL JOBS STRATEGY

Mr Bert Johnson (Perth-Middlesex): While I have the floor, there are a couple of things that would lead up to my question. The first one is the heat in here. I don't like to be complaining to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, but most of the farmers in my riding take better care of the temperature for their livestock than we do in this chamber.

The other thing, while I'm addressing my question to the Minister of Agriculture, is the disease that has caused the recent cancellation of the Ontario Pork Congress in Stratford, which is hoof and mouth disease. Nearly everywhere I see it referred to as foot and mouth disease. As the member for St Catharines will certainly know, sheep, goats and cattle don't have feet, they have hooves. So the disease is hoof and mouth disease.

What I'm really concerned about right now is the young people in my riding who need jobs. Particularly in the riding of Perth-Middlesex, but also across Ontario, they're looking for jobs. I want to know what kinds of things our ministry is doing to help rural youth find jobs.

Hon Brian Coburn (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I thank the honourable member for Perth-Middlesex for the question. I'm pleased to let members of the Legislature know that this year's rural summer jobs program is up and running. The program provides a great opportunity for rural youth right across Ontario. My ministry works in partnership with the summer jobs service program and in partnership with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines. This program provides rural youth with an opportunity to find summer employment in rural communities across the province.

Historically, it has certainly been a hit with employers. Last year, approximately 500 farm food processing and rural employers participated in this particular program, which created over 4,300 student placements across rural Ontario.

Mr Johnson: Minister, from my understanding this program last year was well received by all parties involved. However, I've had constituents in my riding tell me that they were not able to enrol in this program because it was so popular. Can you please tell me if we've taken any steps to rectify this problem?

Hon Mr Coburn: In the past, we couldn't accommodate all of the employers who wanted to participate in the program. So I'm happy to report that this year we are introducing changes that will maximize the number of employers. As a result, a variety of employment opportunities in farming, food processing and in the rural and agricultural businesses are available to youth.

The 2001 rural summer jobs service will accept applications over a three-week period. Our goal is to provide all eligible employers with wage subsidies for at least one student position. This provides more opportunities for students, opportunities for a variety of experiences in the agricultural business.

MANDATORY DRUG TESTING

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, what exactly did Alan Borovoy and Sid Ryan tell you about your mandatory drug testing and drug treatment plan?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for children, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I'm very happy to share what Sid Ryan said the day I met him. He said, "It is a positive sign that we are meeting. He's thoroughly accessible as the minister, I will say that about him. He has been accessible in terms of when we need to meet with him on issues. I think in some ways he does understand a little bit about the social services sector, but on this particular issue he's completely off the mark."

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Supplementary?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The minister may be disinclined to tell you what he was told by this gentleman. I just got off the phone with Alan Borovoy, Canadian Civil Liberties Association, and Sid Ryan, CUPE. Alan Borovoy told you that that Canadian Civil Liberties Association was opposed to your mandatory drug testing, drug treatment. Sid Ryan told you that CUPE members would not participate in mandatory drug testing.

Minister, you were tested today. You didn't come out clean. Why won't you acknowledge that you don't have support from these sectors for your negative, incredibly cynical, sick program?

Hon Mr Baird: I didn't for one moment suggest that Alan Borovoy supported this policy. I didn't for one moment suggest that Sid Ryan supported this policy. But what I did say is that we met with more than 600 individuals and groups to get their input. We listened and we learned. I think we did, as the policy that we announced today reflects, learn a terrific amount.

The one benefit that Sid Ryan has: at least he can come in and meet with me.

AIR QUALITY

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment, particularly in view of the alarming reports that came out yesterday about air quality in this province.

The minister will recall that during the by-election campaign, I asked that her ministry release a report that was being kept secret by her ministry on air quality in the Parry Sound-Muskoka area. We know that the air quality

index was 61, which is remarkably above what it should be, on Tuesday of this week. In other places, such as Algonquin Park, it was 62. So it shows that in cottage country, where people often go for recreational purposes, the air quality is bad.

Can the minister tell us why it is that her ministry has withheld that report? I know that a person in her ministry, her spokesperson, Barry Wilson, when asked, said, "Absolutely not. Jim Bradley can walk around and communicate his conspiracy theories, but the bottom line is the report is not complete, it is not done yet. It's being finalized, and when it's complete, it will be released."

Now, that was supposed to be at least by March 31, after the by-election. Can the minister tell us why it was that this report was withheld during the by-election campaign?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Minister of the Environment): I will certainly take that question under advisement and I will follow through and provide the members opposite with the appropriate response.

1520

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Education, Government House Leader): I want to outline the business of the House for next week.

On Monday afternoon, we will continue the debate on Bill 19, the Ontario Student Loan Harmonization Act.

On Tuesday afternoon, we will continue debate on Bill 19, the Ontario Student Loan Harmonization Act.

On Wednesday afternoon, obviously the Minister of Finance will deliver the budget.

On Thursday morning during private members' business, we will discuss ballot items 5 and 6.

On Thursday afternoon, we will continue debate on the budget.

Other business of the House may be discussed in regular evening sittings next week, and we've filed the appropriate motions to that effect.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION LEGISLATION

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

"Whereas Bill 74, the Education Accountability Act, 2000, was passed by the Legislature of Ontario, and

"Whereas this bill is having a destabilizing effect on schools in Ontario,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the bill as follows:

"(1) Make co-instructional activities voluntary.

"(2) Reduce instructional time for secondary school teachers to six periods per day to allow for increased student/teacher interaction outside of the classroom....

"(3) Allow trustees to exercise their democratic right to find local solutions for local issues."

These petitions are signed by many dozens of parents from St Martin school in my riding. In full agreement with their concerns, I affix my own signature.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Bill 96, the Safe Drinking Water Act, recognized the entitlement of all Ontarians to safe drinking water and provides mechanisms to help Ontarians monitor and protect that right;

"Whereas Bill 71, the Oak Ridges Moraine Green Planning Act, would have protected a vital Ontario environmental and ecological feature as well as habitats of threatened and endangered species from destruction through unchecked development;

"Whereas both bills responded to important problems affecting our environment and public health and safety;

"Whereas the government's decision to prorogue the Ontario Legislature has killed both of these bills before they could be passed into law;

"Whereas both Bill 96 and Bill 71 had received support from all three parties through first and second readings and could have been quickly passed into law if the Legislature had not been prorogued;

"Whereas the government will use the start of the new session to deliver a throne speech outlining their vision and priorities for Ontario;

"Whereas events like the drinking water disaster in Walkerton and the ongoing battle to safeguard the Oak Ridges moraine graphically illustrate the urgency for the government to address environmental issues;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature to call on the government to reintroduce the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Oak Ridges Moraine Green Planning Act and to ensure their speedy passage into law."

As you know, Mr Speaker, I have reintroduced both these bills. So I will gladly affix my signature to this petition.

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death in North America; and

"Whereas studies conducted by the city of Toronto, the United States and Great Britain have all reported that drivers using cellular phones while operating a vehicle significantly increase the risk of collision; and

"Whereas people talking on cellular phones while driving may cause a 34% higher risk of having an accident;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ban the use of hand-held cellular phones, portable computers," faxes and other electronic equipment "while operating a motor vehicle. We further respectfully request that" you support Bill 102, by Mr

O'Toole, "An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while driving on a highway" and we encourage you to pass this "unanimously by all members of the Parliament of Ontario."

I am pleased to sign and support this, as I wrote it.

ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES LEGISLATION

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): A petition to the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas Mike Harris promised an Ontarians with Disabilities Act during the 1995 election and renewed that commitment in 1997 but has yet to make good on that promise; and

"Whereas the Harris government has not committed to holding open consultations with the various stakeholders and individuals on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act; and

"Whereas the minister responsible for persons with disabilities will not commit to the 11 principles outlined by the Ontarians with Disabilities Act committee; and

"Whereas the vast majority of Ontario citizens believe there should be an Ontarians with Disabilities Act to remove the barriers facing the 1.5 million persons with disabilities;

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

"To pass a strong and effective Ontarians with Disabilities Act that would remove the barriers facing the 1.5 million persons with disabilities in this province of Ontario."

I wholeheartedly endorse this and will affix my signature hereto.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): This petition is from citizens wanting a rent freeze.

"Whereas the annual rent increase guideline for multi-unit residential dwellings in Ontario increases every year more than the rate of inflation and more than the cost-of-living increase for most tenants;

"Whereas no new affordable rental housing is being built by the private sector, despite the promise that the implementation of vacancy decontrol in June of 1998 would encourage new construction;

"Whereas over 100,000 people are on the waiting list for social housing, homelessness has increased as a result of unaffordable rents, and high rents are a direct cause of the national housing crisis;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to implement an immediate province-wide freeze on rents which will stop all guideline increases, above-guideline increases and increases to maximum rent for all sitting tenants in Ontario for a period of at least two years."

I support this petition.

KARLA HOMOLKA

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads:

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

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

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

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

Whereas Karla Homolka enjoys an air-conditioned cell—unlike the political animals in this place;

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

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

"That the government of Ontario will:

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

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

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

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

I'm more than happy to affix my signature to this petition.

SALE OF SCHOOLS

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Hughes Public School at 17 Innes Ave in the city of Toronto closed down and its premises have been declared surplus by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB);

"Whereas the city of Toronto has issued a building permit to the TDSB permitting the reconstruction of Hughes Public School for an entity called Beatrice House, for the purpose of a private academic school;

"Whereas the Beatrice House is not a private school registered with the Ministry of Education, nor a mident has been issued to that organization;

"Whereas within the context of the zoning bylaw (438-86), the subject lands have been designated as R2 Z0.6 and permits a 'private academic, philanthropic or religious school';

"Whereas the TDSB has chosen not to lease the subject premises to a computer training company for \$1.25 million annually. Instead, the board has chosen to

lease it to the Beatrice House for a fraction of the current market value;

“Whereas a lease has not been signed between the TDSB and Beatrice House while renovations to the building are underway;

“Whereas local taxpayers’ concerns have been ignored by the TDSB;

“Whereas other locations, such as the Brother Edmund Rice School at 55 Pelham Park or the Earlscourt Public School at 29 Ascot, which are being closed down, have been offered to Beatrice House to no avail;

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

“That the Honourable Minister of Education investigate the leasing arrangement between the Toronto District School Board and Beatrice House inasmuch as:

“(1) Boards are to seek fair market value when selling, leasing or otherwise disposing of schools, except that the price for the property not to exceed the value of the ministry’s grant for the new pupil places when the purchaser is a coterminous board, a provincial school or a publicly funded care and treatment facility offering programs leading to a diploma;

“(2) Boards are to offer the property to coterminous boards and other public agencies operating in the area in accordance with the priority order currently specified in regulation 444/98;

“(3) Toronto District School Board has not dealt in good faith with our neighbourhood residents;

“Therefore, we respectfully ask you to consider our plea for justice. The Toronto District School Board has ignored our concerns and due diligence. We as a community tried everything within our power to fight the glaring and obvious wrong done to us, to no avail.”

I affix my signature to this petition.

1530

PROTECTION OF MINORS

Mr Bob Wood (London West): This petition is signed by 309 people.

“Whereas children are exposed to sexually explicit materials in many commercial establishments;

“Whereas many municipalities do not have bylaws in place to protect minors and those that do vary from place to place and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials;

“Whereas uniform standards are needed in Ontario that would make it illegal to sell, rent, loan or display sexually explicit materials to minors;

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

“To pass Bill 95, Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act, 2000, as soon as possible.”

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas this government has reduced funding for Ontario’s special education programs without regard to the impact these changes are having on some of the province’s most vulnerable children; and

“Whereas these special needs” children “are now struggling with reductions in the amount of support they require with special education teachers, education assistants and classroom resources; and

“Whereas these high-need children thrive on consistency and routine and these disruptions in their educational support are negatively affecting their progress and self-esteem;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to restore fair and equitable funding to special education so that parents and teachers can provide the best future for our children.”

I will affix my signature to this petition.

DIABETES TREATMENT

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

“Whereas over 500,000 people in Ontario have diabetes; and

“Whereas to the expense of treating diabetes, many people cannot afford the ongoing expense of treating diabetes and if left untreated or improperly managed, diabetes can lead to blindness, vascular disease, kidney disease, neuropathy and other problems; and

“Whereas today, more than ever before, people with diabetes can expect to live active, independent and vital lives if they make a lifelong commitment to careful management of this disease; and

“Whereas by providing the resources to successfully manage this disease, the government can ensure more efficient health care for people with diabetes at a reduced cost to the health care system;

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

“That all diabetic supplies as prescribed by an endocrinologist be covered under the Ontario health insurance plan.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

AIR QUALITY

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): My petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Harris government’s wholly owned Nanticoke generating station is North America’s largest dirty coal-fired electricity producing plant and Ontario’s largest producer of the chemicals and acid gases which contribute to deadly smog and acid rain; and

"Whereas the Nanticoke plant, which has more than doubled its dangerous emissions under the Harris government, is now the worst air polluter in all of Canada, spewing out over five million kilograms of toxic chemicals each year, including many cancer-causing chemicals and mercury, a potent, dangerous neurotoxin; and

"Whereas at least 13 Ontario municipalities and seven northeastern US states have expressed concerns that Ontario Power Generation's proposed cleanup plan for Nanticoke is inadequate in protecting the air quality and health and safety of the residents; and

"Whereas the Ontario Medical Association has stated that 1,900 Ontarians die prematurely each year and we pay \$1 billion annually in health-related costs as a result of air pollution; and

"Whereas because the Harris government has now lifted the moratorium on the sale of coal-fired power plants and has set a date for deregulation of electricity, the operator of the Nanticoke plant will likely stoke up production to maximize profits which will only worsen the air quality in cities like Kitchener, Windsor, London, Niagara Falls and St Catharines;

"Be it resolved that the Mike Harris government immediately order that the Nanticoke generating station be converted from dirty coal to cleaner-burning natural gas."

I affix my signature to this petition.

PROTECTION OF MINORS

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

"Whereas children are being exposed to sexually explicit materials in many commercial establishments;

"Whereas many municipalities do not have bylaws in place to protect minors and those that do vary from place to place and have failed to protect minors from unwanted exposure to sexually explicit materials;

"Whereas uniform standards are needed in Ontario that would make it illegal to sell, rent, loan or display sexually explicit materials to minors;

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

"To pass Bill 95, Protection of Minors from Sexually Explicit Goods and Services Act, 2000, as soon as possible."

In agreement, I would be happy to sign my name.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO STUDENT LOAN HARMONIZATION ACT, 2001

LOI DE 2001 SUR L'HARMONISATION DES PRÊTS D'ÉTUDES DE L'ONTARIO

Mr Gill, on behalf of Mrs Cunningham, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act / Projet de loi 19, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités.

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I'll be sharing my time with the member from Durham and the member from Simcoe North. I'm sure it's such a good bill that many other members will be happy to take part in this debate this afternoon.

I'm very pleased to speak today to the second reading of this bill, which will allow the Ontario government to ensure that willing and qualified students can continue to get a post-secondary education.

As the members may recall, the Ontario government signed an agreement in May 1999 with the federal government to move forward with the harmonization of our respective student loan programs. We entered into this agreement in order to improve services for borrowers, reduce student loan defaults and increase accountability in the administration of student loans.

Since that time, however, the national banks have announced that they are withdrawing from the delivery of student loans. As a result of that action, jurisdictions across Canada are putting in place alternative processes to ensure students continue to receive the assistance they need to pursue their post-secondary educational goals. Clearly Ontario must do the same if we want to ensure that students have access to funding for their portion of the cost of a post-secondary education.

Last year, more than 170,000 Ontario students received loans from the Ontario Student Assistance Program, which is also known as OSAP. We must ensure this assistance is also available to future generations.

The federal government has passed legislation that gives it the authority to introduce a direct loan program for the Canada student loan portion of student assistance. That program will be administered by independent service providers under contract to the federal government. There are provisions in the contract for the provinces to use the same service providers if they so choose. The legislation we are discussing today would, if passed by this Legislature, provide the Ontario government with the authority it needs to implement its agreement with the federal government for joint administration of the Canada and Ontario student loan programs.

We anticipate that this would result in better service for students. For example, student loan certificates will be provided through financial aid offices, as is the case right now with Canada student loans. Students would then be able to take the loan certificates to a student loan kiosk on campus or to Canada Post outlets. Funds would then be deposited directly to the student's bank account.

1540

Another example of enhanced service is that the borrowers will be contacted by the service providers at least twice a year to give them information about repayment or changes to the plan and to allow borrowers to update their information, such as addresses and phone numbers.

We are confident that this repayment system will be more efficient for students and will allow us to lower our loan default rate even more. As you may be aware, this year's default rate is 15.7%, which is down from 18.2% in 1999. This is the third consecutive annual drop in loan default rates for the province since 1997, when the overall rate was 23.5%. We have made significant gains. This puts us well ahead on our way to meeting our goal, set in 1998, of reducing overall OSAP default rates to less than 10% by 2003. We need to ensure fairness in the system, both for the taxpayers who fund the student loan program and for the hard-working students who pay back their loans.

I am pleased to note that the default rate has declined across the system. The rate for university students is 7.1%, down from 8.4% and already below the 10% goal that we had set out to be met in 2003. The rate for college students is 17.2%, and that is down from 20.1%. The rate for students at private vocational schools is 28.9%, still quite high, but the trend is downwards. It is down from 31%.

I want to digress for a moment to emphasize that the default rates have maintained a steady decline since our government started reporting publicly on the default rates. This clearly demonstrates that our commitment to accountability, to measuring and reporting on how taxpayer dollars are spent, does improve efficiency and effectiveness. Information on default rates is now available to the public, just as we now require colleges and universities to make available to the public information on their performance in key areas such as student and employer satisfaction and the employment rates of graduates. We are now allocating a portion of the institutions' operating grants on their performance in these areas.

This decline in student loan default rates can be attributed to a number of government initiatives, and these include: credit-screening new loan applicants to be sure loans are not given to students with a history of credit abuse; providing students who have low incomes after they graduate with enhanced opportunities to apply for interest relief on their loan repayments; participating in the tax credit to help students cover the interest costs on student loans; requiring institutions that have very high default rates to help pay for the cost of these outstanding debts; and requiring institutions to give students accurate information about default rates, graduation rates and graduate employment rates by program so students can make informed choices about their studies.

I would like to point out that this government has also put in place a number of student assistance programs that help students in financial need to make it less likely that they will default on their loans. We established the Ontario student opportunity trust fund. Permanent trust funds with a total value of \$600 million, half of which comes directly from the province, have been established at colleges and universities to provide aid to students in need. These funds will provide assistance for up to 185,000 students over a 10-year period.

We introduced annual student grants to help reduce students' repayable loan debts. The Ontario student opportunity grant program ensures that no student incurs more than \$7,000 of debt per year of study. Approximately 39,800 students received grants last year. We now require universities and colleges that increase tuition to set aside a portion of their increased tuition revenues to provide aid to students in need. These bursaries are expected to total \$125.3 million in 2000-01.

The Ontario government also offers scholarships to students to recognize excellence and assist with the cost of post-secondary education. The new Aiming for the Top scholarships recognize high school students with top marks and who have financial need. More than 4,000 scholarships were awarded in fall 2000. Many of the students in my constituency certainly benefited from that and they were quite thankful to the government. In fact, I was quite happy to congratulate them on their achievements.

When fully implemented, \$35 million annually will be invested in these institutions in terms of scholarships that recognize both academic excellence and financial need. Funding for the Ontario work-study plan has been doubled to enable universities and colleges to hire twice as many students and help deserving students complete their studies. Ontario is increasing its support for this program from \$5.4 million to \$10.8 million annually. That's twice as much: 5.4 times 2 is 10.8. The number of students participating in this program will increase from over 3,500 to over 7,000 students.

Ontario graduate scholarships in science and technology assist up to 500 students a year. That's on top of the 1,300 students assisted through the current Ontario graduate scholarships program. In 2001-02, the number of Ontario graduate scholarships awarded annually will increase from 1,300 to 2,000 and their value will increase from approximately \$11,800 to \$15,000 for three terms of study.

It is especially important that we keep post-secondary education accessible at this particular time when we are expecting an increase in enrolment. The Ontario government has been moving forward with a comprehensive plan to prepare Ontario's post-secondary education for the double cohort. The double cohort refers to the graduating class of 2003. I'm personally very attached to that, the reason being my younger daughter, Sonja, who is in grade 10 right now, will be in that double cohort program. I, along with many, many parents, am concerned that we should have enough spaces for our children. I can assure the members in the House, being the PA to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, that we have the resources. I've had discussions with the heads of universities and they've assured us that they already have the spaces and that this will be a program which is going to be handled very, very well.

As the members of this House know, this was a long time coming. Every government previously has had difficulty making tough choices. Everybody knew that Ontario students had to spend an extra year without any good cause. I have visited many, many universities

across North America and across the world. The maximum amount of time kids need to spend in school is up to grade 12. We had an extra year. Not only were students suffering because they were spending an extra year, taking on studies that did not need to be covered in five years of high school, but at the same time we were spending too much money on the education system. This will help us save money so we can spend more money on the current classes and have more teachers for students.

1550

It's a great program, and somebody had to make that choice—a difficult choice because, politically speaking, sometimes parents were worried and wanted to know whether we were doing the right thing. I want to assure them that we are doing the right thing. We have had consultations with the universities across the province and they are ready.

Mr Alvin Curling (Scarborough-Rouge River): “Just trust us.”

Mr Gill: The members opposite are talking about, “Just trust us.” It’s very simple. Even at election time—and there will be many elections coming up—there will be programs you will come up with in your red books. Ontarians will look at that, they will look at the pink book or the orange book and they will look at our blue book, and every one of those books will promise wonderful things for Ontarians. But the people of Ontario know where the credibility lies. Any government can make promises but it’s the Mike Harris government that proves that whatever they say, they are going to carry out. Some people don’t like that, but a promise is a promise—promises made, promises kept.

Coming back to the double cohort, as I said, it refers to the graduating class of 2003, when the first students to complete the new four-year secondary school program will be graduating at the same time as the last students to finish the old five-year program. It is estimated that enrolment in 2005-06 may increase by about 88,000 over 1998-99.

The government’s plan includes many initiatives to expand physical capacity of post-secondary education, increase efficiencies and funding, provide financial support to students and ensure that students have the information they need to make informed decisions.

Our SuperBuild initiative, for example, will see an investment by the government and its partners of \$1.8 billion in campuses across Ontario to meet the projected increase in demand for spaces in Ontario colleges and universities. This commitment to renew and expand colleges and universities will create 73,000 new student places.

Interjection.

Mr Gill: You might have thought I was going to refer to the 822,000 net new jobs that we created in the last five or six years. No. I’m now referring to the 73,000 new student spaces that will be provided.

The province has announced 59 new capital projects and funding for modernization and renewal of existing college and university campuses.

The recent SuperBuild initiative is the single largest capital investment in post-secondary education in more than 30 years. The legislation we are discussing today will complement the government’s plan to ensure that our post-secondary institutions are ready for the 21st century. What we are talking about today is ensuring that students can afford a post-secondary education, because these students are the future of this province. They will make up the skilled workforce this province needs to attract investment and jobs.

I’m going to digress for a moment and go back and compare what it was previously in terms of two programs, federal and provincial, and how we’re going to make it better. I’ve got a table which I’ll be happy to pass on to Hansard. People at home can see that and they can certainly access it through the World Wide Web: www.gov.on.ca.

Preharmonization—I’ll be very brief because I’m running out of time and my friends are ready to take this opportunity—there was one application; there still will be one application. There was an assessment of need conducted. Similarly, there will still be an assessment of need conducted.

This is where the difference is: students used to have two certificates of eligibility, two sets of loan documents, and they had to negotiate two loans. Now, under the new program, there will be one certificate of eligibility, one set of loan documents and they’ll negotiate one loan. I want to come back to the plan. This program will be serviced through kiosks. Students will really not see any difference. Previously they had to go to their own bank and now they’ll go to a service kiosk in their institution. If they’re living in a remote place in Ontario, we have an agreement—or we will have an agreement once this thing is passed—with Canada Post, where they can take their documents and Canada Post will deliver the funds by direct deposit or whatever method they want to use.

It’s a wonderful thing, and we are committed to ensuring all willing and qualified students continue to secure a place in our post-secondary system. This legislation would ensure that our students continue to have access to the student assistance they require to help manage their portion of the cost of their education.

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): It’s certainly my pleasure to follow the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale. I think he demonstrates that anything is possible, really. He’s certainly one of my better friends. As the parliamentary assistant, he’s given me the privilege of speaking somewhat briefly on this topic. I recognize that he’s used up most of the time, but he does speak on behalf of the Honourable Dianne Cunningham, who is the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and who has introduced Bill 19. I know that the member is from London North-Centre, the home of the University of Western Ontario, which draws me right back to the whole point.

My middle daughter—I have five children, as many of the viewers would know. My middle daughter was a student at the University of Western Ontario, the home of

the minister. In fact, I believe at one time she met her and has a great deal of respect for the minister as well. This will be sort of the central theme of my few remaining remarks this afternoon. My wife, as you know, is a teacher and I think she is a dedicated, hard-working teacher. These are difficult times for her and for many teachers who are busy trying to be exemplary models to their students.

As it turns out, my daughter who went to Western is now a secondary school teacher. She's actually a first-year high school teacher now. Despite what the viewer might think, she has a small student loan. In fact, she did get one of the Canada millennium scholarships. Of course she went to a graduate program after university and, as such, had been out of the house for four years, so she was entitled to apply for a student loan, which she did. As a student who wanted to work in teaching, she didn't take a job working where she could have made more money. She preferred to take a job in the summer where she got relevant experience. In fact, I believe she worked for the YMCA as a program person, putting on programs for children with special needs. It's that very experience that she got that was invaluable in getting entrance into teaching college.

So all this is about not just the Canada student loan or the Ontario student loan or the bill that we're talking about today. It's an opportunity and decisions that students have to make and indeed families have to make. They're difficult decisions but they are really, at the end of the day, investments in their future. I think that hard work should be rewarded. I think students who work hard may not all perform the same on a test on a given day, but I think teachers and professors are well equipped to evaluate the students' efforts.

1600

The whole background to this document on the training and colleges act and the Ontario Student Loan Harmonization Act speaks to many things to me as a parent. I should say for the record that two of my younger children are still in university. One of them attends the University of Western Ontario. In fact, she's taking a course this summer, which will cost her a fair amount of money. She missed a course in her first year, so she's in Windsor for the summer. My other son, of course, will be doing his fourth year at Brock next year.

To complete the loop, my wife and I work, we have five children, all the major events in life. University is extremely important in our family. Let's put it this way: we think training them for the future, whatever that happens to be—their life—includes college and/or university specifically, but, in a general sense, training, the skilled trades, whatever they choose. We don't dictate, but we've kept that in front of them, and I think all parents should keep that in front of their families. It's a very important commitment to the children on the part of the parents, and some of that involves saving. In that, there's some accountability of the parents, but there's also some accountability—students shouldn't get what used to be called the Ontario stereo assistance plan. That's how it was referred to.

My children, who lived in a rather rigorous household where they have a father like me, were always sort of critical that I kept them on the more frugal side of life at university than some who maybe had more money. I'm very proud of all of them, but my daughter, the one who is a high school teacher, was most resourceful. She worked. She was on the student council at Western; plus she had a job during her school year; plus she volunteered, as I described earlier; plus she maintained adequate marks to get into post-secondary. I used to talk to her. I said, "You know, the first priority is your education; and if there's time left, social; and if there's time left, work to earn some extra money." I'm very proud.

As I said, most of us are parents here, and maybe this is becoming far more personal than necessary. But, to me, we can talk in the rhetoric of statutes or we can talk in the rhetoric of real people making tough decisions. Minister Cunningham is trying to do the right thing, and the Premier yesterday, in responding to a gallery full of—

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): It was terrible.

Mr O'Toole: No, Mrs Bountrogianni. You will have your opportunity.

I think in general what he was trying to say, and for the record I'll quote what the Premier did say, is that part of that choice is—years ago, I came from a family where university wasn't one of the primary options. Although I did go to university, it wasn't immediately after high school. I worked but then did go to university. What I'm trying to say is, those choices—back then there wasn't the kind of support. It was the best support program for the upper class back then. All of my friends who were from what we would call the north end—it was in Peterborough, and if you were from the west end you went to university; if you were from the east city you didn't go. That was the reality.

Howard Hampton was trying to make that distinction today. I think the desire is there today. The province has committed that the opportunities will be there as well, and I think that's the commitment I hear the Premier making, and I think Howard would like to provide it free. Absolutely nothing is free. The water isn't free, nothing's free. Not that I wouldn't want it to be free. I think it comes down to who's paying. There must be clear accountability. That really talks about this whole issue, as Mr Gill was saying before, that the government is improving accountability to taxpayers in this debate as well as the students and families.

Minister Cunningham has often said she's committed to providing a place in college and university for every willing and qualified student. That's certainly good news. Through our initiatives on accountability, we are helping students find the right place and the right opportunity at the right time for them, and that really drives it right back to the student. In fact, you could apply this whole argument of mine to the student-focused funding model in our secondary schools today. Students should really be

included, be part of the commentary with respect to extracurricular activities: which ones they want and which ones should be provided, as opposed to, "We're offering basketball," they should say, "We want volleyball." The students should be consulted, and in a general sense that's what this is about.

Mr Gill also reminded us that accountability is one of the government priorities in all sectors and that measures have already been taken to improve accountability on the part of the colleges and universities. I'm going to cover some of those accountability mechanisms. We referred to them in the earlier discussion papers as the KPIs, or key performance indicators, as well as the PDFs, which is performance-based funding.

We were relating that the colleges and universities were going to be funded based on performance. That spells accountability. We were going to fund them on performance to the key performance indicators, which leads to, what are the indicators of successful performance? I think it again comes down to consulting with students, parents and educators so that the program itself has some successful outcome for the student. So students will evaluate their program. That will be one of the key performance indicators. Whether or not they secure a job is another indicator, and whether or not they are able to fulfill their financial commitments is another indicator.

The actual institutions themselves will be evaluated on how many people are engaged in the programs and on how many actually graduate. Students and parents deserve a clear picture of the ability of a college and/or a university to successfully prepare graduates for a job. I get a response from people, "Well, your education system's all about finding a job, blah, blah, blah." Technically that's right. However, I think that in respect to the whole debate, there will be those who argue that education is more than about finding a job. I tend to agree with that group as well. I think life is about choice. It's not necessarily about any guarantees at the end of the day. If, for instance, you take a PhD or something, you may end up in the Ontario Legislature. I'm questioning if that's a key performance indicator or if it's a performance-based kind of thing.

On a serious note, I really think that the choices you make—my undergraduate degree was economics and others would maybe take engineering. I think the chances of a job from engineering, which my oldest boy was in, are far more successful, and they would be more assured of getting a job at the end. In fact, it's more like a trade. Some of the technical, more advanced computers are very specific about finding a job.

The point here is that students, and their families who are advising and in many respects paying for it, need to understand the difference. If you go in thinking that because you get an undergraduate degree or a graduate or post-grad degree in a subject that doesn't necessarily relate to a job—if you get a degree in theology, you could become a very excellent minister, and it's a way of life as opposed to a job. It really doesn't equate to money. Having a PhD does not mean you make \$150,000 a year.

Having a master's degree in engineering—Mr Gill has a master's degree in engineering from the University of Toronto and look how well he's done. I mean that in a serious way. Technically he is a good example of how much variability, flexibility there is in these choices we make. I believe that Mr Arnott, the Speaker in the chair, has a degree in political science. That eminently qualifies him in a number of areas, but those choices and the key performance indicators and the relationship with finding a job are very important decision points for students, parents and families.

For example, in deciding whether to enter a program, as I have described, engineering versus sociology or something, the knowledge that twice as many graduates of program A find a related job as those from program B might be a factor in deciding.

So we're providing evidence of the success rates based on certain measurements from choices that are made by students. At the college level, data are based on surveys of basically two groups: the students and the employers. It is based on graduates, to see if they are satisfied with the quality of the education they received—there weren't some bird courses being offered, of which there still is the odd one—and on whether it leads to a job; it is based on a survey of employers to see if recent grads have the skills and expertise to gain entry to the workforce; and it is based on the information about how graduates have managed in the workplace, as well as managed their resources in repaying their loans. It's the skills which they achieved from the money they were loaned that allowed them to get the job. All of the taxpayers realize that's an entitlement, because those who don't go to school—and there are many of them—don't get the loan and quite often, the evidence is there, frequently getting lower-paying, perhaps less challenging jobs. Not in all cases: as I said before, education doesn't necessarily equate to getting a good job, and not having a post-secondary education does not mean you won't get a job. I think it still comes down to the individual and their motives, their hard work ethic etc.

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At the level of university, our students can now review on three criteria: graduation rates, graduate employment rates and Ontario student loan default rates. These kinds of measurements are going to allow students to get a first-hand look at what the evidence is out there. These measures or indicators demonstrate the government's continued commitment to success.

The most recent indicators show that on average 94% of 1998 university graduates had a job in six months after leaving school. That's great news. In other words, there is evidence to indicate that the higher the education the more successful employment opportunities arise. It also relates to income, I might say. There are statistics to support that as well. And 97% of the workforce finds a job within two years. In other words, almost 100% of the students who graduate from university have a job within two years. That's good news and that's important for students to realize, that it's an investment for a job. I

don't care if you're taking philosophy, psychology, you name it: you should realize that at the end of the day you have to work.

I have a son right now who would like to go to graduate school. He hasn't even got good enough marks on undergraduate courses, but he's starting to love the climate and the cultural life of school. I still know a couple of those—in fact, my oldest son is in law school. He went to university and he loved it, he really did, and now he's in law school, which is three or four more years. Hopefully before I leave this world he'll graduate and have a real career. But no, he did serve five years in the armed forces.

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: There is a relationship.

Colleges had similar results I might say, so let's not draw any distinction. I think there's great value in education at the college, university and indeed the skilled trades levels.

The final point on this whole thing is that education before, during and after high school is absolutely important. I think all of us would agree the new culture is lifelong learning, and whether there's a certificate that goes on the wall with that is kind of secondary.

I'm of the generation that graduated when grade 13 was departmental exams. We're moving back in some respects to standards like that, which is to an extent a good idea of how you're doing; gives you some idea of how you'd probably do at the University of Toronto. But they were graduating and it was sort of like cross your fingers—wham, 50% of them failed. That was some sort of measurement that maybe they didn't get the calculus, the chemistry or the history they should have gotten.

Standards and standards at the level that we're speaking about today are absolutely critical. They know the universities that are the top-notch universities, and if they don't they should read the Maclean's magazine, which gives a fair, arm's-length assessment of how our post-secondary institutions are doing. I am very proud to say I'm an alumnus of the University of Toronto, but Western Ontario, Queen's University I see here. And I see a few from the school of hard knocks, not to mention Peter. I know he's a lawyer. I don't know where he went, but he probably failed. Nonetheless—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: No, it was Phoenix. Phoenix is kind of a virtual university and basically—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: It has nothing to do with drug testing. I'm not going there.

Actually, it's the highest employment rate of college grads since 1989. But do you know the important thing? This whole accountability argument about collecting data—and I learned a very few things that stayed with me in university but I did learn a couple of things—if you measure things to understand them, measure in order to control, in order to predict to control, by measuring things you can manoeuvre, manipulate or interject to control outcomes and then you can predict the outcomes.

So, by measuring things you're able to understand the process. Then you have to align what your expectations for these outcomes are. When the outcomes aren't jobs, it's very hard to measure, because maybe the people just want to sit on top of Mount Everest and think about the world; I don't know. I have no idea. It's great to have profound thoughts or music or art and all that. I really appreciate and admire it. But the point is that at the end of it, it's all-important to be measured in terms of, has it achieved the successes relevant to the individual?

I do want to go on here a little bit. I think, as I made the point, that in linking funding to performance, we are rewarding schools that do the best job of preparing students to succeed after graduation and to ensuring that colleges and universities are accountable to students and the taxpayer. I don't think it could be said any more succinctly than that. This year, a portion of the \$103-million increase in operating grants was allocated based on the institutions' performance. We should reward positive performance.

Why reward negative performance? What's that got to do with anything? In fact, you should close them. Negative-performing companies, everybody dumps the stock and they're out of business. But what we do with a public institution sometimes is pump more money in to keep it afloat, and it has no accountability or any willingness to measure itself.

Now, that isn't part of the argument on the private university model. I think competition, without it being public, private, whatever—we need to have some measurement of performance. Two per cent of the operating fund grant goes to colleges based on institution performance, as measured by students, employers, after-graduation satisfaction and graduate satisfaction with their education. This apportionment will increase to 4% in the year 2001 and to 6% for the following year. So the message is very clear out there, if you want to get a copy of this: we're going to relate funding to performance and to the key indicators that I mentioned before.

One per cent of university operating grants this year was distributed based on performance, as measured by graduate rates, graduate employment rates some months after graduation and graduate employment rates two years after graduation. This new approach to funding will benefit those institutions that are responsive to the student and the community need for providing relevant and high-quality programs. I might just say one more thing. We should maybe measure it on how many actually stay in Canada, because right now there's a tremendous demand for very affordable, high-quality education in Ontario, and I know many students from the United States are coming here because it's really a very good bargain for them.

I'm just wondering, I'm getting some signals here. How much time will you really need? I could take it all, but I could share some too.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I need about 10 minutes.

Mr O'Toole: Certainly, I'll leave you exactly 10. I would say we're looking at a system that is working but

needs further attention. This is just a starting point. Taxpayers' dollars need to be spent wisely. No one in this House, with the exception of Mr Kormos, would disagree with that. I wouldn't put words in his mouth, but I've heard him speak.

Most importantly, these people about to enter the system can select a program and/or course, knowing how previous students felt about the education they received and whether it led to a job. We're providing information for them to make these choices I've referred to several hundred times.

The government has already taken steps to ensure accountability and efficiency in our post-secondary education system, and I am confident that the Ontario Student Loan Harmonization Act, 2001, if passed by the Legislature, will take another big step forward to our goal of ensuring that our young people will be prepared for challenging opportunities in their future.

Perhaps most importantly this afternoon, our government understands the importance of giving students and parents the opportunity and the power to make choices. These are different students with different goals and requirements of every student's needs to make the choices that best suit them and their needs. Quite simply, when students and parents have reliable information about post-secondary programs, they make better choices for themselves and, in fact, for this province of Ontario. It all comes back to the fact that a strong, prosperous economy is related to a knowledge-based economy. We need the young people to have the opportunities, but to achieve that, they need to have the right successes at the right place at the right time.

For taxpayers, performance-based funding and KPIs, or key performance indicators, as I said before, drive accountability for public money, which is right on message with the Deputy Premier, Jim Flaherty, for whom I work, actually; for the Premier, Mike Harris; and in fact for this whole caucus.

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It's about accountability. Citizens should have the right to know not only where their taxes are going but what they are being used for and what they're getting in return. When we give the cheque out to the hospital, to the university, to the municipality, to schools, there should be accountability. They should say, "If we get this, you should get that." If there isn't accountability, I question a profession's integrity. At the bottom line, if I say I'm going to provide you a system—

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): That's strong language.

Mr O'Toole: It is strong language, and it's language I hold myself to. Maybe it does go too far. No, it doesn't. It doesn't go far enough. We've got to make sure that the culture of entitlement is exchanged for the culture of accountability. In the broader sense, that's what this whole debate is about. I don't quite have enough time to go there, but I will try.

The measures to give taxpayers the tools to hold government and institutions accountable for the use of public money and complement our accountability mechanisms that have been talked about—some would say

they have been talked about for the last few months. Check out Seizing Tomorrow's Opportunities. Check out the whole debate on OJIB, the Ontario Jobs and Investment Board. That's what it was all about. The Road Ahead document is about accountability. It's about having a plan and executing the plan. This government is known—its hallmark is keeping its promises. The promises that are being talked about today—not to the system, not to all the professors and how much time they teach; it's right down to the student. This is what it's about. It's down to the student. In fact, there isn't a person on this side—I just talked about my five kids. Every one of them here, as I look around, are the ones who are buying the registered education savings plans. Mr Hastings spoke the other week about trying to provide more initiatives to encourage parents to save. These initiatives, from private members like Mr Hastings and from other members as well, need to be respected.

The government is not afraid to recognize excellence. In fact, we champion excellence. Excellence is what we're continuously striving for. A continuous search for excellence is really how I think of our time here, arguably since about 1994, when Bob Rae quit governing, gave up control, just threw the money bag out the window and people were scrambling for it. Floyd ran to the vault and locked himself in. In fact, we let him out and put him on the Ontario Energy Board, and now he makes more money. But that's another story.

I said the government is not afraid to recognize excellence, but we're all about accountability. The whole debate today has to go back and be wrapped fully around by Mrs Bountrogianni's comments. I'm waiting for her to speak. I'm not waiting to hear what she says, but more or less just to hear her speak, because she is a professor and she does have an academic view of this.

When the Premier was asked by the leader of the third party, who, by the way, I should say, out of respect—I'm going to step off the script here; actually I haven't got one. Yesterday the leader of the third party asked the Premier a question. It was actually a pretty good question. I give him a lot of credit for good questions. What I have a problem with is his answers. He has no good answers. We've got the answers on this side. The Premier said, when asked about—and this is important for the viewer to see; I'm going to slow it down here, because TV is at three-quarters speed if you're recording it.

The first thing is that we have increased funding and opportunities in matching scholarships. We insisted that universities supply a third of any increase to bursaries. So one third of any tuition increase goes to help students in need. They need to know that. That means that all medical students who need help paying for tuition and ancillary fees above \$4,500 must get it from the universities. There it is on the record.

Second, I can tell you that last year alone there were 572 medical students in Ontario, which, by the way, was up because we created 40 new medical school places. In fact they were cut by the Liberals in 1990. They cut medical schools by 10%. That's why we're short of

doctors today. There were 52 students in the previous year, gone up to 572. Applications are up again this year, to 3,854 students, and we're completing this with 572 spaces. They've gone up 40 spaces, I think.

I might add, as well, that I am not aware of one medical student who needs help. In fact, the Premier asked that if there was a student in need of help, to bring it to his attention.

I want to go over this one thing—I've got about a minute and a half, so don't interrupt—the subsidy, over and above the tuition: for each medical student, \$22,000 goes into that subsidy. That's not seen.

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: You will have your opportunity.

As a matter of fact, there will be \$22,000 for each medical school spot that goes in for the chair, for the lab, for the smaller class sizes. It's invisible money. They don't see it. In addition to that, if parents aren't able to contribute anything and the student can't contribute anything because they have no time to work, it's a very hard course, we pay the \$22,000 on the spot.

In addition, \$10,000 of OSAP, the Ontario student assistance program, is available. By the way, Mr Speaker, and to the viewer, of the \$10,000, \$7,000 will be repayable. So if you have \$7,000 over four years, that's \$28,000, and there is no interest until after you graduate. We're talking about people who are doctors, and they deserve the very best and the highest respect. If they can't pay off \$28,000 in a year or two—it's going to delay the purchase of the Mercedes for a while—then maybe they need a time management or money management program. That's what this is about.

Earlier today Minister Cunningham said in an answer to one of her questions that she has clear evidence—it's on the record in Hansard—that at the University of Western Ontario medical school—she refuted the statistics quoted by Mr Hampton that kids from families with incomes of \$80,000 to \$140,000 are the only ones getting into university. It's wrong and she deserves an apology.

What our system is about is having high-quality, affordable, accountable and accessible education in Ontario.

I regretfully relinquish the rest of my time to the member from our party.

Mr Gill: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: We are very pleased this afternoon that the family of one of our pages, Melissa Gallant, who is from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, is here this afternoon—grandmother Sandra Gallant; mother Susan; and younger sister Jessica. Welcome.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): That's not a point of order but we welcome your constituents to the chamber.

I'm pleased to recognize the member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak on Bill 19, the Ontario Student Loan Harmonization Act. I thank the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for bringing forth this legislation and I thank

the two previous speakers, Mr Gill, parliamentary assistant and member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale—I'm finally going to get that right—and also the member from Durham, for their very valuable comments on this particular piece of legislation.

Today I will be speaking on a very important issue: financial assistance for students in need who want to pursue a post-secondary education.

The Ontario student assistance program is intended to help students from lower-income families meet the costs of post-secondary education by providing financial assistance for educational costs and basic living expenses to eligible students.

As we've heard from my colleague Mr Gill, the Ontario government must ensure that this assistance continues to be available in light of the fact that the national banks will be withdrawing from the business of lending money to students. That is why the government has introduced the Ontario Student Loan Harmonization Act, 2001.

It has been an objective of this government to make the delivery of student assistance more efficient and to ensure that students and institutions are accountable for the tax dollars earmarked for student loans. Mr Gill touched on the issue, and I'd like to elaborate on the measures this government has taken to increase accountability for student loans.

When we first started reporting annually on default rates, the government made a commitment to reduce the student loan default rate to less than 10%. This year's default rate is 15.7%, down from 18.2% in 1999, and compared to 23.5% that was reported in 1997. I am pleased to note that this is the third year in a row that student loan default rates have dropped in this province.

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It is encouraging that the default rate has declined across the system. The rate for university students is 7.1%, down from 8.4% and already below the 10% goal; the rate for college students is 17.2%, down from 20.1%; and the rate for students at private vocational schools is 28.9%, down from 31%.

This decline did not happen by accident. The government introduced a number of important initiatives that brought the default rates down: new loan applicants are credit-screened to be sure they do not have a history of credit abuse; interest relief on their loan repayments is available to students who have low incomes after they graduate; tax credits can now help students cover the interest costs on student loans; institutions that have very high default rates must help pay for the cost of loans defaulted upon by their former students.

Post-secondary institutions must now also give students accurate information about default rates, graduation rates and graduate employment rates by program so students can make informed choices about their studies. This information is available by program for each college and university, and each institution is required to post the information on their Web site for the public to access.

As Mr Gill also pointed out, this government has demonstrated its commitment to helping well-qualified

students get a post-secondary education by introducing student assistance programs and awards programs that help students in financial need manage the cost of their education. For example, permanent trust funds with a total value of \$600 million have been established at colleges and universities to provide aid to students in need. These funds will provide assistance for up to 185,000 students over a 10-year period. Half of the funding for the Ontario student opportunity trust fund comes directly from the province.

The new Ontario student opportunity grant program ensures that no student incurs more than \$7,000 of debt per year of study. Approximately 39,800 students received grants last year.

Colleges and universities that increase tuition must use a portion of their increased tuition revenues to provide aid to students in need. In 2000-01, these bursaries are expected to total \$125.3 million.

High school students with top marks and who have financial need are recognized through the new Aiming for the Top scholarships. More than 4,000 scholarships were awarded in the fall of 2000; \$35 million annually will be invested in these tuition scholarships when the program is fully implemented. The scholarships recognize the hard work and dedication of Ontario's secondary school students and help them get a good start in post-secondary education.

Funding for the Ontario work-study plan has been doubled to enable universities and colleges to hire twice as many students and help deserving students complete their studies. Ontario is increasing its support for this program from \$5.4 million to \$10.8 million annually. The number of students participating in this program will increase from over 3,500 to over 7,000. This program allows students to earn income, work on a schedule that does not conflict with their studies and make a positive contribution to their campus community.

Ontario graduate scholarships in science and technology assist up to 500 students a year. That's on top of the 1,300 students assisted through the current Ontario graduate scholarships program. In 2001-02, the number of Ontario graduate scholarships awarded annually will increase from 1,300 to 2,000 and their value will increase from approximately \$11,800 to \$15,000 for three terms of study. By supporting our brightest graduate students we are making an important investment in Ontario's future ability to research and innovate.

Our government has expanded student aid at almost every level of the post-secondary education system, from providing loans and part-time jobs for low-income students to funding Ontario's top graduate students to help them turn their ideas into reality. Different students need different amounts of funding for different reasons, and like many of our initiatives in post-secondary education, we are increasing the diversity of options available to students.

This legislation is another important step in our government's work to ensure that every willing and qualified student can continue to find a place in college or

university. In short, I think this government has demonstrated a track record of commitment to high-quality post-secondary education and the efficient use of taxpayers' dollars. Passage of this legislation would enable us to continue and build on that record.

Since different people here have talked about their family members, I want to say that my children have graduated from post-secondary education. In my own family, I knew quite early in my daughter's school career that she would probably be going to university and we started at a very early age to save money so that she wouldn't have to take on any kind of loan program or assistance. We made her work in the summer months. She had to be responsible for all of her personal needs. My wife and I, over a period of time—I guess it was over about seven years—saved the money we needed so that she would be able to be debt-free at the end of university. I'm very pleased we were in the financial position to do that. I know not everyone around the province is in that position.

I understand the need for this legislation. I thank the minister for bringing forth this legislation and I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker: It is now time for questions and comments.

Mr Curling: I have a quick comment and maybe a question afterward. I want to compliment my colleagues from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale and Durham and also the member from Simcoe North.

The bill's need for a full debate is obvious. This limited bill: you can see why the three members here went beyond the bill, because they were so hungry to talk about the inadequacies of what this government is doing to education that they hardly addressed the issue itself. They went on to talk about other inadequacies and tried to compliment and prop up the government in some respect. It's a recognition, of course, that there is lots more to be done in that regard than bragging about all this direction.

Let me also ask the members, what took you so long to introduce this bill? You had this agreement for two years, sitting there with the federal government, a simple, easy little agreement to harmonize this sort of payment, and it took you from May 1999 to May 2001 to introduce this bill. This is the kind of thing you drag your feet on, because it wasn't important at all to you. In the meantime, many of the students out there continue to be confused as to how to pay their bills and don't know who they're paying them to. You had this for two years, dragging it out. No wonder you couldn't meet for this length of time.

In your response, tell me what took you so long, given that you had all these long holidays and deprived these wonderful pages here of one week of learning more about this Parliament. But they've learned a lot. They have learned that you have reneged on not only your responsibility to education but your responsibility of accountability in the House. I hope that in your response you'll address those issues for me.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On behalf of the New Democrats at Queen's Park and Howard Hampton, I want to respond—

Interjections.

Mr Kormos: I've been picking up this lingo, you know.

I want to respond to this. I also want you to know that I fought my way to this position this afternoon, to be the person on behalf of this caucus who gets to respond to the Tory and opposition members. It was a bloody battle, but I persuaded my caucus members to let me come here this afternoon to do the members' response. I insisted that the member for Trinity-Spadina stay out of the Legislature this afternoon and wait his turn for his one-hour response to the bill.

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Look, I don't care how many times Tories stand up like the Premier did yesterday and talk about how great university and college students have it under this oppressive regime. The bottom line is that increasingly it's only the children of the wealthiest families who get to go to university. The reality is that young people like Jessica Lott sitting in the members' gallery today, a university student, can tell you—could tell every single one of you—what the reality is for young people out there in universities and professional schools, that this Tory government has made it increasingly impossible for children of working class families to pursue post-secondary education.

This government has no interest in developing quality among our youth. This government has every interest in creating a BMW Mercedes-Benz culture so that those children from the wealthiest families get to pursue those professions and earn, yes, the highest incomes. The children from working class families are having the doors to universities and colleges across this province slammed in their faces by Mike Harris and the Tories, with their increases in tuition fees and their abandonment of the youth of this province.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): It's interesting to hear the member for Niagara South, I believe, from somewhere in that region of the great Niagara-Vineland heartland. The proposition the member presents is deliciously misleading in that it suggests that any efforts by government to assist in student assistance are well nigh cancelled by any efforts we undertake to reduce the debt that we know is there from students going into programs. Sometimes they end up not getting the right job coming out of a program, but they have a high debt.

The most interesting comment is the mantra for the member for Niagara Centre, who insists that access is now closed to working class families. That's nonsense, a silly proposition. All I have to do is take him to Humber College and he can do an income survey in the robotics program, as an example. He can do a survey in the business accounting program. He can go to Centennial. He can go to the hospitality program at Niagara College himself and find out that most of the folks there come from a working class background.

The silly proposition that everybody who has access, because of the high tuition fees, are going to be the folks who get a Mercedes—I've never driven a Mercedes, don't want to, don't need to. The point is that if some people want to aspire to that, what's wrong with that? That's our free enterprise society. Our friends across the way would level us to the same level of mediocrity—

Mr Kormos: Is that your Jag?

Mr Hastings: It must be your Jag, member for Niagara Centre.

Mrs Bountrogianni: I'd like to respond to the member from Durham and his diatribe of comments earlier this afternoon. He talked about what Premier Harris said yesterday, but he didn't finish, from the Hansard, what Premier Harris said. He basically said that medical students have a \$28,000 loan and that they could pay this off within a few weeks or months—I can't remember exactly what the words were, weeks or months—when in fact all the students who finish medical school then go into residency. Most residencies are under \$40,000 a year. But they are required to start paying off the loan from their medical school. So it's not as if they are already full-fledged doctors, making a lot of money and paying off their loans.

You keep mentioning across the way about the University of Western Ontario ensuring that all their students have the resources to continue in their studies. The average debt is \$75,000 for students finishing medical school at the University of Western Ontario. Those are their numbers; those aren't our numbers. There is some dispute about that research that shows that the average family income of students going to medical school has risen from \$80,000 to \$140,000.

Interjection.

Mrs Bountrogianni: I agree it isn't a perfect study; it's a survey study. But based on those numbers, the average family income has increased. You do this, too. You do studies based on surveys and universities do studies based on surveys. Yes, the reliability isn't 100%, but the average income has increased.

Other studies from Stats Canada have shown that in three university towns in Ontario in fact the average income in general of all programs, not only medical programs, of families sending their children to university has increased, perhaps not to the extent of this one University of Western Ontario result, but it has increased. I really wish the member for Durham were here to hear my response.

The Acting Speaker: The government side has two minutes to reply.

Mr Gill: It is a pleasure this afternoon to take part in this debate, where my colleagues the member for Durham and the member for Simcoe North have taken part as well as, in the two-minute hits, the member for Etobicoke North. I appreciate—I don't see the member here; I know I'm not supposed to say that—the member for Scarborough-Rouge River, who spoke on it. I'm going to be referring directly to the inquiry he made because I think it's really important that we stay on the

message. I'll be very happy to answer some of the concerns, the questions they brought up.

The member for Niagara Centre brought up that all the doctors are rich and therefore they drive a Mercedes and this and that. The other day even the NDP was saying, "Frank Stronach is no good, because Frank Stronach, who came in as an immigrant, as a poor person, worked very hard, made millions and along the way he created many, many jobs. He's a great citizen, therefore we take offence." In all defence to Mr Frank Stronach, I think it's unfair. When students who go to medical school and work very hard—take on a number of loans and they have to pay off these loans and they're happy to pay off these loans—go out and buy a decent car, I say more power to them. They deserve it.

On the other hand, the member for Scarborough-Rouge River—and he's back now—asked, why did we not implement this bill earlier on? Why did it take two years for us—the member from Rouge River, I'm answering your concerns.

Mr Curling: Who's right here.

Mr Gill: Yes. Thank you. We were requested, and it's worth repeating, by the federal government to delay the implementation of this because they were not sure which of the bodies were going to be funding this program.

The Acting Speaker: I will caution all members once again that it is contrary to the standing orders to mention another member's absence.

Further debate?

Mrs Bountrogianni: I'll be sharing my time with my colleague from Scarborough-Rouge River, Mr Curling, who is here, and my colleague from Eglinton-Lawrence, who is also here. I want to congratulate all members for being here, people, whoever, the few of you who are watching. It is extremely hot in here. I think the member—where's Bert from?

Mr Kormos: Perth-Middlesex.

Mrs Bountrogianni: The member for Perth-Middlesex said it very nicely earlier when he said that farmers treat their animals better than how we're treated in here, because it is extremely hot right now.

Mr Kormos: Tell them how stinky it is.

Mrs Bountrogianni: The member from Welland says it doesn't smell nice here either.

I would like to continue to respond first to the member for Durham, because he said some outlandish things.

Just to continue on Premier Harris's comments yesterday toward the medical students and his promise that if anyone is having difficulty, to come to his office, that he will help them: the Premier made the same promise a year and a half ago, two Christmases ago, to families who were complaining that they didn't have enough money to buy presents for their children. First he denied that that occurred, then he said, "If there is a family that can't buy their child a present, tell them to call my office and we'll buy them a present." I don't think he predicted the number of calls that he would receive.

Interjection: A lot.

Mrs Bountrogianni: A lot, absolutely. Instead of helping, his office gave them telephone numbers of charities.

Mr Kormos: Shuffled them.

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Mrs Bountrogianni: Shuffled them off; thank you. He shuffled them off. A lot of people got presents from charities that were already giving them presents. The fact is, the promise was to give presents to the poor, because he couldn't believe there were that many. When he realized how many there were, he just buried it. It was all over the papers. It was ridiculous. He made a similar promise yesterday which will again come to haunt him, because there will be students. As they call us, they will call him, and what will he do? Refer them to food shelters? Refer them to other banks? What will he do? I'm really curious to see what your leader will do.

The member for Durham talked about performance indicators and that "we shouldn't reward negative performance." Well, not only do we not even know if we are reinforcing negative performance; we don't know what we're reinforcing with these performance indicators, because they have been found to be invalid. There is no significant difference between those that scored well on them—the colleges and universities—and those that scored poorly. The margin of error was greater, which means you are funding this—as you call it—extra operating grant money by chance. So even the universities and colleges that received this extra money knew they shouldn't get too happy about it because they knew that next year at the same time they may not get any, again by chance. The minister herself almost a year ago said, "We have to look at these indicators. We know they need work." Nothing. It's May—nothing, and the universities and colleges are waiting with bated breath for Wednesday's budget to see what in fact will be there for colleges and universities.

I want to reiterate that the University of Western Ontario's medical school has told us that the average debt of medical school students finishing there is \$75,000, not the \$28,000 that Mr Harris quoted yesterday. The \$28,000 is what they can get a loan for from OSAP, but the actual debt, the average debt of medical students, is \$75,000. There were students here yesterday who predicted \$100,000-and-up loans.

I wanted to respond to the comments that were made by the member for Durham and I'll get back to the bill now, which is what he was supposed to be talking about or at least partly talking about. On this side of the House we support this bill that harmonizes OSAP with the Canadian loans—absolutely support it. We wonder why it took so long but we do support it absolutely. Anything that simplifies life for a student is something that Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party support.

We realize it'll take time. I had a great briefing last week from the minister's bureaucrats on this new bill and I appreciate it. I thank Helmut and everybody in the bureaucracy and we support it. But does this new bill reinstate OSAP to part-time students that this government

cut? Does it reinstate the extra loan forgiveness that this government cut, so forgiving less of the loan? Or does this bill restore the spirit of the Canadian millennium fund, which was supposed to be over and above what the provincial government gave to the students? It doesn't do that. We know that. The minister has actually confessed and said, "Yes, we have every right to be doing what we're doing." And what you're doing—in case the people of Ontario don't know, those who don't have students who have received this fund from the Chrétien government—is what you would have given in loan forgiveness over and above the \$7,000 that they borrow per year. You just give this millennium fund. You say, "Hey, you got it from the feds. You don't need it from us." The net value to the student is zero.

It's really too bad that the member for Durham isn't here. He mentioned that one of his children did receive this fund. I'd like to know how his son is feeling about this sucking of the millennium fund that was supposed to be over and above what your government owes him.

Hon Rob Sampson (Minister of Correctional Services): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's the second time I've heard from the other side another mention, and I know that both sides have been doing it, about members being here or not being here. You did stand up not too long ago and say it's inappropriate. I would ask the member opposite to withdraw her comment.

The Acting Speaker: I again remind all members that we are breaking the standing orders if we continually refer to another member's absence. I would ask all members to respect the standing orders.

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Let's solve that problem of members not being here and count for a quorum.

The Acting Speaker: It's not a point of order. I will now again recognize the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Another point of order? Do we have a quorum in the House?

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk at the Table: A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize again the member for Hamilton Mountain.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I do retract that. I see the member's jacket and I actually do wish to see him. That was my motivation, but I will refrain from doing it again. He mentioned that he wanted to see me speak, not what I had to say, he said, but just to see me speak, but I will refrain.

The millennium fund: I am curious to see what any student feels about this that I haven't spoken to so far. The students I have spoken to really find it insulting that the spirit was that over and above what the government was to give was taken away. In fact, for some students it's a net loss because the Canadian millennium scholarship is taxable.

I see the member opposite and I supported his bill—was it last week? a whole week has gone by—on the RESP improvement, and this again denies a student the spirit of this, which was to help them with an additional \$3,000.

Is there anything in this new bill that talks about how much OSAP will have to be increased to help the private university students? You will be giving them OSAP in the private university colleges and the extra private corporations that you will allow in as a result of the private universities bill. How much extra OSAP will have to be in the budget for students to go to these corporations? There was nothing in the bill about that.

There was nothing in this bill or in the throne speech about many things, and we'll be listening very carefully during the budget to hear that.

Those are the comments I have for a certain member's comments.

I'd like to talk a little bit about OSAP. I want to reiterate that we support any bill that makes it easier for students to get an education in this province, but over the past decade students have been burdened with increasing debt loads. Tuition has increased by 60% under this government, and due to the demographics there has been a 35% increase in student enrolment, while there has been a 39% decrease in funding with respect to the community colleges. However, over the past five years the amount of loan assistance available to students has decreased by \$500 million. I often hear opposite how much the loan assistance has been increased, but when you consider the number of students, per student there's actually a decrease.

The harmonization of the student loan program is one measure that will help students, and we support it. Anything that benefits the working families of this province is something we support. But this simple harmonization is insufficient to address the oncoming crisis in the post-secondary system in Ontario.

Without a significant investment or re-investment of funds, our system will stay 59th out of 60 states and provinces on the continent. We currently only sit at 59th, just above Bush's Texas. Harmonization makes it easier to borrow, but it does nothing to address the real needs of students.

There is one positive thing that has come out of this government in the last few months, and that is Portals and Pathways, the review of the post-secondary education task force. I think everyone was surprised this task force came up with the results it did. Now we are waiting to see how much of this report will be implemented.

One of the most interesting, and probably upsetting to the Tories, aspects on this report is its strong recommendation for increased funding in post-secondary education. This is your own task force. Assessing the adequacy of government funding did not fall within the mandate of this task force, and yet a significant portion of the report addresses this, is dedicated to this. This task force, by the way, was supposed to look at potential inefficiencies within the university and college system.

What this task force found very easily is that Ontario's post-secondary institutions are both cost-effective and innovative, efficient and fiscally responsible. However, according to the report, we are at a crossroads. The projected revenue gap threatens the very survival of Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

1700

In order for growth needs to be met, additional sources of revenue beyond tuition fees will need to be found. Tuition fees make up a larger share of total institutional revenues today than at any other time during the 1990s.

Institutions are aging. Deferred maintenance costs stand at \$900 million in the universities and \$300 million in the colleges. These are deferred maintenance costs. This isn't the need for new buildings.

Based on current levels of operating funds per student, the task force estimates that the revenue required to meet the projected enrolment increase of 88,000 students by 2005 is \$481 million. This estimate does not include the revenue necessary to deal with inflationary pressures, matching post-secondary investment in competitive jurisdictions, physical plant, improving student services or new learning technologies. This is simply what is needed over and above what is given to address the demographics.

The Ontario colleges are a success story according to this report. We agree on this side of the House. If only the opposite side of the House was more like their predecessor Premier Davis, who started the community colleges. It was a vision that everyone deserved an education in this province. However, according to the Tory task force report, the colleges are not well equipped to respond to the pressures of increased enrolment, faculty recruitment and capital needs.

Eligibility thresholds for OSAP have been raised. Loan forgiveness eligibility has also increased. These two changes, say the task force writers, have resulted in students having greater difficulty acquiring student loans and higher debt loads for those who do qualify. This report in many ways contradicts the Premier's own statements yesterday.

The regulations of the OSAP program are poorly communicated—if this bill begins to address that through the kiosk, as the member opposite talked about, we would support it—and there are long waiting periods for students who want to know if they qualify and how much assistance they will receive.

There will not be significant financial savings from the amalgamation of Ontario post-secondary institutions. The task force believes that there will be little benefit to forced mergers. There are some key recommendations from this report that I hope the government heeds. It is your own report.

Change the governance and administrative structure of the colleges by creating a new college charter. With respect to being more accountable, track and monitor performance indicators, but develop a common set of performance indicators and benchmarks of best practice to provide a consistent set of measures. This task force,

although its mandate was to look at possible inefficiencies through their consultations, found that performance indicators also need to be changed.

There should be a one-stop entry portal. I believe you were talking about that with respect to this bill. But it should also be that way for anything to do with post-secondary institutions. There are so many programs. Some students believe that they're going into one program when in fact, halfway through, they realize it is not for them. The more we can give them before they enter post-secondary the better.

According to the Tories' task force, information on all institutions, financial aid, and transfer regulations and arrangements would be easily accessible to students and their parents.

Interjection.

Mrs Bountrogianni: But I can't comment on that. There should be a seamless transfer system—we support that as well—to assess and evaluate existing transfer mechanisms; in other words, credits from university to university, from college to college and from college to university. There are some great partnerships out there, but there isn't consistency across the province.

The report says that collaborations should have system-wide applicability and that certain institutions—and they say especially in the north, in the rural areas and francophone institutions—should adopt collaborative arrangements.

A transformation incentive fund should be established: This fund will be used to foster innovation and the adoption of best practices in the areas of student centre services, institutional improvements and sector-wide improvement strategies. This fund would operate over a five-year period with \$80 million a year allocated to this fund. An advisory panel would review funding proposals and provide advice to the government.

I hope the member from Durham is listening now, as he said he wanted to hear this.

Student services should be improved. Library services, for example, have gone downhill. They do what they can, they share resources across the library system, but here is where the cutbacks have really hurt.

Special-needs students need more assistance at the post-secondary level, according to this report. The former finance minister, Ernie Eves, did give some money due to the untimely and tragic death of his son, Justin. As a memorial to his son, he did give money for special-needs post-secondary students, and that was appreciated. I was in the sector when that was given, and that was appreciated. But according to this report, more money is needed for special-needs students in post-secondary, and improved scholarship assistance.

I spoke earlier about the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. This report, your report, says, "allow first-year students to qualify for the national Canadian millennium bursary." Don't start at second year, start right at first year, because quite frankly that's when they need it most. They've only had two months to work instead of four. That's when they most need whatever help we can give them.

It says, “Develop government and institutional policies to reduce student debt load and defaults. Special attention should be paid to retaining ‘at-risk’ students.” What happens now with the data from at-risk students—in other words, students who drop in and out—is that the institution is punished. One of those terrible indicators shows, “Oh, this many students didn’t finish this year.”

Lives are complicated. Sometimes it takes more than two years to finish a two-year diploma. The institution should not be punished, as it is now, with its funding source because students decide to take a detour, for whatever reason, to finish their degree.

It says there should be more differentiation and specialization among post-secondary institutions. This report, curiously enough, recommends establishing a polytechnical model within a new college charter. The association of college students, though, warns us and wants us to be cautious that if indeed this polytechnical model is adopted, it should be in the best interests of the student, not of the institute per se.

This Tory task force report says that targeted funding should be given to special populations to allow them full access to education opportunities, and repeats that the access and remediation role of colleges to accommodate special populations needs reinforcement, needs more support. In short, your own task force is saying you have been inadequately funding post-secondary institutions. This bill, although welcome—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. The member for Hamilton Mountain has the floor.

Mr O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: As part of the quorum count, I want it to be noted for the record the member for Durham is here, and I was always watching it on television to hear the—

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order.

I would like to again recognize the member for Hamilton Mountain, who has the floor.

Mrs Bountrogianni: I took back what I said, and I'm glad to see you here.

In conclusion—I would like to give my colleague his turn now—your own report says you're underfunding colleges and universities. This bill is great. We support it. It's going to make it easier for students to get loans. But it's not going to solve the problems with post-secondary institutions.

Mr Curling: I want to commend my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, who is so well-informed about education issues. Actually, the Conservative government should be consulting with her each day. You would learn so much of what education is about and the direction you should be going. I think that would be light and hope for the students of this province. We are actually blessed to have the member for Hamilton Mountain in our caucus.

1710

This is about Bill 19. You heard what my colleague said: “It's a good bill. It's a limited kind of bill. We support the bill.”

If we're talking about harmonizing the Canada student loan and the Ontario student loan. Mr Speaker, at your young age, you can remember, very much so, paying your bills on time at the bank, wherever. You paid your money and you were not quite sure if it was going to the Canada student loan or to the OSAP loan. Sometimes you overpaid your Canada student loan and the bank itself got so confused they didn't even transfer the money over to OSAP. Then the student is called and harassed and harangued all the time that they are in deficit on one side when they overpaid on the other side.

It was an inefficiency of government over there, not getting their act together. Now they're bringing a bill here and saying, “Guess what? We've just about got our act together,” although they had almost two years in which to do that. From May 1999, this agreement with the federal government was in place.

Interjections.

Mr Curling: They're getting sort of agitated over there, saying, “The federal government asked us not to do it.” I don't know when this Tory government, the Mike Harris government, listened to the federal government. Every now and again, I notice now in the House, they are quoting Paul Martin and talking about the brilliant aspect of his direction as the Minister of Finance, and sometimes Jean Chrétien.

Here you are now, you've had an agreement two years. You sat on your rumps the whole time and did nothing about it. But who was being punished? The students.

We, of course, will support this. We support this because, as you said, it brings together the harmonization of these two loans, the confusion that is going on. But it raised some questions for me. They said, “Here's an opportunity now to ask to maybe discount this and allow other institutions to buy this debt.” The banks are saying, “Let us get out of this. It's so bad, let us get out of this.” It will take some time before they get out of this mess. The banks are saying, “Get somebody else to do that.”

And then you see what happens. They're going to discount this amount of money and sell it off to other institutions. You know how it works. It almost reminds me of Highway 407. If you discount this amount of money and sell it off to someone else, somebody is paying for this, because they borrowed this money before and they will discount it and other institutions will get it. So I wonder too, who is paying for that indebtedness? I just wondered. But maybe you don't have to go too far. It's the working class people who again have to dip into their pockets to pay for this government and their misdirection of how they do things.

Do you know what this bill doesn't do? It does nothing to address indebtedness of students. Since 1995—and you can recall, Mr Speaker—this government has raised tuition fees; about a 45% increase since they have been in power. As a matter of fact, this legislation they're bringing in doesn't really tell us anything, because they say, “The regulations will tell you how we're going to go about it.” Of course, they say, “Trust us.” We

have been trusting this government. Many of the people have been doing this a long time. They have trusted them to the point that tuition fees have been increased 45%.

Look at these wonderful young people here today, the pages. You know, I am concerned about them because by the time they are ready for university—and if this government is in power until that time, it's quite possible the tuition fees would be raised maybe 100%. So mom and dad and everybody will have to be working pretty hard to get that money in order to make sure that they're at school and have access to post-secondary studies to get a good job.

Right now, my two daughters have finished university and I'm happy and proud of them, but I'm not so happy that there is a debt of about 20-odd-thousand dollars for their first degree. My other daughter has a second degree and has a great debt on her hands right now. As a matter of fact, it's necessary to have this education. So I am concerned about our young people. If this government continues to be in power—we will make sure that doesn't happen. We'll make sure that we have a Liberal government, and the member for Hamilton Mountain, who has much more insight and much more sensitivity for the concerns here.

So the fact is, while we welcome this harmonization bill, it does nothing to address that indebtedness.

I want to touch on a very particular area. People who had gotten student loans from the government really had confidence in the fact that they would get a nice job in their area of training or education. The government of the day, the Minister of Finance, had announced the direction of the economy, where it was going and the prosperity of that direction, and some people invested in that direction. Lo and behold, after acquiring that, with a lot of money and debt, the opportunities in their profession fell flat. And who is going to pay for that, for the sometimes bad decisions of government? The individuals, the students who have a debt of 20-odd-thousand dollars for their first degree.

You heard, of course, the First Minister, the Premier, state emphatically here that within a couple of months of doing medicine, you can pay for the amount of money you get. I think it was such an insulting way to address a concern of students who are saying, "We're extremely indebted by the time we complete our profession." He said, "Oh, the amount of money they get, they can pay that off." They were in shock. They came to hear the Premier respond to a very intelligent question, a very concerned question, and that was what he said: "You can do that."

He also alluded to the fact that there is no problem at all about access to education. All those who want the education can come forward to post-secondary institutions and be accepted. That may be so academically, but we weren't addressing academic access for the millions of wonderful students we have; we were addressing financial access. Many working-class families cannot afford the increased tuition fees that have been put on by this government, denying them the opportunity to be successful.

You have the Minister of Community and Social Services saying, "I want to get them out to work and I want to get them literacy," and what have you, but in the meantime there is a sort of non-access to post-secondary institutions because of the financial ability to do so.

I would say to this government, sure, you can bring a bill in here for harmonization that is simple and easy, but where are the other concerns you should be addressing? This government has a very bad reputation for implementing things. We will study things, we will have all kinds of task forces doing things, it will be right in their hands, but nobody implements it.

I understand that in your budget speech, in step 14 of your budget, you talked in a creative way about implementation of training institutions and what have you. The next step I would suggest to you is to implement, implement things like access to trades and professions that have been around since 1989. It's all here. Forget about all the studies. They're done already. You don't have to spend any more money or anything else; just implement it. That's the next step. The next step is to implement, but we don't get that done by this government. They will talk and they will create another bureaucracy, another institution, another building in order to talk about training, but here are people who need to access their profession, because they are trained.

The other aspect we always keep addressing here every day is the fact that in Canada or in Ontario we have the brain drain nonsense. We have one of the greatest brain gains in North America: all those wonderful individuals whom you have asked to come to this wonderful country. It's a great country, with all the great professions: the doctors, the lawyers, the engineers, the nurses, all those with their professions. They were trained in their own native countries. Money was spent on the education of these individuals who come here. So we gain. Some of them who have left and gone to the United States are the people who got their training somewhere else and said, "We cannot get ahead here, so we'll go down south." In the balance of debit and credit and what have you, Canada and Ontario have had a brain gain, but what the government has done is played politics with it all and not implemented the basic things about those who can access a trade and profession.

1720

So I do get concerned that we have simple bills and then we speak beyond the facts, because we're hungry for real legislation to come in, to move forward in a good direction. We spend months getting into the House—months. We have not been in this House for months. We are eager, especially this opposition, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals here are eager to get on with the business of Ontario, to get people to work, to get people in their professions, to get the economy going, to address some concerns with teachers and to address concerns with the hospitals that have been in chaos since this government has taken over. But, oh, no, they sit back home and nothing happens. We couldn't them here to even debate those things, to carry on the duties that we

are given to do by the mandate we're given by our constituency.

The fact is that I feel very strongly that while they drag their feet to do these things, the chicken will come home to roost one day—and it is coming to roost. We'll have this government out very soon. Sometimes democracy is a slow process, but the waiting itself can be quite rewarding. Our reward in the next year and half or two is to see Mike Harris and this government out through the door with the dictatorial way in which they do things.

I have a couple of questions which I want to put to this government. First, I'm not very convinced that we are doing very well about our students in the province of Ontario. I think that lots more can be done. We talk about counselling in the area of high schools. The counselling that happens in the high schools is academic counselling. There is no professional counselling, no career guidance of where students should go. Many of them are talking about credits or what you should have, but the fact is that students should be given more counselling in the direction of a professional career in which they should go. I would like them to address that.

The other area that I was extremely concerned about is that when the legislation came out some years ago, students who had great debts, student loans, could not declare bankruptcy. There are students who are indebted to the hilt, unable to move on with their lives. Big business, Eaton's and all that, could declare bankruptcy if they want, but the individual, who may find it extremely difficult to move on with their life, is burdened and the fact that they cannot declare bankruptcy is being legislated. Some people cannot get out of that rut for years. They may never get out of that rut, and live in a bankrupt situation all their lives.

I would like to see this government address that concern, but they welcome all of that, in a way. If you want to take the burden off students, that indebtedness, address that bankruptcy act, in which they say that students cannot declare bankruptcy, even if they are poised to be going in that direction.

I mentioned before, who's going to pay for all of this indebtedness that we're going to have when we do sell off this kind of money to other institutions and all that? Of course, the regulation doesn't tell us what the procedures are and how they are going to discount this sort of money. I'll just give you an example and I'm just going to use figures as an example. If the student loan indebtedness outside is, say, \$100 million, I'm sure they're going to have institutions coming in that are ready to buy it for maybe \$65 million. Then that deficit that is there, they're going to say, "Where did all that money come from?"

I'm not as brilliant as my colleague for Scarborough-Agincourt, who really has the debit and credit thing all balanced. But I saw him shaking his head and I said, "Yes, he's concerned by the fact of, where is that indebtedness going to be paid?" Because what happens is, we discount the money, we maybe sell it off to some

of the friends of Mike Harris, who say, "Give me that money and I personally will make sure that we collect that money."

Many students and families and have called me constantly in my constituency office to say to me the hounding and the harassment of collectors are driving them crazy. When I say to them to call Management Board in this respect, they don't get any kind of support. But I hope that there is some support for those people who need some sort of counselling when they have an indebtedness to their student loan and want to go on with their lives. I strongly believe that if this government wants to address the issue of students, it should look at that great indebtedness they have, look at the fact that they have increased tuition fees 45% since 1995. That in itself brings hardship to families and everyone else who is involved with education.

We know, of course, that it is one's human right to be able to access affordable education. But many of these things are just spoken words. They're not implemented and they're not supported. There is posturing all the time by the government about what they'd like to do with students and what they can do, but this does not really happen at all. The Minister of Labour should be extremely concerned by the fact that he gets a skilled workforce coming in here. But I should tell the Minister of Labour that what is needed is that people be able to afford that training and not be indebted by this huge, huge debt that is bestowed upon them with no great assistance from this government.

Your can't actually give it with one hand and take away so much with the other hand. When I went to college, I recall that it was \$72.50 to do five credits. That wasn't even long ago. Today, by golly, you couldn't pay for one credit with the kind of money it took to go to Seneca College at that time, and when I went to York it was not even that expensive. Today students are faced by such a great debt that by the time they are through with all their education, they have an even greater debt on their hands than having a mortgage on a house. There is a larger debt sometimes than a mortgage on their house. They are not able to proceed and progress through their lives.

I want to say, in support of Bill 19, which is such a simple bill that was hanging around for the last two years and is just coming before us, about harmonizing the Canadian student loan and the OSAP programs: while we welcome that, it is far from addressing the deeper concerns we have and that students have in making sure they can have access to good education.

I will now give my time to my colleague.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): It's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Scarborough-Rouge River, on the banks of the beautiful Rouge; and also my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, the home of McMaster University, that wonderful institution not only of Canadian renown but of international stature, especially for its medical school; also the members across the way who have spoken forcefully to this bill. I

certainly commend them for participating in the debate, especially the member from Durham, who always has something interesting to offer, and the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale.

This Bill 19 is certainly a good first step toward stabilizing the student loan situation in this province, because obviously students cannot complete university without that kind of assistance. It's just not doable. No matter what income bracket students are in, it's a challenge to try to get the money together, not only to pay for tuition; I think there are new, increasing incremental costs. When you were in school you didn't have to pay a couple of thousand bucks for a computer and all the software and updating. So students now not only pay for their books but they're supposed to pay for the hardware, the software, and that's another added cost. Then you have to pay for Internet access at home—another cost.

There are certainly a lot of added costs to being a student, for instance for housing. There was someone in the paper this week talking about living in a basement apartment here in the city of Toronto, I think, at \$1,500 per month accommodation that three or four of them were sharing. So accommodation is a lot more expensive than it used to be. Certainly in all university cities accommodation is expensive. My youngest son is at Queen's, just finishing first year, and it's quite expensive for them. Now they're renting a house, so on top of the utilities and the rental, tuition, books, computers—those costs are formidable, because they're after-tax dollars for a family. There are very few write-offs for families or for students. If you add that all up, they certainly need as much support in terms of loans, grants, scholarships, bursaries, and certainly in terms of keeping tuition down.

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One of the things I agreed with, that the Premier said yesterday—I don't agree with a lot that he said, but one of the points he did make was that there is quite a substantial cost to educating students in post-secondary streams in Ontario and all over Canada. Sometimes we as Canadians or Ontarians take for granted the fact that there are huge costs. I think the Premier referred to \$22,000, or whatever, per student in medical school. But there are costs there, and that comes from the tax base and is shared by property taxpayers as a whole. I don't think we as Canadians, Ontarians, sometimes take full consideration of the costs that governments put up and taxpayers in general put up to make education affordable.

As you know, the opposite of that is the American experience. It's not unusual for an American student to pay US\$20,000 or US\$30,000 for one year at Stanford, Dartmouth, MIT—the top schools. Twenty thousand, and that's not unusual. We, on this side of the border, have had a tradition of government support to keep tuition low, to make it totally accessible. I think it's a laudable tradition, and we, as Canadians and Ontarians, should be proud we've had that open-door policy here. It's something we don't want to let go of, and something that I think we want to enhance, even though the challenges are quite significant if you look at what's happening to students in Ontario today.

There's been a 45% increase in tuition, and, there's no doubt about it, a mindset change is taking place. Where students 20 or 30 years ago would automatically think, "I go to high school, and then I go to university," now they're beginning to say, "Maybe I go to high school. Maybe I go to college. Maybe I go to university," because they know you no longer pay \$1,000 for tuition. Now that tuition could be up to \$8,000, plus the ancillary costs I talked about. So a mindset change is taking place in our schools.

As you know, Mr Speaker, I was fortunate enough to teach in some of the finest high schools in this province for 18 years, so I've been there and I've seen the change. I have a brother teaching high school, and I talk to him regularly about the challenge he has and the differences that have taken place.

When people were speaking here, I can recollect that there were students of lesser means. I know you were involved with ice hockey, and you saw a lot of Toronto kids who were able to get scholarships to Dartmouth or to play hockey at Michigan Tech. They got a great education because of their hockey skills. Many of the students who went to United States universities were given scholarships based on their athletic ability. As much as we condemn the Americans for that type of thing, I was always a great proponent of it. I thought that if a young man or woman had certain skills—and it is too bad it was restricted, in the most part, to athletics and mostly to males. As you know, now it's opening up. We're getting volleyball scholarships, track scholarships for young ladies and young men. That's part of the whole education process. Whether it's athletics or drama or being able to play an instrument like the violin, your excellence should be rewarded and recognized.

I was referring to a lot of these athletes who went to the States. Many of them were of very moderate means. They would never have gone or thought of going to university unless that aid was there. As a result of that aid being there, they got a great opportunity. Take a look at Jim Corrigan from Scollard Hall, who came from a poor working class family in North Bay. He got to go to Kent State, got a great education, played football, raised a family. There are countless examples of that. I remember even in my own school, St Michael's College School, where a couple of students went on to Princeton, a couple went to Yale, a couple went to Colgate—I remember students from a very poor single-parent family were allowed to go to Cornell. They are now working in the States and in Canada and doing very well. They had limited financial resources at home. They couldn't have done it without financial help at home. But because of their athletic abilities, special talents they had, they were able to get an incredible education, for instance, at Cornell. They're better people for it, they're exposed to the rest of the world, and they've got this excellent life, you might say a passport to go wherever they want. They show that degree, they can get a job, they get respect.

I think that's the type of thing we should promote more in Ontario. We do have excellent schools here,

whether it be Queens, Western, McMaster, York or Toronto. These are excellent institutions which we should appreciate more. That's why I certainly favour as much government support of these excellent institutions as possible, because they are our ticket to being competitive, not only in North America but internationally. If we invest in universities and invest in these students and in the faculties to be able to do research, we are going to be competitive in almost every field.

We should continue to understand that this is not an expenditure on these students, whether it be in OSAP or in scholarships or lower tuition; it is an investment in the future of Ontario. More Ontarians should appreciate the fact that this is what your tax dollars are doing. This is what OSAP is doing. It is investing in the future of the students and in the future of your province and your country. You cannot progress, get involved in cutting-edge research in the biotech field or in engineering unless you've got this kind of excellence.

That's one of the reasons why I referred to the American example. As I said, there are certain things I dislike about the American system, but they do place a heavy emphasis on education in the post-secondary sector. Once a child reaches kindergarten, you might say, they talk about investing in that college education for that boy or girl. They are very focused on that and their culture is focused on that. It is one of the reasons why the Americans have done so well internationally in a competitive fashion, because their universities are heavily subsidized corporately, their fundraising drives, their profile.

I know we laugh. Again I go back to the sports analogy. Sometimes we laugh at the Big Ten basketball or we laugh at Duke and all these schools, but that's marketing. They're marketing these institutions. The institutions are marketed so that the kid living in Harlem or the kid living in Hamtramck or the kid living in Santa Clara, that boy or girl says, "Hey, I know about Duke. I want to go to Duke. It's a great school. It's a great place." There's a sense of excitement in the post-secondary future that they see in front of them.

There's nothing wrong with us as Canadians and Ontarians maybe having a bit of that attitude and learning from the Americans, who really are trying to tell us, "Hey, if you want to get ahead and you want to get to a point where you develop excellent forms of new medical technology, medical microsurgery and genetic research, invest in these kids. These kids will make the breakthrough. They will. They're the ones who can do it."

The only thing that I fear is happening in Ontario is that there's going to be a lot of superb minds that won't be able to give us back that intelligence because of the cost of education, which is creeping up in this province, that is going to make a lot of working families and a lot of young people say, "Well, I can't do it because of the money. I won't be able to afford all these costs and I can't afford the debt."

I'm not trying to be critical of the government per se, but I'm just saying this is something that is very much on

the minds of young people. There is the reality of these added costs. I fear that many of these students, who in some cases, by the way, may not be A students in high school and won't be able to get the top scholarships or bursaries—sometimes there are students who have slight dyslexia, they have home situations, whatever it is, where they weren't able to focus on education, which is quite common.

In a lot of the schools in Toronto, students have two or three jobs, so maybe their marks aren't up to scratch. But that student probably is capable of going to university and on to post-graduate school and maybe being a top biochemical engineer, someone who will make breakthroughs in heart surgery. But they won't be given that chance because perhaps their marks weren't quite there, their parents didn't have the money, and the cost of tuition and books and computers made it prohibitive for them to get there. That is no doubt happening.

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I think a lot of these students who come from, let's say, the working class areas of the city and of the province are not going to be able to fulfill their dreams, fulfill their full potential. We, as elected officials, as part of the Legislature and the government, should try and do everything we can to open doors for these students and not preclude giving them a chance to show their teachers or the university faculties what they can do. As we sit right now in Ontario, I think there is a regression, where more and more students are not even looking at this option and their families are saying no.

As I mentioned, I have a brother who teaches at a school in the old city of York, at Rogers Road and Weston Road, if you know that area. It's a gateway community. In his school 90% of the students don't have English as a first language at home; 90% speak another language besides English at home. The tragedy is that in that school, and there are many bright kids, many of them do not aspire to go to university because of the income level, because they feel their parents can't afford to put them through. They see their parents at home struggling to pay the rent, to pay the mortgage, to put food on the table. For them to dare say to their parents, "Hey, listen, I'm going to go university and not work, and go into debt," they wouldn't even dream of it.

Basically school doesn't become a priority because they're working delivering pizza, they're working waiting on tables. Quite commonly, they work with their parents at night cleaning offices. This is quite common in Toronto. They work after school and they go at night with their parents and clean office buildings. How can that student come to school the next morning at 9 o'clock and be sharp and able to do assignments, never mind where they would find the time to do homework because they're working with their parents cleaning office buildings at night?

Among those children are all kinds of undiscovered treasures, whether it be at Archbishop Romero or schools like Lawrence Park in my area or schools like Etobicoke. If we give a bit of encouragement and help them financially and let them know there shouldn't be a financial

barrier to coming to school and staying in high school and going to university, we will not lose these natural treasures we have in our schools. They are there. They are in every classroom, in every school, and somehow we've got to, as government, make it very possible that all these students with potential be allowed to go to university or college and excel in whatever they do. It is not automatic that they will go to school just because they're bright. We need to give them those open doors.

I know the amazing things that go on in our schools. In here we generally dwell on some tragic things that sometimes happen. We went through that strike situation. If you visit our schools, you see the brilliance of young people. I was at a school two weeks ago on Earth Day. It was Chaminade high school at Keele Street and Queens Drive. I hadn't been in a school in years and I went in there. Do you know what they were doing there? They had a brown trout fish hatchery in the school. They built it on their own in an old equipment room. They had a fish hatchery where they had 4,000 brown trout they had got from Duffins Creek. They went there, and as they told us this: if you shock the trout in the creek, then what happens is they squeeze the eggs right out of the trout that are there and then they bring them back to the hatchery, and now they had 4,000 little brown trout in the school. Do you know what they were doing with those 4,000 brown trout? They were going to put them in, of all places—I know the Minister of Labour knows—Black Creek.

Everybody thinks that Black Creek is some kind of open sewer. These kids pulled out 500 shopping carts from Black Creek, they pulled out tonnes of garbage, everything under the sun, and they were rebuilding the banks of Black Creek and putting 4,000 trout into Black Creek. They were doing it because they found it interesting, they found it fun and they found it educational.

Nobody talks about those great stories that take place in our schools. That is one example. I'm sure there are examples right across Ontario of some of the wonderful things that are being done by students if you encourage them, if you inspire them and if you give them some kind of wherewithal to do it.

That's the type of thing we, as government, should try to encourage and reward in our schools. If there is excellence, reward them, give them the chance and ensure that those students who are so interested in natural biology go to university. But I wonder, out of that school—I think there are about 800 students there and about half the school is involved in the environmental club—how many of them will get a chance to go to university. That is a public school in a working class area. If you know Keele and Lawrence, it's not that well-to-do. If there is that kind of commitment by these students and their teachers, we in government owe it to them to give them every opportunity, to make sure that kind of initiative is encouraged as much as possible. This is entrepreneurship initiative of the first order.

That's why, when we look at how we fund universities and the post-secondary section, we do whatever we can to remove obstacles and barriers.

I think Bill 19 is a step toward streamlining the ability of these students to tap into the OSAP loans. We've got to make it easier; we've got to have much more opportunity and do whatever we can to keep tuition down, as difficult as it is, because no matter how you cut it, if tuitions keep going up the way they are, there are going to be a lot of students who, through no fault of their own—not because they're not intelligent and not because they're not willing or their families aren't willing—will not be able to excel in university or college.

That is why we have to look at Bill 19 and whatever we do in this sector as an investment in Ontario's future. It's an investment in intelligence. That's really where we can be competitive with the rest of the world. We can invest in human intelligence here in this province. There's a lot of it. I encourage this government to do whatever it can to ensure that there is a stoppage to this creeping increase in the cost of tuition, that there's more facilitation of scholarship grants, way above and beyond what we do now, so that every child will get that chance to fulfil himself.

Thank you for listening. I appreciate it.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Questions and comments?

Ms Frances Lankin (Beaches-East York): I'm largely in agreement with the member from Eglinton-Lawrence. In looking at the bill itself, he describes it as perhaps a good step. I see it more as an administrative bill. It is about streamlining. It really parallels the federal government's move to take over student loans because of the high debt load that was there and because banks were no longer prepared to finance the risk in that sector. So there are some administrative changes here.

What I think is sad is that we've missed an opportunity to really try to tackle the root cause of the problems in our universities, colleges and post-secondary education system right now for student indebtedness, and that is the issue of tuition.

I think the member from Eglinton-Lawrence's analysis is right. I'd give it some language that he may not use. He provided a class analysis and I think, quite frankly, that is appropriate. When we see what has happened over the last number of years, since 1995, across the board tuitions have gone up by about 60%. Some professional courses that have been deregulated have gone up by as much as 500%. As much as the government speaks to the issue of the student loan program and the changes they've made, what we can see in hard research that's done is that working class families are making different choices. Kids from working class families are saying they don't want to take the risk of that kind of high indebtedness. There is a chilling effect that is happening which is so terrible for the future of our young people and for the future of our country.

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I believe, and our caucus believes, that we've got to reverse this. We should immediately re-regulate those professional courses that have been deregulated. We

should roll back those tuitions. Let's have an even playing ground for anyone who wants to be a doctor, for example, in this province. We also believe we need to roll back tuition increases another 10%. Let's then look at how we can alleviate the pressure and really have equal opportunity of access. It's a class analysis, I think.

Mr O'Toole: I just want to pick up on the positive responses I'm hearing. I would include in that the member for Beaches-East York, who, to some extent, has gone a long way to agreeing that the harmonization initiative to provide students with a clear opportunity is really the right thing to do. Beyond that, there may be some disagreements with the deregulation of tuition.

I think the member from Eglinton-Lawrence said it, and I think he recognizes, as well as relating to KPIs, the key performance indicators, it's the right thing to do. We should measure somehow, so that students have choices to make. We've all talked about choices. Which program leads to the best opportunities?

I think the institutions are starting to change their culture as well. In fact, they've been consulted, as you know, on developing these performance measures. But it still does come down to choice. At the end of the day, it comes down to choices.

I like to think of the positive part of it. We have much harmony on some of the comments made today, and really it's a celebration for students. If we could simplify the process of applying and what the criteria for applying are—there are going to be variances between provinces for opportunities, and some of the best universities and colleges in Ontario. We have to make sure we have some of the best programs. I think that between students having those choices, it's clear to me that this is what this accountability mechanism is all about. There will be those who disagree with the word "accountability," but students need to know what the success rates have been, what the enrolment has been, what the graduation rate has been. I think this gives them the information to make clear choices. After all, at the end of the day, all their education and training is about how they want to direct their own lives in the future. So it's not just that.

The member for Hamilton Mountain, who I know was a professor and is a learned person—although she is not here right now. I shouldn't say that but I say it because she said to me—I know she's watching on television somewhere out there. I hope she doesn't have a television in her car. But anyway—

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to my colleague from Eglinton-Lawrence, who indicated clearly that we will be supporting this bill. It does provide, in our view, certain streamlining to make it easier for student loans and so on. But he also correctly noted, and I think with some eloquence, based on his experience in his riding—the experience many of us in this House have had—that the question of post-secondary funding, the question of tuition, ought to be looked at in much greater detail.

Post-secondary education in this province is becoming more and more difficult for working families to achieve, whether you're talking about medical school or undergraduate programs. Tuition increases in the course of the last 10 years, I believe, now exceed 110%, well above the rate of inflation in other sectors.

It's interesting that this government's policy has been effectively, in our view, to starve post-secondary education at the very time when world experts in productivity and other things are telling us the importance and significance of post-secondary education to productivity improvements.

Robert Reich spoke at a conference we organized, and basically talked about governments having two roads: they can take the high road or the low road. If you take the low road—that is, lower taxes, lower quality, a lower standard of living—someone is always going to be lower than you. Or you can take the high road: higher productivity, a higher standard of living, better health care, better education.

Post-secondary education is essential to our future productivity. It's essential that our young people have access and opportunity in post-secondary education. Working families are calling on us to deliver that. This government has failed that. This government has failed miserably in the whole area of post-secondary education. This bill, while it's acceptable, doesn't go far enough. We'll change those things in about two and a half years.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of Labour): I'm glad to jump in on this. It's kind of interesting; I've sat in this House for the last few days and heard eight questions from the opposition Liberals about the fees, the cost of going to medical school. In not one of those eight questions did we hear from them what their position was. What's your position? They give us all this code language about working people and about the cost. Of course there's a cost. When you go to medical school, you're probably going to have to incur some debt. I appreciate the fact that that happens and it's difficult but, you know, I'm not so sure, after you graduate, if there's a much better position or capacity for anyone to move into a very significantly well-paying job, respected, and get a guaranteed card from the government to begin billing in order to make a significant amount of money. I'm not suggesting they're not important; of course they're important.

I guess you're saying they should incur no debt. Is that what you're saying? The government should pay every last nickel that it costs to educate someone through medical school? Is that what you're saying? You're saying there shouldn't be any fee attached at all. There should be nothing to encumber the individual to pay anything toward their education, although at the end of the education we can't compel these people to stay in Ontario and work. We can't compel them to work in certain parts of this province. We can't do any of that, but they're going to stand and ask us questions: how come someone has to go into debt after they go to medical school?

I ask the members opposite, you had eight questions, three questions from your leader—I know where the NDP are—three from your deputy leader and two from a backbencher. Not once did you say what's your position. So I ask the member for Eglinton-Lawrence, or that member from Hamilton who has a position on virtually everything, both sides, like ordering teachers back to work, what's your position on the cost of medical school?

The Speaker: The member for Eglinton-Lawrence.

Mr Colle: I want to say thanks to the member for Beaches-East York for her comments, insightful as always; the member for Durham about accountability, I appreciate that; and my colleague from Windsor-St Clair for his input.

The Minister of Labour basically got down to base ranting and raving as usual. Up until this point we had, I think, a very harmonious, productive debate. It's too bad, when we're dealing with an issue of this importance, which I think is in many ways non-partisan, because we're looking to the future of our students. We want to try to make sure we're doing the right things, because a lot is at stake here.

Not all Tories but certain Tories have a problem: they never listen. We said emphatically that we would roll back tuition 10% and we would re-regulate post-secondary tuition, especially for medical students. Those are two things we stood for firmly. But what I want to get back to—

Interjections.

Mr Colle: The Minister of Labour keeps ranting and raving as usual. The key thing is it's not a matter of—

Interjections.

Mr Colle: The Minister of Correctional Services thinks it's a joke; the Minister of Correctional Services thinks it's funny. But what isn't funny to families in Ontario is that their children deserve a right to education. These two ministers think the right to education is a joke. We on this side think it's a very serious mandate that the provincial government has. That's why we, as Liberals, feel that education is not a cost; it's an investment in the intelligence and the future of this province. We don't think it's a joke, as the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Correctional Services think it is.

The Speaker: It now being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Monday.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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

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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Finances et affaires économiques**

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Legislative Assembly / Assemblée législative

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Vacant
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Caroline Di Cocco, Jean-Marc Lalonde,
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