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(Hansard)**

**Journal
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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 29 May 2001

Mardi 29 mai 2001

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 29 May 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 29 mai 2001

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

RESPONSIBLE CHOICES FOR GROWTH
AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT
(2001 BUDGET), 2001
LOI DE 2001
SUR DES CHOIX RÉFLÉCHIS
FAVORISANT LA CROISSANCE
ET LA RESPONSABILISATION
(BUDGET DE 2001)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 28, 2001, on the motion for second reading of Bill 45, An Act to implement measures contained in the 2001 Budget and to amend various statutes / Projet de loi 45, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures mentionnées dans le budget de 2001 et modifiant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr David Christopherson): The Chair recognizes the member for Trinity-Spadina to resume the leadoff debate for the third party.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just want to say to the good citizens of Ontario that it's a quarter to 7. I have 42 minutes. Would that we had more time to debate, but we don't have time to debate as much as we would like because this government, as you know, has squeezed the opposition so much in terms of our inability to say what we need to say. I will have approximately 20 minutes or less for my remarks in order to allow our other colleagues to have—

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member for Trinity-Spadina I'm sure knows it's very important to have a quorum call to see if there is a quorum in the House to listen to what I'm sure will be very interesting remarks from my colleague.

The Acting Speaker: Is there a quorum?

Clerk Assistant (Ms Deborah Deller): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Clerk Assistant: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Trinity-Spadina will continue, please.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Speaker, and I thank you, member for Hamilton East, for that. I often engage the Conservative members because, as I was saying yester-

day, it's the only opportunity we have to talk to them. They don't talk to us at any other time. I am always patient with their remarks. I like the dialogue with the other members because dialogue is important. If we don't get it in this place, where else are we going to get it? Because we don't get hearings any more.

Good citizens of Ontario, welcome to a political forum at a quarter to 7 on Tuesday night. After much pressing of this government on hearings, they relented today. The Minister of Education and the Premier must have had a little chat, because the caucus didn't have a chance to discuss this, I'm afraid. They decided it this morning before they even had their caucus meeting. We were there. M^{mce} Ecker came at around 10:15 and said, "We're going to have hearings." So clearly, M^{mce} Ecker and M. Harris met and said—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: What is it? There are some people who just don't want to listen. I know. I understand. That's why I always address myself to you, good citizens, because I know that while I say I like the dialogue with the Conservative members—who are leaving one by one. That's OK. I really don't mind because I'm talking to you directly. I don't need to talk to them. You are the citizens who need to listen to our discussions, our concerns, and hopefully we will be able to engage you, as I know we have, because there are a whole lot of Ontarians who are concerned about the measure this government has introduced, an incredible direction, a position that is radically different from what they claimed in 1999. In fact, they never announced in their election platform that they would fund private education. It was never part of their platform in 1999. Now here they come and claim yes, it was, yes, they did say it, yes, they're for fairness and yes, they're for choice. They can say whatever they like, and they do. They seem—I say "seem" because I'm not sure about what you, good taxpayers, are saying out there, but if I have any inkling from having just this evening spoken to five people from, believe it or not, the Brampton area, God bless Brampton—or Burlington. Sorry, people from Brampton—from Burlington. This is an area of Conservative support, you understand. There isn't just one signature on these petitions. Every petition is full of names. We're talking about Brampton. We're talking about Burlington. We're talking about all these Conservative areas where they traditionally have done so well.

With this particular measure, we are seeing clear opposition to the idea of public dollars for private

schools. While I am not certain about the level of disenchantment with this government, I am convinced this government has made a mistake in terms of its interest and desire to support private schools, religious schools and private non-denominational schools.

1850

We've been pressing for public hearings. For a week and a half we said, "This direction is so completely new, we demand public hearings." This morning, M^{me} Ecker said, "OK, we're going to give you a couple of weeks." We thought that was interesting. I think it's a good thing they relented, because clearly they know they've got a problem. They can't shut out the debate, because it's too significant a change to simply say to the public, "We don't need to hear you." They had to relent and this morning they said, "OK, we're going to give you hearings," but this afternoon M. Harris said, "Yes, we want input on the implementation of Bill 45, on the implementation of public funds for private schools." He wasn't saying, "We want to hear from you, good citizens, about whether or not you're opposed to the measure." What he said clearly, and what M^{me} Ecker has been saying for the last week and a half, is, what they want is advice from you on the implementation of this bill.

Does that sound like consultation to you? No, it isn't consultation. It isn't coming out to you, the public, to listen to your voice, your possible opposition to this, so that once having heard your opposition, good God, this government might decide that perhaps it would be best not to introduce such a bill, to in fact take it back. That's what they ought to be doing. The measure is so completely new and different and so much in the face of a great deal of opposition that this government should not be taking a position in advance of the hearings. But that's what Harris did this afternoon, and I think it's wrong.

This afternoon, I heard Conservative members saying, "We have put millions and millions of dollars into the education system." Right, Joe Spina from Brampton Centre?

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: They've been saying on the other side they have put billions of dollars into the education system. You all heard that, right? You guys heard it, right? I was here; I heard it. The people up there watching these proceedings heard the member saying that a couple of billion dollars has been put into the education system. My argument is, if you've been putting \$2 billion into the education system, why are people so unhappy? Why are parents so angry about the loss of so much in our education system? I tell you, if you put in \$2 billion, there would be some evidence of some consumer, as you would say, satisfaction, or client satisfaction, wouldn't there? Joe, wouldn't there?

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): I don't have a problem.

Mr Marchese: I know you've got a problem.

Mr Spina: I don't have a problem.

Mr Marchese: Yes, you do, Joe, and I'm going to tell you why. Here's a survey that was done. I want to show you how your \$2 billion—

Mr Spina: Who did it?

Mr Marchese: Oh, it really doesn't matter. Oh, you can contest it. I understand you would contest it, but let me read some of the numbers, Joe.

Mr Spina: What was that example?

Mr Marchese: I'm getting older, Joe, I need these glasses. Look at this, it's so sad. Here we are, number of participating schools: 940 schools in 68 of the 72 boards in Ontario. That's a whole lot of schools, 940 schools out of 68 of the 72 boards in Ontario. So out of 68 boards, that's a lot of schools. It's almost 1,000 schools. That's a lot of schools, right?

Here's what they represent: 24% of the elementary schools in the province; these are the ones that are participating, because some are not. School size: 54% have fewer than 350 students. Principals: 85% have a full-time principal, down 10% since 1997-98; 15% have a part-time principal. Class sizes: 58% of classes have 25 or fewer students. English as a second language: 44% have ESL programs, down 34%. Specialist teachers—

Mr Spina: So what's the class average?

Mr Marchese: I'm not sure you need that. Specialist teachers: 37% have gym teachers, down 10% since 1997-98; 56% have music teachers—in this regard, no significant change of the schools that called in, which is good—14% have visual arts teachers, which is down 18%; 13% have design and technology teachers, which is down 48%; 20% have guidance teachers, down 35%.

On to library: 68% have qualified teacher-librarians, down 15%; 40% are staffed at times by volunteers, up 40%; 14% are staffed by students—God bless. Computer technology per school: an average of 47 computers, of which 27 have CD ROMs, 28 have Internet access and 10 have printers. This is for your information.

Mr Spina: Give us that number.

Mr Marchese: Well, I give it. If it doesn't say down or up, I give it. Textbooks: 66% reported students must share textbooks.

Mr Spina: That's probably down from 80%.

Mr Marchese: What, you think this is good? It says 66% reported students must share textbooks. That's a whole lot of students sharing textbooks.

Mr Spina: Yes, but it used to be 80.

Mr Marchese: Oh, Giuseppe, I don't think so. Some 65% reported worn or out-of-date textbooks, worn or out of date. God bless.

Volunteer participation: schools reported an average of 141 hours per month are being volunteered; 88% report using volunteers on field trips; 89% report using them in classroom; 25% report using them in the office; 13% report using them for lunchtime supervision.

Fundraising: schools reported raising from zero to \$75,000. Province wide, parents in elementary schools raised approximately \$30 million. Much of it was spent on essentials.

Mr Spina: You're totally out of context.

Mr Marchese: Joe, now listen—

Mr Spina: You're out of context.

Mr Marchese: No, I'm not. Much of it was spent on essentials; 18% was spent on textbooks, 49% was spent on computers and software, classroom supplies was 42% and library resources was 50%.

Mr Spina: Compared to what?

Mr Marchese: Compared to what? Compared to a good economy. You've taken \$2 billion out. That's what it's compared to.

Psychologists: 9% reported no psychologists available to students. Social workers: 19% reported no social worker available to students. Compared to what, right, Joe? Meaning there are no social workers in these places; there ought to be, right?

Speech pathologists: 4% reported no speech pathologist available to kids.

Community use of schools: 84% reported community use of school buildings; 40% reported user fees for community use. That's up 25%.

Busing: 85% reported busing of some of their students; 20% reported longest one-day trip as one hour or more.

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Interjection.

Mr Marchese: No. It was exhausting. Good citizens of Ontario, I read such a list as a way of telling you—does this list that I gave you sound like two billion bucks have been put into the educational system? I am telling you, good citizens—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Brampton Centre.

Mr Marchese: —that what I have read to you sounds like two billion bucks has been taken out of the educational system. I know, Joe Spina, you're saying, "It's not true," but I'm telling you that real people, real people with real concerns in classrooms and those involved with classrooms, report we've got serious problems in the educational system. I just want to say that this statistical information belies what this government says.

Mr Spina: Pardon?

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Of course it is. It belies—

The Acting Speaker: Excuse me just one second. The member from Brampton Centre, this is twice. This is my first time in the chair. Please don't let it end in something more serious than it needs to. I would ask you to please give the member the floor.

The member will please resume.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Speaker, for your kindness. Good to have you there.

As I was saying, Joe, two billion bucks taken out of the educational system. You can't but notice it. And only a Tory ideologue would say, "No, that's not true. We put in money"—only a Tory ideologue and their sympathizers, although I think it's a diminishing number of sympathizers.

I want to say to you that I feel a bit sorry for M^{me} Ecker these days. I do; I don't know about you. But

here's M^{me} Ecker's quote: "We've been very clear," she said six months ago or so, "that our goal is a good quality public education, and the estimates of \$300 million needed to fund religious schools would be \$300 million that would come out of the public school system." It could not be clearer, David. It could not be clearer, the quote. She said we cannot take \$300 million out of the public system to fund private schools, religious schools. I didn't say it; M^{me} Ecker said it. These are not my words. These were her words, as M. Stockwell used to say when he was here on the other side. He would wave little papers and would say, "I didn't say it; you did." And that's what I say to Janet Ecker, the Minister of Education: I didn't say that; you said it, and so did your Premier. He said the same thing. In fact, he said it wouldn't be \$300 million, that it would be \$500 million.

Now, I expect this of the Liberals, but the Tories? Good God, people think of you as much more principally to the right and more principled on the right. But when I hear Tories do this, I squirm, because I've got a term for it, right? And my term is usually "reptilian" to describe that particular nature of the political personality that is able to say one thing today and deny it the next. You understand, David.

So I feel bad for M^{me} Ecker, because I see her every day in the Legislature pretending she doesn't hear that quote, pretending and wishing, "My God, did I say it? Why did I say it? Why did the Premier make me say it? Why did he say it?"

"Why did we say it?" she's saying, and today she has to pretend that she never said it. The Premier has to pretend that he never said it. Every day M^{me} Ecker, la pauvre M^{me} Ecker, has to hide, cower and hope that they don't beat her up on this quote. It would be hard for me if somebody said, "Marchese, you said this then." Knowing that I had said it, how would I be able to cope with denying it? And she's not able to cope with denying it because, alas, she did say it. And she did believe it then.

Poor M^{me} Ecker. M. Flaherty outflanked her. Unbeknownst to her, he put in his finance budget this tax credit. I tell you, if I was the finance minister and did that to another minister, it would take some—how shall I say it so it would be acceptable?—muscular fortitude, right? It would, and he did. Quite clearly Flaherty did it unbeknownst to the minister, and there she is, squirming on her own, having to defend a policy that M. Flaherty, the finance minister, did all on his little own.

I feel bad for so many of the other Tory members, when unbeknownst to them Flaherty introduces this measure. I am certain many of you squirmed deeply inside, because I know you personally are offended by this. You can't say it? How can you say to the public, "We are in opposition to M. Flaherty, to the Premier"? You can't say it. I know that; I was in government and know you don't do that. While we had Mr Kormos who, God bless his soul, stood by party policy all the time and reminded the public, we don't have too many Tories doing that. We don't have too many Tories doing that kind of thing, as we had with Kormos in our party,

reminding us of our party policy. Would that we had a few Tories, strong men and women, who would stand up to Flaherty and to the Premier with this measure that takes us in a completely different direction.

You ought to be supporting public education. You ought to be saying, "Yes, it's \$300 million that will come out of the public system. Yes, we took \$2 billion and this will be yet another \$3 billion to \$4 billion or \$5 billion. Yes, this will encourage more private schools to spawn."

This is not for the very wealthy. They don't need your measly \$3,000. People who send their children to Upper Canada College, who spend anywhere from \$16,000 to \$28,000, do you think they need your \$3,000? No. More thousands of little schools, middle schools, will spring up where the tuition fees will be \$5,000 to \$6,000. That's what will emerge, and more money will come out of our public system.

New Democrats are unequivocal: we're opposed to public dollars for private schools and we believe public schools ought to be inclusionary, must be inclusionary, and can accommodate our religious and cultural differences. We cannot splinter, segment and fragment our system by funding private schools and religious schools. We urge the Liberals to be very clear in their positions when they speak to this,

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Do they? Yes, they oppose tax credits, but do they support other religious schools? If they do, they need to say it, because New Democrats are unequivocal: we are for a public system and for every public dollar to go back to our public system.

With that, Speaker, I leave you the remaining time this evening to complete the remarks on this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I would like to thank the member for his, I would think, passionate comments, to say the least. I have some concerns with some of the things he said, but our fight is with the government across the way and the ill-conceived notion they have that they're preserving public education while in fact they're attacking it in the cruellest of ways: withdrawing money from the public system to give their friends a tax credit. It's that simple and it's wrong.

This budget fails the people of Ontario in so many different ways. In the health care field hospitals are crying for more money to provide the services that people need in Ontario. The reality is that this government refuses to commit the necessary dollars. So of course I'm in support of the Ontario Hospital Association campaign to raise awareness of how this government is underfunding hospitals in Ontario.

Today we talked about community care access centres not being able to give their clients the services they need. We're not talking about people who have the resources to provide services for themselves; we're talking about frail, elderly people who have paid their entire life into a system with the hope that when they needed the system, the system would be there. This government, through this

budget and their actions, have failed those frail, elderly people in the cruellest of ways.

I would suggest to the people of Ontario that when they hear the rhetoric of this government, it is pure rhetoric. The fact is, Ontarians are hurting.

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The Acting Speaker: Further speakers?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your position in the chair this evening. I understand it's your first time in the chair and I congratulate you.

I'd like to respond a little bit to the comments from the member for the New Democratic Party. I understand how passionate you are with your concerns on the tax credit portion of the budget. However, I hope you will understand the importance of our role as the government of Ontario in providing a balanced budget for the third year in a row—the first time, I believe, that this has happened in almost 100 years in this House.

As you know, in our role as the government, we have to find a little over \$63 billion to operate the province of Ontario. With that \$63 billion we need to keep a strong economy so that you can sit over there and criticize us for health care spending and education spending and everything you can possibly find wrong. The fact of the matter is, we have to keep this economy strong at all times. That is how we receive the revenues to make Ontario strong and create jobs so that people will be able to afford tax credits in the future, or be able to afford homes to pay property tax on, to buy cars, so that everyone here in this House will have an opportunity, so that everyone in our families and everyone in our communities that we represent will have the income and the revenue to support a very strong Ontario economy.

I understand there was a lot of conversation this afternoon on the Leader of the Opposition's resolution. I thought we had talked fairly clearly on the tax credit issue. You know how our government feels. We're very supportive of this. Our constituents are telling us they've needed this for some time, and I'm pleased to be part of a government that supports the tax credits.

Mr David Ramsay (Timiskaming-Cochrane): I'm pleased to add my comments on this debate tonight. It's important that members stand up and give with some clarity where they stand on the public education issue. I think it's very important for members to know that the Liberal Party believes in a public education system.

The Minister of Education will say, "You don't believe in choice." We do believe in choice, but we don't believe the government should pay for that choice. It is a free country and if you want to send your children to another school, you're free to do that, but I don't believe public taxpayers' dollars should go to fund that choice, and that's the way it is.

People then will bring up the Catholic system. The Catholic system is there as part of our history, as part of our Constitution. Right now we're having this debate because the United Nations and other organizations will say that is discriminatory, because we fund a public sys-

tem, and a religious system only for one religion. I think that's the debate we're going to have to have down the road, about how we fund the public education system.

But right now we have that as a constitutional guarantee, and I think the only way that would be resolved is through a public discussion. Probably, like Newfoundland, we would have to have a vote in this province. I'm not sure we're ready for that yet, but I think politicians of all stripes will probably have to address that issue some day, because we have an issue here that a lot of groups in society feel is not fair, that we fund a public secular system and a public religious system for one religion only.

I think this debate really reflects the debate on how you see this country. Do we see this country as a group of segregated entities, or do you come to Canada to come together to be Canadians, under this flag, in this country, not bringing the arguments and disputes you have in the old country, but coming together and building a new country together. That's what I believe about this country.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm not sure what the sequence here is, but I think the member for Trinity-Spadina has a two-minute wrap-up.

In the interest of showing respect, he always is enthusiastic. The member is always entertaining and I believe quite genuine in his commitment to public education, as am I, I might say, having been a school trustee for a couple of terms, as well as having a spouse who is a teacher and one of my daughters is a high school teacher. I can tell you as a parent of five children that it's absolutely critical that we have the highest-quality education system in this province.

I think the debate tonight is on Bill 45 in a broader sense. I will be speaking next and I don't want to use up all of my particularly salient points. I'm really rising to pay respect to the member's comments and to respect his position as a clear defender of public education and not offering choice. That's his choice. In fact it's his party's position. They have been clear. I think where the ambivalence occurs is that clearly the Liberals are all things to all people. That chameleon kind of presence is intolerable, it's unacceptable, and people aren't as gullible as they would lead us to believe.

We're seeing evidence of that in Ottawa today. There's no question in my mind that they will put through, irrespective of the public view, an inordinate salary increase in Ottawa.

Mr Ramsay: You had better be careful of what you speak.

Mr O'Toole: No, I say to the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane that there is a party over there that has very deep-rooted principles and that had some tough decisions to make between 1990 and 1995. I've looked at the history. I was serving as a regional councillor at the time. I'm probably here today because I was opposed to things like the social contract and other difficult decisions that they, in their time, had to make. I think this government is doing the best we can to serve the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: A two-minute response.

Mr Marchese: I thank the members for their comments. To respond to the member from Simcoe North when he says, "The economy must keep strong," I agree. Who disagrees with that? But why would you weaken everything society and its members demand and expect? Why would you weaken our education system in the way you have? Why would you beat it up in the way you have for the last six years, taking out two billion bucks? You don't keep an economy strong by weakening our health care system and our education system. You weaken our economy and our culture by taking \$6 billion to \$12 billion by the end of the next year for tax cuts to the corporate sector and to individual special friends of yours who don't need the money. You're doing it at the expense of these people who have come here to listen to the debate, people from Burlington who came to bring petitions here with hundreds of names of people in Burlington. It wasn't hard to get the names of people in Burlington to say, "We're opposed to public dollars for private schools." It didn't take much.

We're talking about Tories in those areas understanding and realizing that you are weakening our education system. People in London and Guelph are sending a clear message to you that they don't agree with you. You are wrong, in my view. Ecker was right six months ago when she said it would take \$300 million out of our public system to fund religious schools. Ecker, you were right then. What happened to you? What happened to you, Premier, when you said it would take \$500 million out of our education system? You were right then, Premier. What happened to you? Now Flaherty has left the Minister of Education on her own to defend a policy she doesn't agree with, la pauvre M^{me} Ecker, on her own, and all these other Conservative members who are left to defend a policy they don't support.

We are for a public education system that is inclusive and that accommodates all of our differences. That's what New Democrats stand for.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr O'Toole: It's my pleasure tonight to rise and share my time with the member from—anyway, there are two other members I'll be sharing my time with. I'm not too sure. I don't have the order paper in front of me. The member from Simcoe North is one of those who I believe will be speaking. At least he has expressed that interest.

Bill 45 is the bill we're actually debating. It is rather a large instrument, and I believe it's important for the viewers tonight to understand and appreciate the scope. The scope is far broader than the specific debate we've heard to this point. I believe there are 22 different sections in the bill that amend current statutes to support the budget initiatives. I can tell you, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, that there were extensive public hearings to come up with this framework document, the budget, which is the instrument by which we are allowed to allocate resources throughout the province to serve the people of Ontario.

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An important way of beginning the debate on Bill 45, from my perspective, is to start at the beginning and to really firmly appreciate the important strategy of this government and, to even drive that down further, that it is for ordinary Ontarians, of which I'm one. The people of my riding of Durham I believe represent all that's good about Ontario. There are agricultural people, there are people in fast-growing young families, and a lot of pressure on the school systems to build more and more schools.

My children spent most of their education in portables. All five, fortunately, have received a decent education. In fact, most have graduated from university or are in the process of graduating, and as I said earlier, one of my middle daughters is a high school teacher.

The pressure on this government to meet the growing expectations is phenomenal. We're at a time in the economy—and I think this is what Finance Minister Flaherty said—to look at the reality of where we are. There is a bump in the road, and some of the numbers that I will speak to during the small amount of time that's allocated to me will indicate that we're going off numbers of about 5.6% growth and we're coming down to numbers of 2% to 3% GDP growth. Each per cent represents almost \$600 million in revenue, so for every per cent change in the GDP from 5.5% down to, let's say, 2.5%—I think the actual numbers are 2.2%—that's a significant revenue consideration and an expenditure on the other side. Again, driving it down to fundamentals, we are committed to balanced budget legislation and to finding fairness in the allocation of the resources.

Clearly, in the three weeks that we travelled this province—and there were members from all parties involved. Mr Phillips was involved, and you, Mr Speaker, at that time as the finance critic for the NDP, were involved in those public consultations. We did hear from people on serious, serious social issues, some of which we hear about here in question period. I think whether it's children's treatment centres or whether it's more money for hospitals or more money for education or more money for culture and tourism, we've heard all of it—the homelessness issue, right across the board. There were no filters involved.

There were presentations from the independent school groups in those public consultations, I might say. They are not new. In fact, when I was a school trustee in 1982-85, there was relentless pressure to address the perceived inequities in public education at that time. It has not changed. That's the record. I was involved in the provincial parent association in 1980, and the same issue of equity was in question then. Are we going to address the issue of equity, as the United Nations and others have demanded, or is it going to be the entrenchment of the current status quo? That is the question, and it's a question of fairness and a question of parent choice.

But I've allowed myself to be drawn into the immediacy of that debate because it has received a lot of attention and, I might say, about 9-to-1 support in my riding

of Durham. In my riding there are five independent schools today that have survived, and most of the parents support those schools. They serve voluntarily on the boards of those schools, and on the boards are hard-working, middle-class people who want the very best quality, values-based education. I use the word "values" because it crosses all frontiers. People from many different backgrounds chose, from Catholics to Baptists to I think people who are just looking for values within a school system.

But I want to go back to how all of this is addressing the demands that we heard in the public hearings and about three hearing levels after the public hearings, where the minister and stakeholders would meet, trying to determine what the ultimate priorities will be. Clearly there was a tremendous amount of demand: pressures on the health care system; tremendous demands on the environmental equation, not just Walkerton but, in a broader sense, far more awareness by the public on clean air, water and soil. There was a lot of emphasis on the importance of some of the shared services between levels of government. One of them may have been housing that received a fair amount of attention. All levels of government are on record as saying all three parties have to be involved.

Now, I still want to establish the premise on which our budget and the discussion on Bill 45—its mode of operation or its vision, if you will. It comes down to four important points that must be clearly embraced before anyone can get through all the rhetoric of the debate.

The importance of having a strong economy: this may sound redundant or rhetorical, but if you don't embrace the importance of having a strong economy that generates wealth, you're in trouble. If you need any evidence of that, all you need to look at are large Third World countries like Brazil and China, where they have no ability to develop capital. This is an economics argument of the simplest order, but without the ability to have a strong economy, governments themselves, and, for that matter, the greater good for the greater number and the public, cannot possibly survive. I look at countries like Brazil that have a tremendous comparative base in many respects to Canada but do not have the ability to support the infrastructure of lifestyle or quality of life. I've been there personally, and I know that to some extent there are a lot of gaps in the infrastructure between the very well-off and those who have absolutely nothing: not health care, not education, not even shelter. So without the strong economy, the whole equation sort of breaks down.

The next part—this is the second step of four important principles—is fiscal responsibility. This is a traditional Conservative value. It can be simply stated as, "You cannot spend more than you earn." You can invest, certainly, in those kinds of infrastructure, both human and physical, that grow your economy and grow your society for the greater good and the sustainability of all. So the second principle is the fiscal responsibility.

The third and I think most important part is the sustainability of quality of life. That's far-ranging, from

health to environment, and probably they overlap a fair amount; safe quality food production and inspection processes. It crosses all boundaries, including safe communities. So you have everything from police to health care workers, and indeed I'd include in that an accessible education system both at the post-secondary level and the elementary level. That feeds into our quality of life. In that, I would include such things as having a diverse culture and having access to recreational resources and opportunities.

But again this all goes back to the fundamentals of who is paying the piper. Ultimately, that's where I believe you as a government found the revenue fell off the radar screen. You were collapsing as a government, and you ran up \$15-billion deficits. Actually, it's hard to say which came first. I suspect it's fiscal policy that allows you to assess decisions. I was part of that, when you had two or three different plans before the social contract to try to reach some agreement. It was the expenditure reduction plan when I was a regional councillor. I was the chair of finance, and the expenditure reduction plan was an attempt to say, "OK, everybody raise their hand and take a 15% raise." Well, nobody raised their hand, and nobody took a raise. Eventually it had to be mandated, and everyone understood.

At the very top, when you called Wilson and the OFL—Gord Wilson, a nice fellow and all that—called them all together with Earl Manners and all the rest of them there, no one would agree to say, "Wait a minute. The public sector doesn't make products. The marketplace figures it out." Whether it's cars, whether Chrysler is better than Honda, the marketplace figures it out. If there's no price and no quality, the people don't buy the car. General Motors, where I worked for 30 years, most of it in administration, found in the 1970s that they didn't have the price and they didn't have the quality, and people were buying Hondas. So the marketplace sorted it out. I would say today they've improved in both price and quality. That comes down to a fundamental part of this fiscal equation, which is the accountability side. I'll probably talk more about that later on in my remarks.

But the fourth ingredient, and this is probably something that may receive some recognition here—certainly the most important part is having the clear vision of where you want to be, a vision of where you want to be as a society, a vision of where you want families to be, a vision that recognizes efforts and rewards, a vision that recognizes accountability. That's not a negative word. Some people view accountability as each family—families that perhaps might be listening tonight realize that accountability means that you can't spend more than you earn. It's as basic as that. You can invest, but what am I getting for the investment?

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I go through these numbers every once in a while. I chaired four budgets when I was in education, and I saw the demand always exceeding the supply, the municipalities blaming the school boards, and there was no accountability. In fact, if you go back in history, there

were two commissions while I was in municipal office. There was the disentanglement report—David, you would remember that—and there was the Fair Tax Commission, both of which were trying to achieve the same thing: who pays for what service and who has what revenue stream? Basically that's what they were saying.

Mr Ramsay: You ignored the report.

Mr O'Toole: No. The report, quite honestly, is all part of the accountability mechanism that is in this budget. It's part of the Who Does What. It's part of the local services realignment. If you don't appreciate that switch of \$2.5 billion off the residential tax base and the unloading of \$3 billion of costs—that's what happened. We downloaded part of ambulance and part of some other service levels, but we uploaded \$3 billion in education to the provincial expenditure side—very important.

There are four points: a strong economy; fiscal responsibility and accountability; sustainability of quality of life; and strong leadership, with the determination to deliver on the vision. Those are the four principles that are absolutely critical to understand this document and the very strategic, logistical decisions that are being made to deliver.

What evidence do I have that these commitments will be delivered? The proof is in the budget. We have had the third straight year with a balanced budget. That's the first time in 100 years in this province that has actually happened. It's tough love. It's tough medicine in some respects. But if you go back to the four principles, without that discipline and that vigour to keep the economy strong and competitive, so you don't scare away investment and jobs from Microsoft to whomever, so that opportunities are there for people—and the numbers are all here to support. Some 600,000 people have left welfare and the number of net new jobs is closing in on 900,000. The numbers are there.

If you look back to the previous year or the previous decade, it's often referred to by many chronicles of history as the 10 lost years. I can tell you that the other signal of success of the fiscal policies of this government is that we've paid off \$3 billion in debt. This deserves a whole 20-minute dissertation.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): How much is the debt.

Mr O'Toole: The debt is now \$110 billion. And the debt, by the way, doubled between your time and their time, from \$50 billion to over \$100 billion. The plan of your government, before you were elected, Mr McMeekin, in the Lyn McLeod red book, where you got defeated in 1995, showed lower repayment of debt and higher debt at the end of your term. The only ones who were honest were the New Democrats who said, and do believe, that governments spend money.

You believe in tax and spend, I understand that, and that's where we differ. You believe that every solution to every problem is to increase taxes. If you dare to stand and refute that—when you increase taxes, whether it's teachers or nurses, you're taking it out of this pocket and putting it in this pocket. It's true. The evidence is there.

The middle-class people, of whom I'm one, were working harder and getting less. There was less and less accountability and in fact many people on the front line in the public sector were extremely frustrated, to the point where they threw out the NDP and completely rejected the Liberal government.

The plan we put in place was to repatriate the budget. There was almost a \$12-billion annualized shortfall in the budget—\$12 billion out of \$60 billion. That's a 20% shortfall every year.

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): So you increased the debt instead.

Mr O'Toole: You don't understand. I'm sorry, you don't understand why the debt did increase. The debt increased—

Mr McMeekin: You borrowed it.

Mr O'Toole: You'll get your time. You'll get your two minutes.

The debt increased because on top of that, Ontario Hydro debt was some—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I request that the member opposite not patronize us.

The Acting Speaker: That is not a point of order. The member for Durham has the floor.

Mr O'Toole: I apologize to the member for Hamilton Mountain. She will get her two minutes. I do have a lot of respect, and I didn't mean it in a patronizing way. But if you look at the numbers, if you were to actually cut the deficit immediately, it would be like jamming the brakes on in a sports car. It took us about two and half years to eliminate the shortfall every year. There are only two ways: either increase taxes or reduce spending. They're the only two ways of eliminating the annualized shortfall.

When you have a deficit, Mr McMeekin, the deficit goes into the debt bucket every year, as you understand, I'm sure, perhaps, as a former mayor.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Toole: That is really what happened. If you look at the plan on top of that, we repatriated the Ontario Hydro stranded debt. Their debt load was about \$38 billion. Of the \$38 billion, a portion of that debt was recognized by the Macdonald commission as stranded debt, that is, the assets could not pay off the debt. So the restructuring of Ontario Hydro is an important debate that needs to be held. If you look at the public accounts documents and in our budget document, you will see very clearly that that has been addressed. It will be an ongoing part of the debate.

But I want to make a couple of last points. The evidence is clearly in that the fiscal approach of this government is up. I would say that real exports as a percentage of GDP have grown by 59.8%. That's an increase of 17.3%. Housing starts are up 99.7%. The consumer confidence index has grown from 97 to 122, a 25% increase. Retail sales have grown \$79 billion, up 33.7%. Auto sales are up 45.9%. Total employment is up

14.4%. Disposable income is up 22.1%. Real machinery and equipment investment in this province is up 92%. Real commercial and industrial investment has increased; it's up 36%. The Canadian consumer price index has gone from 2.9%, a 0.4% change. The private sector consensus for real GDP growth is 2.3% in 2003 and 3.6% in 2002.

I really believe fundamentally that there's far more that needs to be debated in Bill 45. I recognize the importance of education, while at the same time recognizing parent choice. It's completely unacceptable for our children and their future to be ransomed. Parents want choice. They do not want to be in conflict with their teachers. Most of them highly respect their individual teachers. Quite honestly, it's a systems problem.

I'm only making these comments out of respect. I think some of the people in the gallery tonight are potentially educators. I would leave on a note of saying I have the highest respect. Most of us here tonight owe the very fact that we're here and able to articulate our arguments to educators. In that group of people, I would include current teachers, as well as parents, who are in fact the primary educators of our children. In fact, teachers themselves cannot do it without a strong family in the background helping them to build and set goals and be role models for them as young people.

The last and most important issue in the few minutes left is the 5.4% increase in health care spending, \$1.2 billion. There's more work to be done and this government's job is not finished, but we're well on our way to making this the greatest province to live, to work and to raise a family in.

The Acting Speaker: Questions, comments? The member for—I knew I was going to have trouble with this one. Let me see: Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

Mr McMeekin: That's right: you go west to east, Mr Speaker. Congratulations; good to see you in that chair. You look great.

I want to talk just briefly a little bit about this prosperity argument. I want to say upfront that whoever planted the idea in the honourable member's head that Liberals are opposed to tax cuts quite clearly wasn't looking at recent history. One only needs to look at our cousins at the federal level and some of the wonderfully creative things that our finance minister there, who happens to be a good Liberal, has done. No one would have remembered the Good Samaritan if he hadn't had money. Prosperity is important. We want to be prosperous. We want an economy that's strong.

The reason Liberals, and some other members on this side of the House, want an economy that's strong is so we can look over our shoulders and spot and respond to the legitimate needs of the vulnerable, not treat this political journey we're on like some wagon train that's going west that only stops to light a campfire every once in a while and to drop off the vulnerable, the sick, the aged and those other folk who have special needs.

We want a prosperous Ontario, but a prosperous Ontario includes a strong and healthy health care system, it includes a public education system that will make a difference in the young lives of the children who have the privilege of working with so many wonderful teachers across this province, and it includes an environment where anyone in this province can pick up a glass of water without fear of injury, like in this House: take a sip and then sit down.

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Mr Marchese: The member from Durham is right: there is more to Bill 45 than issues of education. It is for that reason that we said to him, "Separate the two." There's so much to separate from that bill. Bill 45 with the accompanying documents is this thick, more or less. It's a big document. So the member for Durham is so right to say, "Yes, we've got to talk about so many other aspects of Bill 45." So separate the issues. Give us a break. Give us time to debate them. Take them out of Bill 45 so we can have a proper debate on these issues. You're right.

But he also seems to believe it's the job of Conservative governments to take our money—your money, good citizens; your money, good taxpayers; and my money—and give it away to corporate avarice, to the avaricious among us, the corporate avariciousness that's out there. The rapacious corporations that are out there can't get enough. No matter how much this government's taxes are diminished, the corporate sector says, "It's not enough. We want more." Who's going to pay for our educational system if they decide they don't want to pay any more? It's left to you, good citizens. If that's the way we're going, we won't need or want an educational system any more, because there's not going to be anybody left to pay.

I say to you, good citizens, we have a rally this Thursday. New Democrats will be there among so many others, with so many other coalition groups, saying we need hearings. We need this rally to bring people together this Thursday at Queen's Park at 6 o'clock. I invite you to take some time out of your busy lives to come and demonstrate visibly against this government deciding to take public money for private education—for religious education and for private non-denominational education. We believe it's wrong. Come out this Thursday at 6 o'clock.

Mr Dunlop: It's always a pleasure to rise and make a few comments on the comments by my colleague from Durham. He brings up a lot of good points. Of course, we are the government and we believe in the policies that were laid out in the Common Sense Revolution. I think this House forgets very quickly the type of mess we inherited in June 1995. I'm sure you remember yourself, as a member of this Legislature, that this government inherited a deficit of spending that was \$1 million an hour. Do you remember that? You forget that you were spending \$1 million an hour more than you were taking in. We laid out a plan, the Common Sense Revolution. We sold that plan to the citizens of Ontario. We cam-

aigned on that particular plan for over 18 months before the election. We knew there was debt reduction to slowly eliminate the deficit. No one could possibly eliminate \$11 billion in one crack—you know that as well as I do—because if that was the case we'd be a bankrupt province to this day.

I'm very proud to be part of a government, proud to sit here with my colleague from Durham, and talk about and discuss in this debate this evening a balanced budget for the third year in a row. I'm very proud of that. You find fault with it, but we're looking out for the economy of all people in the province, not just special interest groups but for everyone in Ontario. The economy has to be strong in order to have the revenues to pay for all those things you want, like education, like health care. In all those things, spending has increased.

My time is up.

Mrs Bountrogianni: I'd like to get back to the part of the budget that deals with tax credits for independent schools and why we consider them vouchers. According to your own Premier, when children leave the public system to go to these independent schools, the taxpayer saves money.

Mr Marchese: Private schools.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Did I say "public"? I meant private schools. Your own Premier said the taxpayer saves money. Why is that? Because the per pupil grant leaves with that student. That board doesn't get that money. So if thousands of students leave, which they may, given what you've done to education—I was just watching Voice of the Province before I came here and one woman called in and said, "We are not rich and elite like Upper Canada and Hillfield and so forth, but we don't like the large class numbers." So this woman was actually funding her grandchildren in an independent private school, not necessarily an independent religious school, but just one with smaller class sizes. Of course, this is your formula. It unfortunately has worked, but I think it's stopping—I think the public, the "good citizens," as Mr Marchese says, are actually beginning to see what you're up to. The formula is, erode confidence in any public system and you can rationalize privatizing.

Now, the biggest fear of all besides education is health care, and it seems that's what you're doing with health care. Yes, we have problems in health care, but study after study has shown that privatizing doesn't make it more efficient. If it doesn't make it more efficient and if it makes it less accessible, why are you even entertaining the thought? We have a federal committee looking at it. You can't even wait for that committee, with Mr Romanow, to do its work. You have to get in there and privatize health care. As far as its being accessible to all, we do know what happens when it is private: it is accessible to those who have both the human and financial resources to access it and to know where to look for better health care.

We are against this budget for the reasons stated, and I'm very happy to be part of a caucus that looks at public education for all.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Durham for a two-minute response.

Mr O'Toole: I'd like to thank the members from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot as well as Trinity-Spadina, Simcoe North and Hamilton Mountain.

I will say briefly, in the couple of minutes left—the member from Ancaster-Dundas has said he's concerned about vulnerable people. We'll be providing \$55 million in the year 2001-02, going to \$197 million annually, to enhance services and support for people with developmental disabilities. We will also invest \$67 million over five years to build new places for them to live within communities. The Ontario Association for Community Living is absolutely thrilled. I'm also thrilled that we will be providing \$26 million over the next four years to improve the safety and security of abused women and children in crisis by adding 300 beds in women's shelters and refurbishing another 100; we'll also provide \$3 million this year, growing to \$9 million, for counselling and crisis intervention. In my riding, that equates to Bethesda House, a women's shelter I've supported, even when I was on council, in many ways. To this day it's a great celebration.

We also recognize children's treatment centres. There are 20 in Ontario. We have an excellent one that has been arguing for years—Grandview Children's Centre—for children with very high special needs; also \$26 million to improve community mental health, and the list goes on.

In the very few minutes, I just want to respect that I did listen to other people. The member from Trinity-Spadina spoke about education and the hearings. The minister did commit—whether it's under some pressure—that there will be hearings and it is appropriate. But the debate has been going on—if you want the records, I have many of them—since around 1980, all documented. In fact, it was part of our pre-document on visioning education, called *New Directions, Volume Two*, by Elizabeth Witmer and Dianne Cunningham in 1993. Read it.

Also, in respect to our taxing, we have actually reduced by 73,000 the families who will pay taxes. They still pay tax federally.

The Acting Speaker: The member's time has expired. Further debate?

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Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): It is my pleasure to stand in this important debate. This is a very limited debate that this government has been willing to concede in its rather roundabout, indirect, couching and hiding way of putting forward this proposal for education. It's stuck on pages 24 and 25 of the bill to enable the budget. It was a couple of paragraphs in the budget speech, and yet it has profound implications. Kicking and screaming, finally the government has been drawn into a very small concession to the people of this province, that they might actually get enough time to understand what this government is up to.

There's an instruction from a government that not too long ago put forward a proposal for a voucher: \$3,500 to

encourage people to go to private schools. That government was in Michigan and that government was defeated in its referendum at the polls. In Michigan, 70% of the population said, "Private school vouchers are no good for our kids."

This government, by contrast, doesn't even have the courage of its convictions, can't stand up and say to the people of Ontario, "This is what we want to do and we stand behind it." To the contrary, this is the government that a year and some months ago had, in the words of the Premier, no intention of changing a commitment to public education. We can only infer in this House and in this province that this, then, is that change. This is the government now deciding it is no longer committed to public education.

For parents who have tried in the last six years to make sense of their children's school, who have tried to get response, for teachers and for other people who've worked hard to try to provide education under the duress provided by this government and its centralizing, over-controlling, defunding environment, now finally everything they've experienced makes sense. It makes sense that the government has been in the midst of building toward this particular proposal.

This is an attack on public education. In other places—in fact, in 35 US states they all at least recognize that. But we don't have a government here with those kinds of convictions. We don't have a government with that kind of pride in what it stands for. Instead, it tries to slip it in the back door, and worse, it tries to hide behind other things than what it really intends. But make no mistake, this is a \$3,500-see-you-later pass to families to take their kids out of public education, to take some public funds with them and into private schools. That's what this government has put in front of us in Bill 45.

It is harmful to all publicly funded schools. Every student who leaves is taking \$6,800, which, by the way, is about \$1,000 less than schools and students were funded in 1995, but it's still \$6,800, and Mike Harris is going to give that \$3,500 to the parents. After the first \$300 million that they take away, that they aren't making available to public education this year, then perversely, strangely, and in a way that none of the members across have addressed, the government will actually hang on to those dollars, will actually make that a dividend of backing away from public education.

There are parents out there feeling pretty harried, there are students focused on exams and there are teachers doing their marking. It is important that people out there do take the time to have a look at this. We have so very little time, thanks to this government's particular inability to face the public, to face their public.

In fact, it has to be that the priority for funds is in public education. But more than that, what this province needs to give excellence for all in education is a government that will give education the priority, and that's what our party is prepared to do. Our party has already put forward proposals that this government in power has available to them as options they could use to improve

education. But sadly they choose not to, and that's part of our debate here tonight. It's the part about, do we want to have, for example, lower class sizes for kids in the primary grades? This government raised those class sizes. This government cut back on commitments to junior kindergarten, to the smallest grades, where we've learned—and everyone in this House has been exposed to—we can make a substantial difference from what we were aware of even 10 and 15 years ago. If we spend the right kind of time with children at an early age, we can actually have those kinds of investments pay for themselves. But this government declines to do it.

Elsewhere in Bill 45 they'll commit \$2.2 billion to lowering large corporate taxes 25% below those of our neighbouring US states. This government is leading a race to the bottom. They don't want to compete on quality education, on excellent health care. That's not the wont of this government. It's never been more apparent than in that contrast in Bill 45. Two desultory pages to create a back door out of education and then many, many more pages to say to corporations, "You will be getting the extra reward. You will have a bonus from this government at the cost of those students."

We have said that's wrong. We have said the priority should be lower class sizes. We've said how much it would cost and we said that has to take priority, but we cannot yet convince the members opposite. That's why tonight we are appealing to the public of Ontario. We are saying to them that the future of education is in their hands, to be talking to the people in their communities and to be insisting that if there is \$300 million available right now, it needs to be spent on public education. We are going to help them. We are going to help them by making them aware. We are going to help them by helping make their members aware. Each government member has to reckon with, as the member for Peterborough has to, things like these textbooks.

This textbook, if I can just quickly reference it, was written in 1964 and revised in 1982. This is a textbook I got last week from Gary Fenn, the head of history at Thomas A Stewart school in the city of Peterborough. It's called *The Enduring Past*. This government would like to leave students of history, of almost all the subjects in grade 11, stuck in the past with textbooks that are falling apart, that aren't even available in numbers for students to take home and study. This government is endorsing that, because this year, the same year they want to give private school vouchers, is the year they cut in half the amount of money available for textbooks, so there'll be no new textbooks for history in grade 11. The only funding available from this government—after imposing the new curriculum, after making that happen all across the province, not testing it ahead of time and saying to all teachers, "This is what you will teach," they're saying to them, "You can't have the textbooks. We're not prepared to pay the freight. We won't make those schools work. Instead, you'll just have to get by."

If that's the choice, I think the parents and the taxpayers of this province who carry the freight for pub-

lic education are going to want to talk back to their members, and we're inviting them to do that. We want them to take part in forums that are going to be in their communities. We want them to take part in the public hearings that this government has offered a very, very small window for. They'd like them to happen like that and disappear, and the summer occur and this insidious measure be in place. We're not going to let that happen, and we say to people tonight who are watching, call the clerk of the finance committee, Susan Sourial—she's available on the Web site—and register your willingness to be heard. This is your place. It hasn't looked like it for quite a long time, but this is where decision after decision on public education has been made without accountability from this government opposite. Now is the time, because they've made their choice.

This government has said that they are prepared not only to invest money but their commitment over in the private sector. Let's be very clear that this does cut off a better future. There are things that students need: they need the textbooks; they need the smaller class sizes. We can't do a good job with any kind of curriculum unless we let the teachers have a fighting chance of being able to impart not just the knowledge but the support and the individualized attention. For some reason, the members opposite don't want to provide that. For some reason, they want to cut off those kids from their future.

We think there should be in schools, funded by the government, an ability to share excellence, a priority for excellence that would allow, for example, lighthouse programs to take the best things that are happening in the system that we have in public education and make them available to other schools and to have that happen with the express encouragement of the provincial government, because right now that intangible simply isn't there. This measure strikes to the heart of whether or not the public service, the kind of motivation that makes our schools and the other worthwhile things in our society work, is at all appreciated, let alone rewarded, by the government of the day that has that leadership responsibility.

This policy is fundamentally a lazy policy. It appeals to people to say, "Take your self-interest and we'll let you walk out the door with \$3,500." It says to the members of this House, "You don't have to wrestle or struggle with the consequences of your decisions; you'll never have a motivation again to fix public education, because we're prepared to defund it, family by family, out the back door," rather than do what I sincerely believe the people of Ontario expect them to do, that they don't have an exemption from. They are supposed to do the job of leading education, and what the people of this province need is a government that will take responsibility.

Over the years, I think people have been very familiar with a whining refrain that comes from the government benches, that blames everybody else. It blames students, it blames school boards and it blames teachers. I can tell you that a Liberal government would stop that, would take responsibility for providing excellence in education,

and that's exactly what this government is afraid to do. They've declined to do that.

I think there's another quality in what the government is offering to us in Bill 45 that needs to be understood by the people of Ontario, and it has that quality of—no deceit, because I know that's not a word we can use in this House, but it has fundamentally a quality of misdirection, of saying to the people out there, "This is what it's about," when in reality it's about something completely different.

The government is pretending that this is an issue of fairness, but when you look at what they're offering, what they're actually saying to families out there is, "If you happen to be in the families we're using for our marketing, who are tied to the railway tracks, religious families who are out there who didn't have a deduction, you might gain \$600 out of the \$3,500. But if you're in a private secular school, then for the first time you're getting a brand new tax break." The members opposite have a responsibility to go to their ridings and come clean about that.

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They are not giving this as a benefit to families who may be out of the public school system for matters of conscience; this is simply a reward to existing private elite schools, existing private secular schools and the ones that this government obviously hopes will occur in future. It's a wide-open exemption. It doesn't exist in any state or any province anywhere. This is brand new. This is an ideological turn for this government. It obviously reflects where they think they're headed.

I'm here to tell you this is not a direction for the government. This is a dead end. This government is going to get nowhere with this particular direction because I am certain they are going to run into the awareness that's starting to build out there, the aliveness that people have, that public education isn't just worth defending—it's worth fighting for.

Public education touches our fundamental values in being able to create places where people can go and reach their potential. They can reach it on some kind of approximate basis. We don't define people by where they come from; we define them by where they're going. If they've got the energy and the ability, they're going to go as far as possible.

We need to do better in our schools certainly, because education has become the one thing we can confer on people, but this is not the way, not this desultory, lazy lack of initiative coming from this government that would then say to families in this province, "Take your kids out." I think people know. They can read between the lines what that means, that this government is not going to be committed. That makes it even more important that right now the people of the province respond, that right now the people of the province don't just see this as an initiative coming down the track, but that they stop it cold in its tracks, because this government is simply using political opportunism. They see a narrow-cast for some votes. They see this as some way to offer

an ideology to the small number of people out there who want it and, very perversely, this is a way to get at some of the very people who have become discouraged about public education in the last five and six years, courtesy of this government, a government that I think the province of Ontario needs reminding spent public dollars on advertising to attack the teaching profession, to attack school boards, to attack people within education to help create some of this very lack of confidence.

But I have a very good sense that people out there know much better. They want to see a school operate with the full support of the community. They want to have the control of schools decentralized. We have had a Soviet-style government in the last six years that people are just now starting to understand, a government whose sole-minded emphasis has been to cut services to fund the tax cut that no economist can be found to support as an engine for the economy, but members across swear illogically on its merits, and only that. This is an obsessed government that doesn't have the ability to build in the balance that some of the most vulnerable people in our society, the ones we have a charge for—

Mr Spina: You're so full of it. Get out a pitchfork and a wheelbarrow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Order. The member for Brampton Centre will withdraw.

Mr Spina: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Kennedy: We see some upset happening as members opposite too are starting to realize this sad policy is something they're stuck with, that they don't dare—last week I wrote to them. I wrote to all the members of the House and I said very openly, "Go back to your schools. Have the confidence of your convictions. Go and explain to the public schools how you condone lousy textbooks for kids and private vouchers instead. Tell those people." Everyone in this House has that obligation. Go and see your public school. You have the answers; let's hear them.

Mr Speaker, I wish I could report to you after constituency week that dozens of the members opposite took advantage of that, that they were to be found in their public schools accounting for this policy. That's not happening.

I think there's still time for the members opposite, there's still time for this House to be able to restore some confidence and faith in the ability of legislators to make a difference. The members opposite don't like to be labelled with political opportunism, but that's where it stands. There is no explanation. There is no place in the world that private school vouchers are seen as a way to help public education. There's nothing that can be said about that. We will hear hopefully from the members opposite, that they won't ramble on about the other parts about Bill 45 but they'll actually address this question. If you're confident, let's hear it. Let's hear the defence. Explain to people why it is religious schools get one fifth the benefit of private, elite schools. Explain that. Put it on

the record. Table the facts. Let's see where you're coming from.

Your communities deserve to hear from you because, fundamentally, in 35 US states there were misguided governments and misguided initiatives, but they at least at the very minimum had the capacity to put this in front of the people. We can't even get this government to hold hearings in their own communities. Why won't we have hearings in Brampton and Barrie and Markham? Why won't we? Why won't we go out and see what's happening in Muskoka and hear from people who want to be heard from? What possibly could elected members of this House be afraid to hear? How could they be worried?

This measure, for all its demerits, has one grace, which is that it doesn't actually take place until next fiscal year. There is no reason for anything but a government that is short on backbone and long on arrogance to play it this way. There is plenty of time for this government to change its mind. There are two pages, a proposal that's put forward.

Every member in this House deserves to account for it, because this government did not run on this issue. This government did not say to the people of this province, "This is what we will do if we're in government." Instead, they said the opposite. They tried to play and they tried to infer that they would never do anything of the kind. We have a letter from the Premier which says explicitly that "such an action"—and make no mistake, private school vouchers are such an action—"would run directly counter to Ontario's long-standing commitment to public education." That was apparently the truth on the Premier's letterhead on January 18, 2000, far after the election. That was the truth then. Where is the truth today from the people opposite?

In this House they have a Minister of Education who voted today. We should register, because not everybody may have been watching between 3:30 and 6, that there was an opportunity for members of this House to vote their conscience for public education. They had a chance to expressly say that lower class sizes would be more important to them than this private school voucher, but there was no member of the government who thought that way. There were none of them who could put themselves on the record with that kind of preference for students.

Students out there I think look to this House more than we realize. There are students out there who realize that they constitute, in their prevoting age, a pretty vulnerable minority, and they recognize, I think, pretty instinctively whether or not the adults are getting their act together on their behalf. If the members take their time, if they go into their own schools, if they're not afraid to go in those schools, they will find students who have been already attuned to what's happening. They recognize how much different the experience is than that of their brothers and sisters. They recognize that this was the government where not one member opposite got up and said, "We've got to put extracurricular activities back in the schools. We've got to put students first." Not one member oppos-

ite said that for 240 days. Then finally, latterly, after the fact, the Minister of Education in desultory fashion said, "We might fix this problem we've inflicted on students."

I know the students out there fervently hope they'll be here at a vigil tomorrow night. They fervently hope to see sincerity emanating from the government benches, from every member in this House, and we will be judged by our actions in the next number of days. I think the people of this province, the students of this province, in the last six years know there has not been a fulsome commitment to education, that we have in front of us a bill, tawdry as it is, in sections 40 and 41 of Bill 45, that acts as a litmus test. This government is fond of giving everybody else tests. They say they'll test teachers, they say they'll test students, they say they'll test trustees, and they'll inflict horrible penalties if they aren't responded to. This Bill 45—some people say, "Bill 45, the smoking gun"—is a test for the government, and we have a pretty good idea that they just won't be up to it.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: I've got a minute for the critic for education for the Liberal Party and another minute for the government. Here it is. I agree with most of what the member for Parkdale-High Park says. I do. I've got some questions for him. I read the 10-point plan of the Liberal Party. I haven't had a chance to be critical of it yet because I'm so busy attacking you guys, but here it is.

2010

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: No, that's another one.

Point 9 of their 10-point plan says, "Every new teacher will be required to meet a rigorous entrance standard"—how is that different from the Tories?—"and existing teachers will be expected to constantly upgrade their testing skills." They already do that. How is that different from what the Tories have already presented? Good God.

Interjections.

Mr Marchese: I know you guys want to shut me down, but it won't work.

Point 10 says, "We're going to do something no Ontario government has ever done before: we will set targets for improving our province's test results," meaning they support the test results but somehow they're going to do it differently? Then they say, "We won't blame our schools or teachers or boards." That's interesting.

Point 4 says, "We will create turnaround teams. These teams will be sent into schools that consistently fail. Where necessary, we will replace the administration." So we won't blame them. We will replace them, however. We will send these replacement teams out where there's poverty and a great deal of drug abuse and all that. If they fail, we'll send teams to fix that up. Please, you guys, we don't have time for your plan, but we'll get to it.

There's a rally this Thursday at Queen's Park. And yes, Mr Kennedy, there's a vigil as well, at 6 o'clock. We support both of them. Please come to the rally and tell them that you disagree with the Premier, who says he

wants simply to have input on the implementation of this budget. We want more than that.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'd like to make some comments on the speech of the member for Parkdale-High Park. In the middle of his 20-minute talk he mentioned lower class sizes, and he very quickly said they know how much it will cost or that they costed it out. That's wonderful, except they costed it out at about a third of the real cost to do the 20-person cap for junior kindergarten through grade 3. Something like \$300 million to \$400 million is the cost they may have, and of course if they'd really done their homework they'd know it's over a billion dollars.

A hard cap of 20 people makes no sense at all. You must know that. I mean, you have a class of 21 people so you're going to have two classes, one of 10 and one of 11. You have to have some flexibility in the system if you want it to make any sense at all. You really wouldn't want to do that if elected. It would be far too expensive and it just doesn't make sense. But if you are elected next time, I'm sure you'll figure that out.

Talking about the equality in education tax credit, you keep saying we're funding schools. We aren't funding schools. We're letting the hard-working people of this province keep some of their hard-earned money to use as they choose in an independent school. That is very much different from funding schools. It starts out as a 10% tax credit in the first year.

He talked about tax cuts, saying no economist would support the idea of tax cuts. Well, I think they've proven themselves with the \$15 billion in extra revenue this province has garnered since 1995. I don't really think we need an economist; economists usually differ in their opinions of various items anyway. I think that's proven fact at this point.

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): I'm very happy to comment on the remarks made by my colleague from Parkdale-High Park. I do not know an individual more committed to public education in this province. He put forward in the debate this evening some very salient points, put them on the floor for serious consideration.

These are issues that have come to my colleague the critic and to me in my role as a rural member, and we believe that the people of Ontario and the issues they've brought to our attention deserve your attention. I believe the people of Ontario, as my colleague has indicated, deserve an opportunity to have their voice heard.

My leader, Dalton McGuinty, has indicated that we want public hearings across the province so that all people in Ontario will have an opportunity to share their comments, to share their ideas on this notion.

This is a total about-face for Mike Harris and the Tories of Ontario. We have it in writing as recently as January 2000. This was not the government's position. In the debate in the last provincial election, Mike Harris declared he would not put public dollars toward private schools.

Interjection: He didn't.

Mrs Dombrowsky: He did, and he's turned around on that. We believe the people of Ontario should have an opportunity to make their voices heard on this very significant policy issue.

I want to make a comment as well to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, who was a little critical of our math. I suggest that maybe his own math needs some review. The Minister of Finance has indicated that this idea could cost some \$300 million, and I think now it's recognized rather broadly across the province—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. The member for Hamilton West.

Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West): I also want to underscore many of the comments of the member from Parkdale-High Park.

The government has spent a fair bit of time this evening and on other days trying to convince everybody that it's not a voucher system, that a tax credit is entirely different because one goes to the family and the other goes directly to the building. The fact of the matter is, what you're going to do is encourage more people, more students to leave the public system and go into the private system, for a number of reasons, not the least of which we can trace back to former Education Minister Snobelen saying you were going to create a crisis.

So the less confidence there is in the public system, by virtue of your underfunding, the more average parents are going to have discussions around the kitchen table saying, "What are we going to do? We're not satisfied with what's happening in the education system." They are not going to sit there and debate the policy of how funding in the public education system happens in this province. They're going to focus on the quality of education our children are receiving. If that's not coming up to what those parents expect, then they're going to have that discussion around the table.

The fact that you've put a tax credit on the table means that option looks more appealing. So it means more private spots, more private schools and less money in public education, because as far as I understand this bill, for every student who leaves the public sector and goes into the private, the school board gets deducted that money. Same overhead, but it's on a per pupil basis, and if the pupils start leaving, you're going to have less money. But the same overhead: you still have to heat the same building, you still have to bring a teacher in.

You can play all the games you want. This is about devastating our public education system.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Mr Kennedy: It's a pleasure to respond. The member for Trinity-Spadina said he was going to spend a minute on us; he spent a minute and 45. I think he's losing his perspective, unfortunately. This isn't just about what you're against; this has to be about what you're for.

We're for excellence for all in education. What needs to be put in front of the people of this province is an alternative to the lazy, spent attitude of this particular government. We're in fact not only prepared to take responsibility but to actually put forward proposals, to

make sure that—somebody tried to ridicule turnaround teams. If you're in an area that has extra challenges, you should get extra help. We're saying that right now.

We're saying—for example, the schools that exist in Simcoe that have 400 from another system: what's happening in the school that's lost 400, and why doesn't the provincial education system take care of that? It doesn't take care of that. Out there are textbooks that are unusable or don't exist in adequate numbers. I want to say to parents watching and to schoolchildren and teachers: send your member, when you are done, the school books you have in your riding. Show them where the money, the \$300 million they want to invest launching this private voucher initiative, should be going. Tell people what we need to make our schools excellent.

It's not because we don't have some of the best teachers in the world; we do. We've got students who have competed successfully internationally. I want to mention in particular Durham region, where they won a world-class award not many years ago. The combination of the Minister of Finance, who has taken over education with this particular initiative, and the Minister of Education representing that area have taken away from that school the motivation, the willingness to get things done on the part of students and on the part of teachers and have shown us how you can run things into the ground just by not being committed to them.

I can tell the parents, the students, the teachers, the public out there who invest—75% of whom don't have kids—that this party is committed to making sure we have the best public education system in the world, and we won't let this government get away with putting up a back door to wreck it.

2020

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Dunlop: It's a pleasure to rise this evening to speak on Bill 45, the Ontario budget, 2001. I know most of the evening has been taken up with tax credits and that issue, but I'd like to talk about the budget itself and the seven themes that underlie the budget: responsible choices, cutting your taxes, building growth, value for money, helping our most vulnerable, investing in our young people and a plan for the future.

I'd like to thank Minister Flaherty for bringing down his first budget. I think he's done an excellent job on it. I'd like to thank the previous speakers this evening for their comments.

The 2001 Ontario budget is balanced for the third year in a row, and that's very important to me as a new member. It's the first time in nearly 100 years that an Ontario government has presented three consecutive balanced budgets.

Earlier this evening I was talking to the member from Thornhill, Ms Molinari. It's very interesting that for a newcomer in 1999, she is probably the first lady in the history of this province to sit on a government that's balanced the budget in her first three years as a member of that government. I think she should be very proud of that, and I drew that to her attention earlier. It's seldom

that something like that would happen, but I think it's important. I'm very proud of the fact that in my first three years here as a member of the second-term Mike Harris government, we've balanced the budget for three years in a row.

I'd like to talk about responsible choices. This budget contains the largest debt repayment of any government in the history of the province, \$3 billion. The government has achieved, to this point, 80% of the \$5-billion net debt reduction commitment we promised the people of Ontario in our Blueprint commitment in the election of 1999.

From 1996 to 1999, Ontario kept its promise to cut personal income taxes by 30%. In 1999, our government, in the Blueprint, as I said earlier, made a new promise: Ontario taxpayers would get an additional 20%—a \$4-billion tax reduction over five years. The steps to this goal were taken in the 1999 and 2000 budgets. The budget we are debating tonight proposes that over the next two years, the first and second tax rates would drop to 5.65% and 8.85% respectively. On January 1, 2003, the threshold at which surtax is payable would rise. This effectively removes the first tier of the two-tier surtax.

The results of that are that 95% of taxpayers in Ontario would see tax savings of 20% or more, and the average tax saving for taxpayers with incomes of up to \$100,000 would exceed 20%. The largest percentage reductions would be concentrated on taxpayers with lower and middle incomes. More than \$4 billion of additional tax savings would be delivered to Ontario taxpayers. Once again, our promise has been kept.

The cornerstone of our plan and tax cuts—I want to make this point very clear: each taxpayer has benefited from tax cuts. Some 660,000 low-income earners have been completely removed from Ontario's tax rolls since 1995. In this latest budget, I'm proud to say we're proposing to remove another 75,000 people from the Ontario tax rolls.

It's interesting, when we talk about tax cuts, how many provinces and even the federal government have followed the lead of Ontario and of course our colleagues in Alberta. It's interesting to note that for a family with an income of \$60,000, without the tax cuts they today would have been paying \$4,570 in provincial taxes and \$8,110 in federal. After these tax cuts, the provincial roll will drop 51%, so the family that was paying \$4,500 will now pay \$2,200. And even the federal government—we were pleased last year, as a caucus, to see that the federal government had decided to finally reduce some taxes. That family of \$60,000 will go from \$8,100 to \$6,400 after the federal tax cuts are in place. Ontario leads almost all the other provinces and the federal government in looking at tax cuts.

A few years ago, almost anyone in this House would have thought tax cuts would be an impossible way of stimulating the economy and of creating jobs and creating the type of wealth we have in our province today. After two years of record growth, Ontario's economy continues to grow. The private sector consensus for the

real GDP growth is 2.3% this year and 3.6% planned for 2002. Our job growth, and this is also included in the budget, will continue in 2001 and accelerate in 2002. Ontario's economy has created record new jobs: 22,900 since the 2001 throne speech. We're very pleased with those types of announcements and results of our fiscal management.

During the budget, Minister Flaherty announced Ontario's Edge. Its purpose is to legislate the full schedule for corporate income taxes between now and 2005 to give our businesses certainty to plan for the future. You all realize that we feel very strongly about investing in our businesses so they can continue to invest in the economy and create the types of jobs we want for Ontario families.

We begin to eliminate the job-killing capital tax by proposing a \$5-million capital tax deduction. We will review tax incentives to make sure they are effective.

We're building on the quality of life in Ontario through clean air, good roads, efficient transportation and quality hospitals.

Ontario's Edge will also legislate the corporate income tax cut that would provide businesses with certainty so they can plan for expansion in the hiring of new staff. Again, I believe Ontario today is at 5.7%, the lowest unemployment rate in our country.

The budget proposes to adopted several recommendations of the Business Tax Review Panel. The proposed capital tax deduction would, first of all, increase capital available for reinvestment. It would simplify our tax system. It would remove capital tax liability for over 11,000 small and medium-sized businesses. The business tax review panel noted that the tax incentives add complexity to our system. The province will review business's tax incentives to ensure their effectiveness, as well as such targeted taxes as the corporate minimum tax and the tax for fuel conservation.

Ontario's Edge also has capital investments through SuperBuild, and that will help enhance the quality of life. The SuperBuild millennium fund is planned to support this goal, with \$250 million for interregional transit in the GTA and nearby regions and \$250 million for strategic infrastructure projects to support Smart Growth in other urban areas, and finally, \$500 million that was previously committed to Toronto's waterfront. Again, I think we're all planning and would like to see the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto be successful in the 2008 summer Olympics.

2030

We will invest \$25 million more this year to ensure that our water is safe and our air is clean. That has increased operating funding to the Ministry of the Environment by 51% since 1997-98.

Quality of life depends on value for money and also on balance and priorities. The 2001-02 budget increases health care spending by 5.4% or \$1.2 billion. Having increased investment in health care by almost \$6 billion since taking office is something we're very proud of. We've already far exceeded the commitment we made in

our Blueprint in 1999. I'm very pleased with that, although we know the current rate of increase in health care spending is not sustainable. I look back to 1995-96, when health care spending made up 38% of the provincial budget. Today we're at 45%, and it's growing at a rapid rate.

We need to address health care challenges on two fronts. First of all, it would be nice to reform federal funding to ensure that Ottawa funds at least 50% of the increases. Currently their commitment is only 14 cents on the dollar. We need to have Ottawa back in the health care business; it's as simple as that. Also, we have to reform the health care system to make it work better and to ensure its sustainability. I know we talk over and over about federal involvement in health care, but 14 cents on the dollar is actually ridiculous when you think that the original agreement was for 50 cents on the dollar.

The first step in reform is greater accountability for health care and other sectors. We've talked over and over in the throne speech and in the budget—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister of Labour is not in his seat. If he insists on heckling, he will have to leave this place.

The member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I needed that break anyway. I'm really dry.

The first step in reform is greater accountability for health care and other sectors. We will introduce the Public Sector Accountability Act to apply to all transfer recipient organizations. That act will require those organizations to publish business plans and performance measures, will require them to have balanced budgets and will require these organizations to showcase achievements of the most efficient organizations. I've talked to people on some of the hospital boards, and there are some concerns about this Public Sector Accountability Act. But people who are efficient are looking to be rewarded for efficiencies, and I think that's a good method as well.

The accountability office will be set up in the Ministry of Finance. That office will evaluate performance across whatever sector we're referring to. It will champion the strongest performers and spread best practices, and will promote the creation of common goals and performance measures. It will also monitor compliance with the new act and will implement remedies where performance must be improved. I look forward to further debate on that act when we introduce it as well.

We will also undertake value-for-money reviews of all government spending. Again, that's part of the accountability and responsibility we brought out in the throne speech. We will invoke private sector expertise—you know that we believe very strongly in the private sector. We will ask common sense questions about what services government should be providing, and we'll ask whether services are still meeting their goals, whether these individual ministries or agencies are performing their goals effectively. We will look for other delivery options

to make the maximum investment for our taxpayers, and we want to look for every possible efficiency that can be out there. We will generate savings for the highest priorities.

We will be seeking a buyer for the Province of Ontario Savings Office, and we will be looking for other ways to involve the private sector to find cost-effective solutions in providing services to our taxpayers. We will look to maximizing benefits and services to all the taxpayers of Ontario.

One of the policies of our 2001 budget is helping the most vulnerable. Government has a role in helping the most vulnerable in our society. It's the right thing to do. We've increased funding for services and shelters for adults with developmental disabilities, 300 new and 100 refurbished beds in women's shelters, an additional \$20 million a year for children's treatment centres, and we'll be expanding education supports in child and youth centres in institutions.

We're investing \$26 million over three years for community mental health organizations. Just recently, Minister Johns was in Barrie to name the new members of the mental health task force for the Penetanguishene catchment area at the mental health centre there. I know that task force is looking forward to providing some expertise and recommendations to the Minister of Health.

The children's aid societies will receive an additional \$8 million annually. We will spend \$50 million more annually to combat youth prostitution and punish those who exploit our young people.

Included in the budget as well is \$6 million annually for police and crown attorneys to fight organized crime. We will also spend more on electronic surveillance for adult services in communities. We will be extending Project Turnaround, which is the youth correctional centre that happens to be in my riding. We will continue that for another two years. We will double the number of youth justice committees to 36.

Finally, we will be increasing early years funding by \$114 million in 2001-02, growing it to \$193 million annually. The key new initiatives will be the networks of the early years centres.

Investing in our young people has some other points I'd like to bring out as well. First of all, the support for funding of public education will increase by \$360 million in 2001 and 2002. Of course, that \$360 million has been the topic of debate here this evening. We're investing more in education than there currently is in enrolment. I think the total for this year will be \$13.86 billion for the 72 boards the province funds.

The government remains committed to guaranteed funding for the public education system—again, that's what the debate is about this evening. We have always put students and parents first. Now is the time to address the concerns of parents whose children attend independent schools, often for religious or cultural reasons. We think this is the right thing to do at this time.

Equity in education: the refundable tax credit provides relief against the first \$7,000 of tuition for each child.

The tax credit will be worth 10% of that amount in 2002, rising to 50% by 2006, which is a maximum of \$3,500. It will stay at that level for subsequent years. It's about fairness, equity and a parent's fundamental right to have input to the child's education.

We expect to have a space for every student, and we hope to provide major multi-year funding to colleges and universities for 2003-04 with the arrival of the double cohort in that year. Through the SuperBuild fund, we'll be investing \$1.8 billion to create 73,000 new student places. Of course, that was previously announced by Minister Cunningham late last fall.

I was very pleased to see that Georgian College, in my riding, received \$27 million, and construction should start right away. Also, when we refer to investing in our youth, we're investing \$60 million in the start-up of the Ontario Institute of Technology in the Durham region. That will provide a mix of university and college programs. We're pleased to see that. I myself think it's overdue, and I'm looking forward to the proposals that come forth with that.

We'll be providing another \$50 million over five years to update equipment and facilities for apprenticeship programs. Again, I think this is very positive. We'll invest \$33 million by 2004-05 to double the number of entrants into apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades. Of course, in order to build all the hospitals and colleges and all the construction that takes place with a vibrant economy, we need a good skilled workforce.

We'll also be providing \$12 million to help foreign-trained professionals enter our Ontario workforce faster.

2040

My time is almost done. I just wanted to say that the goal for the future is to establish in Ontario the best-performing economy and the highest quality of life in North America. I think we've made the right decision with this budget and I'm pleased to support it here this evening.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mrs Bountrogianni: When you say "best quality of life," for whom? Whom are you talking about? There are people here who have been suffering since 1995, since your government got in. When I first came here in September 1999, 22 disabled children in Hamilton were at home because there wasn't enough money for educational assistants to take care of them, their toileting needs, their wheelchairs and so forth, because of the lack of funding from this government. Finally they did find half a million dollars for these educational assistants. They absorbed the costs, but they knew they'd have to pay the piper at some point, and of course we know about the teachers' strike. My kids were out, along with 40,000 other kids, for three and a half weeks. It did go to arbitration and they finally did reach a settlement, but at a sacrifice. Teachers were laid off. So is the education system better off today than it was in 1995? Certainly not in Hamilton. Certainly not in my riding; certainly not in the new city of Hamilton.

You mentioned the money for post-secondary in this budget. You had your own task force look into efficiencies, and they found that you need at least \$900 million in deferred maintenance costs. This is your own task force. This isn't our task force; this isn't an independent task force; this is your task force—\$900 million for deferred maintenance for colleges and universities, and you've pledged \$100 million in this budget. You do the math. Is that enough to take care of the buildings for our college and university students? With respect to the double cohort, you finally did give multi-year funding. I wish you'd do that with the hospitals. You finally did that with the universities. But again, you'll have to double that in the year 2003-04 to meet what your own task force says is needed for the double cohort. Are you going to do that? Are you going to double it for 2003-04?

Interjection.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Since the Minister of Labour piped up, let me remind you about accountability. You say you wanted more accountability. You have two chances now to end golden handshakes of irresponsible CEOs of hospitals, boards and so forth and you haven't taken us up on that challenge. I'm telling you, steal the next severance bill. Take it, make them accountable, take the credit and we'll applaud you for it. But don't speak out of both sides of your mouth. If you want public accountability, show us.

Mr Christopherson: I thought it interesting that the member for Simcoe North raised the privatization issue that's contained in here. Of course, most of the attention is focusing on the privatization of our public health—our public education system—and our health care system—but within this bill also the government has announced that they're planning to privatize the Province of Ontario Savings Office; POSO, as it's known. What's interesting is that when we asked the government officials, "What is the value that you're going to place on this to put it on the market?" they didn't know. They hadn't done the homework. So what does that tell us? It tells us that ideology is driving this. Not dollars and cents, not fiscal management, not any sense of getting a better bang for the taxpayer buck; it's all about, "We've got to privatize something or our supporters are going to be all upset, so we'll privatize POSO." That looks to be the way it is. It would be interesting to hear the government member indicate something different. If you've got a figure that it's worth, I'd like to hear it, because it means something has changed from the last time we raised this.

It's interesting, almost laughable if it weren't so serious, that the member also raised the issue of caring about the most vulnerable. There are so many things this government could do that you're not doing. You could stop clawing back the national child benefit supplement from welfare kids. Let's just isolate that one issue. There are dollars that come from the federal government to help low-income families that directly help, at least a little bit, poor children, and you claw it back. So the federal government gives it down to these individuals and you take it back. I'd like the member from Simcoe North to

tell me how poor children in Ontario benefit from that clawback.

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): I'm pleased to be able to comment on the debate the member from Simcoe North entered this evening. He started off by talking about the fact that this is the first time in 100 years that we have had three balanced budgets. He went on to say that as a new member in this House, in this Legislature, "I take great pride in being part of three years of a balanced budget." The member for Simcoe North, as a matter of fact, is one of the six men who in 100 years have balanced the budget for three years. Certainly that is something to be proud of.

In my background, coming from the York Catholic board, we had a deficit budget, and by the time I left the chairmanship there it was a balanced budget. I'm used to balanced budgets in the last number of years, so I'm pleased to be with a government that is fiscally responsible and respects taxpayers' dollars.

The member also touched on a number of important points in this budget: the fact that we've invested more money in health care. Health care is a priority. Ontarians have told us that it's their priority. We've invested more money into health care despite the fact that the federal government has reduced its funding. As a matter of fact, 100% of the increased dollars needed for health care is totally funded by the provincial government. It's totally funded by us.

We've invested more money in education, in Super-Build. This budget also allows for operating funding for post-secondary institutions, because that's what they told us they needed. We invested in the infrastructure. This budget provides for the operating dollars they need to sustain an excellent post-secondary education system. So this is a good budget overall.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): There are a number of ways one could respond to the comments from the member for Simcoe North, but I don't have enough time to get into it. What I'd like to do, if I may, is just talk about something that wasn't in this budget at all, and that is any reference whatsoever to the northern health travel grant. Mr Speaker, you would be very sensitive to that as well.

The fact is that we've been fighting a battle now for the last two years, since this government got re-elected, to try and get this government to acknowledge the inadequacy and unfairness of the northern health travel grant. The former minister, after an enormous amount of pressure—20,000 names signed on petitions; petitions continuing to come forward—finally agreed to at least review the program. The program was reviewed. That is still a secret; the new minister still won't acknowledge it.

This is something that is extraordinarily frustrating to all northern Ontario residents. Certainly I can speak for the constituents in my riding who are watching this evening, and all those who aren't as well, may I say, who have to travel outside their own communities for health care. While the government has funded Cancer Care Ontario to send patients from southern Ontario to the

north for care—either Sudbury or Thunder Bay or other places—and funded 100% of accommodation, travel costs and everything else, the fact is that those who have to travel outside the north for help are receiving a mere subsidy. That's a huge frustration and something we're very disappointed not to see any reference to in the budget.

May I say, in that my time is running low, that this is something we're not going to give up on. All of us on the Ontario Liberal caucus side are very supportive of fixing the northern health travel grant. My northern colleagues and I are going to keep fighting it. The fact is, there should have been some reference made to it in this budget. There was absolutely no reference at all. It's a huge insult to northerners. But we're not going to give up; we're not going to give up at all. We're going to keep fighting until we correct this. I know the Ontario Liberal caucus under Dalton McGuinty will solve this, but we are furious that there was no mention of it in this year's budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain, the member from Hamilton West and my colleague Mrs Molinari from Thornhill and Mr Gravelle from Thunder Bay-Superior North.

As I said earlier, I'm pleased to support this budget, Bill 45. It's I think a fair budget for the people of Ontario.

I look back particularly on my years on municipal council, in municipal politics. I've watched with a great deal of interest over the last 20 years budgets presented by different governments and different Treasurers in Ontario. Some of those budgets were presented by my colleague Norm Miller's dad, Frank, when Frank was the Treasurer for the province for a number of years.

I don't think you can put out a perfect budget. As far as I know, people have complained about health care and have complained about education forever. I can remember that in my years on municipal council, I think between 1985 and 1995, the education portion of the tax bill rose 140% while enrolment went up 16%. We complained, as municipal politicians, about the education system. We thought it was too expensive. At that point the province had its role there. I was glad as a municipal politician to see the province take on the process that's used now for funding education.

I just want to say in closing that I've enjoyed this debate this evening. I look forward to further comments from my other colleagues around the room. As I said earlier, I'll be supporting this budget.

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The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I'll be sharing my time with the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

I'd like to start by talking about the budget in general. We just heard a member say you can't get the budget perfect, and then other members say it is the best budget ever. I guess it all depends on the perspective. If you are

a corporation in Ontario, you did quite well. I don't think the average person out there understands that corporations, through this budget, are getting a \$2.2-billion tax cut. In the current fiscal year, and I'm taking this right from the government's own document, it's own budget, corporate taxes are expected to go down from \$9.1 billion to \$8.3 billion, in just one year.

Just think, who doesn't like a tax cut? Corporations like a tax cut. We would like a tax cut. The problem is, we can't afford it. We cannot afford it if we truly believe in a publicly funded education system, if we truly believe in a publicly funded health care system that is available for ourselves and for our loved ones, if and when we need it.

So if you're a corporation, this is a good budget, a good tax cut of \$800 million. Just think what that \$800 million could do with the public health care system or the publicly funded education system, for example. We've heard from the hospitals that they feel they are under-budgeted in the current budget by some \$650 million. As a matter of fact, they're getting \$100 million less than last year. We all know that most of the hospitals in Ontario ran a deficit last year.

This wasn't as a result of poor management and this wasn't as a result of poor delivery of services; this was as a result of not being provided with the needed resources to do the job in the first place. What's going to happen in this coming year is that the government is just going to make it worse so that there will be longer waiting lines in hospitals and fewer beds available for people if and when they need them. I could go on and on along that score.

The other issue relates to the tax credit for education purposes. The government will say that this is not a voucher system, that this is not funding private education, but the bottom line is this: somewhere between \$300 million to \$700 million that otherwise would have come into the coffers of the province of Ontario in revenue is not going to be there. When you add that to the \$2.2 billion of the corporate tax cut, there's going to be somewhere around \$3 billion less coming into the province of Ontario than otherwise would have been the case, and that is a lot of money. On a budget of roughly \$62 billion, that is somewhere around—what?—6% or 7%; no, it's more than that, about 8% or 9% of the entire budget in the province.

Interjection: Nine per cent.

Mr Gerretsen: Nine per cent of the entire budget of the province. The point that we're simply trying to make is that a budget is not just about expenditures, but it's also about lost revenues.

The government had a choice and it clearly made a choice, whereby it was going to favour its corporate partners and people who send their children to private schools. I have nothing against people who send their children to private schools. If they want to do that, that's fine. They have a choice. They can either send their children to the publicly funded education system or they can send them to private schools and pay for it themselves. They've always had that choice. To somebody

who wants to make that choice, I say, "God bless you." I believe our priority here should be to make sure we have the best publicly funded education system possible so that we give every child in Ontario an equal chance and an equal opportunity to reach the maximum potential that each of them is capable of.

That's one of our main purposes here. That's what Ontario is known for. That's why traditionally, over the last four to five years now, we've been held to have the best quality of life as far as the United Nations is concerned. Closely connected with that is our health care system. I can assure you that with regard to what the province has just done, or what the government is doing with respect to the education system, the same thing is going to happen to our health care system. You are going to allow the system, through underfunding, basically to run down to such an extent that people will be looking for alternatives in exactly the same way they're now starting to look for alternatives in private schooling.

It's going to happen. John Snobelen said so in the speech he gave on the crisis in education some five or six years ago. He had the plan down, which is that the way to get people out of the public systems, whether it's in health care or in education, is to allow those public systems to run down to such a level that people will make other choices.

Hon David Turnbull (Solicitor General): He never said anything of the sort. What a load of drivel.

Mr Gerretsen: You may call it a load of drivel, sir, but it's true and the people of Ontario believe it to be true.

The government has made a big to-do over the fact that it has actually increased the total health budget of Ontario, but I think the people of Ontario should know that \$1.2 billion, which is most of the increase for this coming year for the entire health care system, is as a result of increased transfer payments from the federal government. I'll be the first to admit that the federal government for a number of years reduced the payments it gave to the provinces and now they're bringing them back up again. You sit there and say, "Look, we are adding an additional"—I believe—" \$1.4 billion to the health care system," and you try to take credit for the entire thing when in fact \$1.2 billion of that \$1.4 billion is as a result of increased federal payments. That is the way it is.

Hon Mr Turnbull: That's not back up to what it used to be.

Mr Gerretsen: I hear the minister chirping along, but let's talk about one other thing. Right now we have hearings going on in Walkerton. It's something that unfortunately has sort of drifted off the front pages of the newspapers, but the point is that your own budget documents clearly indicate that over the last five to six years you have allowed the budget of the Ministry of the Environment to go down by some 56%.

That means only one thing: you've got fewer people doing the inspections, fewer people involved in making sure the environment in Ontario is the best it can be.

That's the bottom line. People aren't stupid out there. They realize that if you cut a budget in half, you simply will not have the same number of people to make sure the regulations are enforced, to make sure we have clean drinking water, to make sure sewage systems are inspected etc. If you've got fewer people doing that work, then more things are going to get by, more regulations are not going to be adhered to and the environment of the province is going to suffer. We've seen the results of that in what's happened in Walkerton. Those kinds of situations could very well get worse in time as we go along.

There is a whole other group of people out there suffering from the result of this government's non-action. In the Kingston area, just today I noticed that our community care access centre has to handle a \$3.3-million loss. I know from the number of calls we've been getting over the last three to four years that many people who have traditionally relied on the nursing and home care services that community care access provides to the people in my community, mainly seniors or people who are disabled etc, have been unilaterally cut off, and many of their situations are really dreadful situations. The irony is that in a lot of these situations, if you don't give those people the kind of nursing care and home care they need, they will probably end up in institutions, at a much higher cost, a lot sooner than otherwise would have been the case.

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In Kingston, the CCAC has been told to come up with a \$3.3-million loss. As a matter of fact, Nancy Sears, the administrator there, basically says the ministry asked her, and this is a direct quote, "Tell us what would happen if you only have \$25 million," which is \$3.3 million less than last year. Of course they're in a total state of panic, because it means more and more people will be cut off from the services they need.

I have other letters from parents who have developmentally handicapped children and are pleading with the ministry, "Do something." We have children coming out of the school system now who live at home with their parents. Those parents need some support, but because they're 21 and out of the school system they simply can't be helped.

All I'm saying is this: wouldn't it have been wonderful if some of that \$2.2 billion in tax cuts or the \$700 million of tax credits now going to the private schools could have been used to help the most vulnerable in our society, whether the elderly or the developmentally handicapped? That's the kind of budget we should have seen in this province.

Mr McMeekin: I'm pleased to add my voice to the debate this evening. As one of the newest members of this Legislative Assembly, I recall arriving here with high expectations and high hopes. I believed then, as I believe now, that despite our political differences we might work together to accomplish a recognition of the high values and ideals that so many Ontarians hold to be self-evident, those historic values and ideals that make this province

such a wonderful place in which to live, work, play and raise a family.

Every government must understand and appreciate the unique opportunity afforded them when they present a provincial budget. Simply put, government budgets ought to be a reflection of the basic values, visions and priorities of society.

Mr Speaker, having read and studied this budget, I need to express to you and members of the Legislative Assembly my profound sense of disappointment. Clearly, this budget is out of step with the basic values and beliefs of the people I have the privilege of representing. While some government members may find this hard to believe, there really is more to life than tax cuts and some ideologically driven race to the bottom with respect to the provision of historic services that our citizens have come to value. Interestingly, one simply has to examine the past five years to recognize the supreme price Ontarians have had to pay as a result of the narrowly defined choices of this government, choices driven by one-dimensional tax cut policies, policies which show favour to the few at the expense of Ontario's many working families.

Let's examine the costs of recent government decisions to Ontario's working families. I'm a pretty simple guy, and the best way I know to share my message with the people of Ontario isn't to concentrate so much on what was in the budget but rather to focus for a few moments on what wasn't in that document. Here's my top 10 list of what this government forgot to tell the people of Ontario in their spring budget.

First, public education is in trouble. Under this government, \$1.8 billion has been slashed from education spending, extracurricular activities have been curtailed, libraries closed and English-as-a-second-language, music and art programs have been cancelled, while funds for new curriculum textbooks, school transportation and the general upkeep of schools have been dramatically reduced. In fact, the real per pupil spending by this government has decreased across Ontario by some \$918. It's difficult for me to understand how this government can pretend to suggest they support public education when all outward and visible indications show the exact opposite.

On the post-secondary side, tuition fees have increased over 50% in the last five years, while real spending on post-secondary education has been reduced by over \$300 million.

In the wake of Walkerton and the very serious concern across Ontario related to the quality and safety of our drinking water, overall funding for the Ministry of the Environment and the inspectors they employ has been reduced by 56%. Incredibly, this provincial government is now prepared to allocate less than \$50 million to correct the very real problems we have with our Ontario drinking water plants.

Health care—my favourite—is a mess. Hospitals currently face between a \$650-million to \$750-million shortfall to provide current patient care, not to mention future needs, Mr Minister. No new funding has been provided

to relieve the nursing shortage crisis in Ontario or to finance much-needed primary care reform. The lack of funding for new capital projects, Mr Minister, is once again causing an offloading of health care costs to municipalities and local charities—you know what I'm talking about. With the exception of Alberta, no province in Canada, if you can believe it, spends a lower percentage—5.35% of their gross domestic product—to meet the health care needs of our people.

Let me take a minute to refer specifically to the situation in Hamilton. The Hamilton Health Sciences Corp this year will face a funding shortfall of some \$43 million. Unless things change dramatically, patient care will be severely affected, which will result in longer waiting times for surgery. In addition, we face the possible reduction of 150 acute care beds and the layoff of up to 450 hospital workers—very disconcerting.

In agriculture, the Harris government has closed OMAFRA offices across Ontario and reduced total agricultural spending by 20% since 1995.

On the municipal infrastructure side, which includes roads and sewers, less will be invested this year than in any of the previous 15 years. After dumping \$600 million of new costs on our already beleaguered municipal property taxpayers, the provincial government's total investment in public transit is an embarrassingly low \$30 million.

For just a moment I want to talk about my Let's Build a Bridge municipal tour. I've heard concerns about this government's abandonment of Ontario municipalities. In fact, one eastern Ontario municipal leader informed me that municipalities would do so much better if the province would simply leave them alone. In Orangeville, another municipal leader noted that when it came to assisting their local concerns, the province could only provide its undivided evasion. In the new city of Hamilton, the mayor and council still await the provision of adequate transitional funding, the lowering of the arbitrary and discriminatory business education tax and this government's keeping of their revenue-neutral promises of a couple of years back with respect to provincial downloading.

Social housing has been completely abandoned by the this government, in spite of \$170 million of federal matching funds available. The province simply refuses to get involved.

We could talk about hydro deregulation and the privatization, which is going to cause hydro rates to skyrocket, some estimate, as high as 30%.

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Since 1995, the provincial debt escalated from \$84 billion to \$114 billion, and we spend \$218,000 an hour on interest just on what's been added since 1995. Let me ask a simple question: do we really believe our health care, education and environment are in better shape today than they were five years ago? No, we don't. How do we feel about the offloading of provincial costs to municipalities, the abandonment of our agricultural community, increased hydro costs and the growing problem of

homelessness? It's simply wrong. As I travel across my wonderful riding of ADFA, people express to me their concerns and fears about where Ontario is heading. My constituents want dependable health care, a strong public education system, clean air, clean water and clean government.

This evening I've offered but 10 examples of what's really happening in Ontario. There are many more I could add. The priorities of this government are not shared by me or the people I represent. That is why I will stand with my Liberal colleagues, individuals who have a broader vision of what's needed for Ontario, and vote against this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Christopherson: Again, I would like to commend my colleagues in the official opposition, the members from Kingston and the Islands and Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. I think the member from Kingston and the Islands was one of the few people this evening who raised the issue of the environment. It's been raised a little, but again, if it weren't for this issue around the privatization of our public education system, it would have gotten a lot more attention, particularly in light of evidence that's now coming out at the inquiry where, sure enough, as we said at the time, you knew the cuts you were making were going to do damage and put the health of our citizens at risk. You knew it, and the evidence is now coming out.

You'd think, if for none other than just political reasons—even if you really didn't care enough to do it out of caring—you would have made sure there was enough money going into the Ministry of the Environment, at a time you're giving away \$2.4 billion in tax cuts, to at least make it look like you're trying to repair some of the damage. But, no, nowhere near the funding necessary to take the Ministry of the Environment back to where the citizens of this province deserve it to be.

My friend from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot also raised the issue of the environment. He raised a number of other critical issues that affect our new city of Hamilton. Let me just focus on his mentioning the pending legislation that will eliminate by law the ability of hospital boards to run deficits. What does that mean? It means Hamilton citizens and their families are left outside the door because the hospital can't run a deficit when they run out of money. If you can't run a deficit and you can't borrow the money, then the patients wait in the cold. Thanks a lot.

Mrs Lyn McLeod (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I'm happy to respond to the comments that were made by my colleagues from Kingston and from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. I'll have an opportunity myself to speak to this budget bill tomorrow afternoon, and I'm obviously going to dwell on the issue that is of gravest concern to me overall in the budget: the introduction of a tax credit which will allow for privatization and the creation of two-tier educational system.

But I'm glad to have this very brief opportunity to comment on the issues my colleagues have raised around

the impact of tax cuts. Consecutive tax cuts coming from this government have made cutting taxes the priority over the provision of any kind of services to the residents and citizens of Ontario, but in particular in this budget, the \$2.2-billion corporate tax, which will make Ontario the jurisdiction that has lower corporate taxes than anywhere in North America, or maybe on a par with Alberta. That, as my colleagues have described it, truly is a race to the bottom. Of course, it's not going to serve us well economically, because if you try to be the lowest, there's always going to be somebody who's lower.

My leader, Dalton McGuinty, has repeatedly said the goal of Ontario should be to compete economically by being the best, by having the best education system, the best health care system, the best place to live, and that includes the quality of our environment. But, of course, this government, in making tax cuts its priority, has created chaos in our educational system. My colleagues have touched on the kinds of cuts that have been made. My leader has touched on the 35,000 young people who are waiting for special education. We've seen the squeezing of Ontario hospitals. We've seen chaos in our health care system. My colleague touched on the \$43-million deficit faced by the Hamilton Health Sciences Corp, the hospital that this government saw fit to take into trusteeship earlier this year rather than actually deal with the reality of the problems they've created with their budgets: no concern about impact at all.

Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls): It's a pleasure to rise and comment on the comments made by the members for Kingston and the Islands and the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

Members opposite talked about a variety of things in their speeches and that they don't like Ontario today, they don't like the picture of Ontario today. A lot of people ought to think back to 1995, when Ontario had about its fourth consecutive \$10-billion-plus deficit. They racked up \$50 billion in debt. The people of this province are still, and will be for many more years, paying interest on that debt. We had extremely high unemployment rates. We had runaway expenditures in the province. We had taxes that the Liberals and the NDP had put on people for 10 years that made us one of the most highly taxed jurisdictions in North America, one of the most uncompetitive tax jurisdictions in North America. We had 1.3 million people on welfare, and they're proud of that record. They're really proud of the record of having 1.3 million people on welfare. That was a tragedy.

Today we've got one of the lowest unemployment rates we've had for years. We're getting an increasingly more competitive tax jurisdiction. We've seen almost 600,000 people move from welfare to work in the past six years. We've created about 825,000 jobs in the past five years. That's a record to be proud about because, as more people work, more people are paying taxes. Every time we've reduced taxes, revenues have gone up. We do conservative estimates every year in the budget about our revenue stream. That's called responsible budgeting. Quite often our revenues end up exceeding what's

budgeted, and the members opposite know that. They in fact complain that we do conservative budgeting, but it works.

Mr Bartolucci: I'd like to thank the members for Kingston and the Islands and Ancaster for their comments. Indeed, they provided the true picture of what this budget is really all about. This budget fails the working families of Ontario because it fails public education. It does not believe in public education. This government doesn't believe in public education.

The Ontario Liberals and Dalton McGuinty believe working families want a strong public education system, and we will fight for it. This budget fails working families because it invests \$300 million less in post-secondary education than we did five years ago. That's a failure this government will be responsible for in the years to come. It fails the people of Ontario because it fails our health care system.

The member for Kingston and the Islands spent a little bit of time talking about his community care access centre and the \$3-million deficit they're going to face this year and how they're going to address that. That's universal across all the community care access centres in Ontario. Eight of the nine community care access centres in northern Ontario predict a \$20-million deficit, and do you know what? The only way they're going to recover it is by a reduction in services. So this government fails the people who require community care access services.

This government also fails the people who have to travel from northern Ontario for cancer treatment, at 34 cents a kilometre one way. This was not addressed in the budget. This government fails the people of northern Ontario, continues to discriminate against the people of northern Ontario, continues to practise health care apartheid for those northern cancer patients who have to travel for treatment. Because of that, this budget and this government are a failure to the people of Ontario.

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Mr McMeekin: I'm pleased to sum up. I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about public education as well. I want to say at the outset just how disappointed I was that this government moved ahead, I think, frankly, without the integrity that we need in terms of political process or without any kind of mandate to speak to this issue.

Shortly after I was elected in the by-election, I had a conversation with the minister about a number of changes that might be forthcoming. I took the liberty of suggesting to her at the time that if she and her government were going to move ahead with something like the funding of independent schools, they ought to strike a select committee of the Ontario Legislature and not spring it on anybody out of left field, or in this case right field. I thought at the time that that made some sense, and I continue to believe that there might well have been some options, some available discussion and debate that we could have had sensibly about this, rather than see it handled the way it was.

I was pleased to read in the throne speech and in the budget about this provincial government's move toward choice within the public school system. In fact, that's something we were pleased to initiate and were pleased that the government picked up on. The problem fundamentally is that this government, in its proposal for tax credits, has trouble being taken seriously when it has yanked \$1.8 billion out of public education, where teachers are so stressed out, where we have overcrowding in the classroom, where parents and students are having to raise money for textbooks and computers, where teachers are leaving the public school system literally in droves, when children need to wait months for a psychological assessment, and when we've got such a desperate need to reclaim our inner-city and rural-based schools.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Christopherson: In the six or seven minutes that I have, I would like to put on the record my strong opposition to this bill.

I want to begin by responding to a comment just made by the member for Niagara Falls, because he talked about debt and what it meant to future generations. I'm paraphrasing, but he was basically asking, why should the next generation be burdened with that debt? I want to say to that member that I'd like to see some of that concern about the next generation being applied to the education system that he was lucky enough to benefit from. It's infuriating that you make the argument that you care about the next generation in terms of dollars, but you don't want to acknowledge the fact that you, the government of the day, are not providing the next generation with the same quality of education that the rest of us enjoyed. If you were one of those who were fortunate enough to go on to post-secondary education, the debt factor, the personal debt that you now take, by and large didn't exist in the past. What about that future debt burden that's being placed on our children? Where's your concern about that?

I had an opportunity to talk to Ray Mulholland, who's the trustee for ward 4. That's my old ward, when I was an alderman on Hamilton city council. Actually, he's now the chair of the board. Ray has been serving—I don't know—it's got to be close to 30 years or better, doing a phenomenal job. Anyway, I talked to Ray earlier today about the fiscal reality, not the Tory fantasyland that you want to paint about how wonderful everything is in our schools. I wanted to hear from the chair of my board in Hamilton about the reality.

Do you know what the reality is? It begins with the fact that the board has been forced, as a result of your funding formula and the regulations and policies and laws that you brought in, to lay off 54 teachers who teach English as a second language.

Sir John A. Macdonald Secondary School is one of the largest high schools in our community. There are over 1,000 students. My office spoke with Principal Murray Kilby earlier today, and they confirm that there are between 50 and 60 different countries represented in the

student body there. Many of them are new Canadians. The only chance they've got is to get an early grasp on the overwhelmingly predominant language in our province. As a result of your actions, the teachers who teach those children to speak English are going to be fired. Again I call on government members: stand in your place and tell me how losing 54 teachers who teach English as a second language helps all those kids.

The shortfall in terms of the funding that you've offered—it's so infuriating. The shortfall right now is between \$5 million and \$8 million, and that is just to barely keep their nose above water. When I say that, it means that a lot of the programs and a lot of the teachers and a lot of the assistance that were there still won't be there, but at least fiscally they can keep their head above water. What did they get instead? Where they were expecting between \$8 million and \$10 million, they got \$5 million. They're going to have a deficit of \$3 million at least, or they're going to make more cuts. That means more kids get hurt.

This is the public system that you tell us you can afford to divert \$300 million away from. Let me tell you very directly: you can't afford to do that to the public education system in Hamilton without it affecting the quality of education and the future of the kids who are in the system.

By the way, there was this big announcement that you were going to give an extra \$1 million to offset the increase in the cost of energy. Guess what? Ten days ago the board was informed that the \$5 million they got, which should have been between \$8 million and \$10 million to start with, included the \$1 million that was supposed to help offset the cost, which by the way it didn't do because those costs were \$1.2 million. So there's \$200,000 that had to be found anyway, and it turns out that that \$1 million is part of the \$5 million.

How are our trustees supposed to get on top of this? How are they supposed to provide the quality of educa-

tion that you benefited from and that I benefited from? We did, you know. We benefited from those investments, investments in the public education system, and these kids don't.

Let me tell you, these are not the folks whose parents are spending a couple of extra weeks on the beaches of Bermuda with their tax cut—far, far from it. In fact, Ray went out of his way to mention to me his concern because a lot of the demographics of those he represents in ward 4, and whom I used to represent when I was on Hamilton city council, are such that they can't scrape up the other 50% of the money required if they did choose that they wanted to go to the private system. So when you say you're giving parents choice, you give choice to those who are prepared to make whatever sacrifice necessary to scratch every dollar together or those who have an abundant amount of money to pay for it in the first place.

Let me say this in the closing moments. If you decide, and obviously you have, that the issue of fairness and equity is driving this because parents deserve choice, if you walk through that doorway, you've crossed that threshold, you now believe that there's an element of inequity here, unfairness, and you're going to do something about it, I'd like to know why you think it's fair to stop at \$300 million. If you've already made the argument that it's inequity that's driving this and you want to give people choice, shouldn't you be funding all of it? My point being, that's what's coming. Ultimately there will be 100% funding. It might not be tomorrow, it might not be in five years, but it's coming, and it's going to come at the further erosion and expense of our public education system. I say shame on every one of you who stands up and casts your most cherished vote in favour of this budget.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 9:30 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow afternoon.

The House adjourned at 2130.

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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