



ISSN 1180-4386

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario
Second Session, 37th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario
Deuxième session, 37^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Friday 8 June 2001

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Vendredi 8 juin 2001

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

Responsible Choices for Growth
and Accountability Act
(2001 Budget), 2001

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Loi de 2001
sur des choix réfléchis
favorisant la croissance
et la responsabilisation
(budget de 2001)

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

Président : Marcel Beaubien
Greffière : Susan Sourial

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Copies of Hansard

Information regarding purchase of copies of Hansard may be obtained from Publications Ontario, Management Board Secretariat, 50 Grosvenor Street, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1N8. Phone 416-326-5310, 326-5311 or toll-free 1-800-668-9938.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

Exemplaires du Journal

Pour des exemplaires, veuillez prendre contact avec Publications Ontario, Secrétariat du Conseil de gestion, 50 rue Grosvenor, Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1N8. Par téléphone : 416-326-5310, 326-5311, ou sans frais : 1-800-668-9938.

Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
3330 Whitney Block, 99 Wellesley St W
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
3330 Édifice Whitney ; 99, rue Wellesley ouest
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400 ; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

Friday 8 June 2001

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Vendredi 8 juin 2001

The committee met at 0959 in the Holiday Inn, St Catharines.

**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)**

Consideration 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 Chair (Mr Marcel Beaubien): Good morning, everyone. This committee is meeting this morning on the first day of hearings on Bill 45, An Act to implement measures contained in the 2001 Budget and to amend various statutes. On behalf of the committee, welcome and good morning.

I would like also to point out to all the participants that we will be using the same rules during the committee hearings that we use in the House, in the Legislature. I would like to remind everyone of that also.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Mr Chair, before you begin, I ask for your indulgence. I want to say to you that you have been a very fair Chair. The motion that I want to introduce has nothing to do with the fairness of your chairing, because in subcommittee meetings I've seen how fair you have been.

But you also know that the rules have changed, because traditionally we have divided the lists that would be delegated to speak among the three parties. We made a request that this would continue as a normal rule. The government changed that. We asked for longer hearings so people could come after 4:30 and 5 o'clock so that people could be heard; the government refused that. The government then said it wasn't good enough that we divide the lists as we have done traditionally, that the government should have more power to be able to appoint who comes before this committee. The government as well decided that the advertisements, as you know, would only speak to the fact that Bill 45 would be reported in this manner: "Bill 45, Responsible Choices for

Growth and Accountability Act." That is the nature of the advertisement that would go out. It had nothing in it to report about the fact that the majority of the people here are coming to speak to public support for private schools that they're opposed to. People were outraged this morning. I wanted to bring this to your attention.

I want to read a motion that I hope the Conservative members will accept. I have copies here, if the clerk would like to pass them around. The motion reads:

Whereas there has been overwhelming public interest in Bill 45, which would undermine and jeopardize our public education system; and

Whereas more than 730 groups and individuals who asked to make presentations before this committee have been refused because the government did not allow enough time to hear them; and

Whereas more than 60 groups and individuals from the Hamilton-Niagara region submitted requests to the committee, but there is only time for 16 presentations today;

I move that this committee agrees to sit past 4:30 pm and until such time as all applicants from the Hamilton-Niagara region and/or those assembled here can be heard with respect to Bill 45.

That's my motion.

The Chair: Before we proceed on the—

Interruption.

The Chair: We're here to consider Bill 45. If there are going to be disruptions—we have a number of people. In Mr Marchese's motion he says that there's only time for 16 presentations, and if we continue at the rate we're going today, there may not be time for any presentations. I would strongly suggest—

Interruption.

The Chair: I mentioned at the start of the meeting that the same rules apply here as we have in the House. I do have different options. My choice would be that we have an opportunity to hear the presenters make their presentations this afternoon. However, I'm flexible. If we want to demonstrate and keep going all afternoon at the same rate we're going this morning, that's your choice.

Interruptions.

1010

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr Marchese has put a motion on the floor. Everyone has a copy. Any discussion?

Mr Marchese: On a recorded vote, Mr Chair, in the event there is no discussion.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Yes, there is discussion. Chair, look what has happened. People have a right to be heard with respect to this proposal. There are supporters of it. I understand that. They have a right to be heard. But so do the people who oppose it. The fact is that there are thousands of Ontarians who are going to be denied their right to be heard because this government has compressed committee hearings into only four days outside of Toronto; has started them at 10 rather than at 9, as suggested by the New Democrats; is ending them at 4 o'clock, rather than into the evenings, as suggested by opposition parties; and has restricted the four days in Toronto to mere afternoons.

Eighty days of hearings, nothing less, will in effect permit people like the folks here to be heard on this important matter, both the supporters of the government's proposal—and I recognize their right to be heard—but also the opponents, and I'm telling you the opponents of this proposal are being squeezed out. This is rigged; this is rigged; the fix is in. It's the government's problem. The government has created this scenario. You're the author of that discord. You're the author of that anger.

The Chair: I would like to remind all the members that if we're going to entertain a number of motions, I would suggest maybe we should be entertaining them at the end of the day so we can give the people here a chance to make their presentations.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): The difficulty with that, Mr Chair, is that if this committee decides it is going to permit more people and is going to extend its hours, the people may not be able to be notified, may not be able to be prepared for it. I think it would certainly be advantageous to have more people on the list than we have today. A list was submitted to us, I think you would be interested to know, Mr Chair, because you'd be aware of this, around the province. The regional municipality of Niagara, for instance, wanted an opportunity to make a presentation today; they were denied that opportunity because of the confines of the schedule of this committee.

I think the suggestion which has been made in the form of a motion is highly supportable, and I would hope the government members would join the opposition members in supporting that motion.

Mr Marchese: Mr Chair, we know the feelings are strong, on both sides, and we wanted to be able to increase the number of hours as a way of allowing people to be heard. We tried this with the government members the other day when we debated this in committee and subcommittee. Subcommittees normally make the rules and decide, in an orderly way, by agreement, how we will select the people, the number of hours, and normally we have all agreed. This time around, on this issue, the government decided to change the rules, and they did this by fiat, without consultation from the opposition parties. We were not able to change any of the rules that the government committee introduced to us.

You know that yesterday, when we debated this, they changed the rules so as to allow the government, which is able to introduce bills and laws—but to allow the govern-

ment, in committee even, to choose more of the delegates they want before this committee. That was wrong. If they had permitted—in spite of the limited hearings, which we opposed—the usual rules, the opposition parties would be able to select more of the people who would more clearly reflect the opposition to this bill. But they changed them in such a way that they behave as if they're an opposition party, and they're government and are able to select the people they want to come and speak in favour of their bill.

They need to understand that in changing the rules and in compressing hearings as they've done, you encourage these strong emotions on both sides of the debate. What we're telling the Conservative members here with such motions is that maybe they want to change it, perhaps not in the way we put it, to allow for more hearings so as to permit more people to speak. Maybe this is not adequate for them, but it gives them an opportunity to respond to these strong feelings. I hope one of the Conservative members will speak to that.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): I want to speak in support of this motion. We have a situation where there is an issue that is very highly charged, with opinions on both sides, and I think it's incumbent upon us as a committee to hear them. When you consider that even if the budget is approved the impact of the provisions that are really the subject of what everybody on this roster is talking about—the tax credit for independent schools—will not come into effect until the year 2003, there is no rush to have this resolved in four or five days.

You have heard the expression of people who are here, and not just here but outside this particular room, that there should be full discussion, that there should be an opportunity for people to present their views. That is the essence of our democracy and I think it really is something we should take into consideration.

Mr Dalton McGuinty (Leader of the Opposition): I want to speak in support of the motion that has been tabled. In addition to the reasons offered by my colleagues, putting public dollars into private schools represents a dramatic shift in Ontario's education policy. During the course of the last provincial campaign, and specifically during the leaders' debate, Mike Harris assured us that he would never do what he is now doing. More recently he sent me letters, as did the Minister of Education herself, assuring me he would never do what he now is about to do.

When Ontario considered extending funding to Catholic schools, there were 68 days of public committee hearings, which travelled around the province and carefully consulted Ontarians. This as well represents a dramatic departure from the traditional education policy in the province of Ontario, hence the tremendous interest that's visible here and I'm sure will be evident in every other of the very few communities this committee is going to visit.

In addition to the reasons already put forward by my colleagues, surely we've got a responsibility, collec-

tively, to allow people to speak to any education policy that in a substantive way dramatically departs from our history. That's exactly what this policy is. It was uninvited, it came unannounced, people were taken by surprise, and now they should have every reasonable opportunity to speak to this dramatic shift in education policy.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I would just point out that the resolution is in fact almost identical to the positions put forward by members of the opposition in a number of previous meetings. I would suggest that at the very least the motion is out of order. The committee has decided how we would approach the day's hearings, and that's a matter of record. I think it's very important that we hear from those people who have gone to a lot of trouble to be prepared for this morning's meeting. As we debate these types of resolutions, time goes on and we are able to hear fewer and fewer people. I don't think that's fair to the public who have gone to the trouble to be here. So I will not be supporting this resolution.

Mr Kormos: What I don't think is fair is that clearly some members of this committee don't want to sit past 4:30, don't want to extend their working day, when quite frankly there are a whole lot of folks here who have a lot longer working days than the members of this committee and who have gone to a lot of trouble to be here today in an effort to speak to this important matter. Mr Hardeman, the simple solution is to agree to this motion for this committee to sit as long as necessary here in St Catharines today, including tomorrow, so that these folks, all of them, can be heard on this incredibly important issue. That's the fair thing to do. It's also the democratic thing to do, and a fair and democratic person would support this motion.

1020

The Chair: If there is no further discussion, I will put the question. All those in favour?

Mr Marchese: On a recorded vote, Chair.

Ayes

Kwinter, Marchese, McGuinty.

Nays

Galt, Hardeman, Marland, O'Toole.

The Chair: The motion does not carry.

SMITHVILLE DISTRICT CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

The Chair: I would like to call our first presenter this morning, which is the Smithville District Christian High School, if you could please come forward. On behalf of the committee, welcome. Could you please state your name for the record.

Mr Tony Kamphuis: It's Tony Kamphuis. Before I even start with the comments I've prepared, I'd like to

apologize to you, Mr Chairman, and to the other members of the committee. I don't think that's the sort of public discourse I should be involved in, and I apologize for delaying the proceedings by getting involved in it.

But I am appreciative of the chance to get involved in this public hearing process. I appreciate the chance to speak today, and I thank you for that opportunity. It's kind of a special position, I think, to have the opportunity to be the first presenter, and that makes me especially glad to be able to make a strong statement of support of the proposed tax credit for supporters of independent schools.

Throughout the hearings, you are undoubtedly going to hear lots of different opinions regarding the costs or savings involved in this tax credit proposal. You're going to hear lots of opinions on either side about the relative quality or lack of quality of education provided in independent schools, like ours in Smithville and lots more. I don't want those issues to be the focus of what I say this morning, although I would like to address a few of them nearer the end of my presentation.

First and foremost, I would like to cut to the heart of matter. In the budget of May 9, the provincial government took a step forward for the education of all Ontario's students, and I want to encourage you to capture that vision, to recognize the importance of that move and to see through to completion the measures that are going to give that vision real flesh.

What I think you're witnessing here is the sometimes challenging, sometimes difficult process of seeing our education system in Ontario mature. We're a province of diversity—cultural, religious diversity. I see no shocked looks on the member's faces. Everybody realizes that. That's not a revelation. But in the face of that, you really have two choices. You can respond to a multicultural and diverse society by saying, "We support sort of a facile multiculturalism. Have your ethnic dances. Have your food fairs. That's great. But don't think that diversity should actually apply in areas that make a real impact, like education." Or instead, the idea is that in that case, everybody should have exactly the same experiences and be moulded by exactly the same forces. I don't agree that that's the right way to go in education in Ontario. I don't think education is like polyester pants where one size fits all. I think diversity is a positive virtue in a democratic society.

I'm sure it's no shock to you, and it certainly won't be after the hearings, that people have different opinions on education. They hold different views. When it comes to the question of how we approach the formal nurturing of our young people, you'll hear a diversity of opinions. You can respond to that diversity we see in Ontario by saying, "No, no. These students are like fresh meat that we're going to put through the same system and come out with relatively similar-shaped hamburgers," or you can say, "We're going to have a system that's richer than that."

Right now, the system previous to this tax credit initiative said, "Look. There's an approved list of two

choices for parents. You may send them to the public school and the way it approaches education or you may send them through the Catholic system and the way it approaches education. But if you even consider stepping outside of those two choices, if you think you should have some option in that, well, now, my friend, you're going to pay for that audacity."

The cost attached to disagreeing with those who are in support of those two systems is going to be hefty, and it's going to exclude working and middle-class families. That I don't think is a positive approach that befits a mature province.

I think the alternative approach is the more positive one, and it's the one that I see evidence of in this tax credit. It says, "Look, a democratic government depends on a citizenry that attains certain levels of ability and literacy, that has a certain ability in numeracy, that develops thinking skills, that is exposed and encouraged in developing civic-mindedness." This approach says, "We'll create a situation that helps make sure those are developed. But the exact approach taken, the perspective that influences the education that provides those—we'll allow for openness, we'll allow for some options in that regard."

To me, that approach is like a breath of fresh air. That's a visionary response. That's an approach to our diversity that displays a certain level of maturity, is forward-thinking. It's an approach I welcome.

Interruption.

The Chair: Order.

Mr Kamphuis: Members of this committee, I implore you to listen to the presentations over these next days as you consider the opinions people bring forward concerning the issue around the tax credit, but don't lose sight of what lies at the heart of the issue. It's stationed between an approach that says, "We have vision," and an approach that says, "We have great fear." The first says, "We trust the choices our citizens will make. We have confidence to allow people with differences to live out those differences in meaningful ways," and the other approach says, "No, we, the leaders of the existing system, have to maintain complete control. We're the most capable of making appropriate decisions for others in the important areas of everyone's lives. Chaos will reign if we let that control slip."

Now I'd like to address just a little further—

Interruption.

Mr Kamphuis: I'd like to address a little further the issue of parental choice. What this tax credit does—

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr Kamphuis: What this tax credit does is look over all the groups of stakeholders in our education system, and they're many. Then it recognizes parents in a more meaningful way than we've ever seen before. This government initiative is saying that the leadership of this province believes that, as a group, parents are the ones most likely to make decisions based genuinely on the interests of their own children.

Interruption.

The Chair: Order, please. I would ask the audience not to applaud.

Mr Kamphuis: I think they're exactly right in that regard. Parents have the interests of their children at heart and now we see a move to actually acknowledge their legitimate interests and to give some influence and meaning to that, and here we are.

I would like to take a couple of minutes to address some of the other issues that surround this question. I support Smithville—

Interruption.

The Chair: I'm sorry for the interruption, sir, but I guess you're going to have to do the best under the circumstances.

Mr Kamphuis: I understand. I appreciate that.

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): On a point of order, Mr Chair: I am having difficulty hearing this deputation because of the interjections. I think, in fairness to both sides, we need to be able to hear the deputations from both sides without any interjections. Interjections are out of order in these committee hearings.

The Chair: I agree with you, Ms Marland. However, I know it's an issue that's charged on both sides. I will try to maintain some order. If I get absolutely no co-operation, then I'll have to deal with it, but I'm willing to put up with some disruption at this point in time. Hopefully we'll see fit that people should have the opportunity, whether they're one side of the issue or the other, to make their presentation. Thank you.

Go ahead, sir. Sorry.

Mr Kamphuis: That's OK.

I'm a supporter of Smithville District Christian High School. We offer the Ontario secondary school diploma. Every year we have an inspector from the ministry come to ensure that we're meeting the requirements of the ministry's guidelines and recommendations. Our school has done that in every year it's been in existence. It's its 20th graduating class this year, and it's graduated students who are wonderful citizens of Ontario, members of the public, people who are out there being productive citizens and contributing to our democratic mosaic.

1030

I'm proud of that contribution. I'm proud of the fact that we meet and exceed all of the requirements that are placed upon us by the government when it legitimately looks after the interests of education in this province. You will not find that concern among the independent school sector.

People say this is going to be an attack on the public school system. For most of my years of formal education, our family lived in an area that didn't have access to independent Christian schools. I attended the public school system. I have a deep love and respect for the public school system. I don't want to see anything that's going to harm that system or the Catholic system. These people educate the children of my neighbours, and I have to love my neighbours. That's a command I live by. It's not an option, it's a command; and so I look to promote their interests. I have no difficulty with that. What I

bristle at is the notion that just because I want to support those systems, therefore I'm a segregationist or I'm not allowed to participate in the education of my children in the way I see fit and to encourage the development of a school that sees that as an important thing.

Another point I'd like to address is that private schools are an elitist preserve of the wealthy. I know one day, Mr McGuinty, in the Legislative Assembly—I read the records—you repeated a single question, I think, 11 times. You were counting yourself. At the end of each statement you would refer to the independent schools as “elite schools like Upper Canada College.” I understand rhetorical strategies and all of that stuff, but not only was it, I think, gross misrepresentation of what independent schools really are like, but it hurt me as a member of the working middle class personally.

In response, just consider this: at our school we collect crushed pop cans, we collect Canadian Tire money and we collect Campbell's Soup labels. We used to collect cereal box tops, but that program's no longer in place. We sell cheese every month. We sell sausages every month. We sell chicken fingers every month. We sell plants and shrubs in the spring. We hold a softball tournament. We hold a volleyball tournament. We have a charity auction. And then at the end of the year we go around door to door among school supporters and ask for another contribution, please, so that we can meet our budgets, so that we can keep—

Interruption.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr Kamphuis: —the cost of the tuition as low as possible, because when we have a tuition increase of \$150 or \$200, we end up with people who can't afford it any more, who cross the line.

I don't know what your definition of “elitist” is. I doubt if your definition of “elitist” is someone with a bag of crushed pop cans in their garage; it's just not likely. Our schools are supported by middle-class, working-class people. We have so many fundraisers actually that a friend of mine said to me the other day that when they heard of a new fundraiser being introduced, they said, “Fundraising's becoming the F word of the new millennium around this place.” We laugh so we don't have to think about it too long.

My point's just this: if somebody says they're speaking on behalf of working-class people, they're speaking on behalf of the middle class and then opposes this tax credit, I think they're working with too narrow a view of who makes up the working classes and a pretty narrow view of who supports independent schools.

When people say, “No public funds for private schools,” I'm shocked at the fact that I can be so easily removed from the group called “the public.” I consider myself a member of the public. I think our family contributes to the public good. We're very involved in our local community in a whole host of ways. We love our local town. We love our local public and Catholic schools. We love our school too and we say let's have room for everybody.

Interruption.

Mr Kamphuis: I do.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr Kamphuis: What about this, that every group is going to go ahead and start up its own schools? My friends, I think that really reflects a certain level of ignorance about what it takes to run a school. If you saw the thousands of volunteer hours a volunteer school board, hundreds of committees that run the school and the thousands of hours spent by volunteers, parents and grandparents alike, put in every year to keep the schools going, nobody's going to say, “Oh, it's so easy to start a public school.” I know you can fill out a one-page form and that can initiate the process, but that's not running the school yet. There's too much work, too much cost. Not only that, we haven't seen anything else. If people think that some partial funding of independent schools is going to start a whole range of new schooling options, what's the evidence? Has it happened elsewhere that this has taken place? If anybody brings these points forward—

Interruption.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr Kamphuis: I think when people ask these questions of your committee over the weeks, it's perfectly legitimate for you to say, “Do you have any reason to believe that? Do you have any reason to believe this is going to destroy the public system? Has it happened elsewhere? Has it happened in other provinces of Canada?”

Then there's the charge that independent schools threaten the social fabric of our province. I think the notion that independent schools threaten our social fabric is just an insidious notion. There's no evidence to support it. I know my time may be getting short, so I'll address this quickly. First, these schools already exist. If they're a danger to the social fabric, shut them down. I don't believe they are and I see no move in that direction.

Recently, the United States Department of Education commissioned a study to see—this was their goal—how far private schools undermined civic values. Let me just quote from the result of that study. “Advancing public goals like integration, tolerance and a commitment to community does not require the direct operation of schools by the government, concluded Dr Green from the University of Texas. In fact, the evidence suggests”—

Interruption.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr Kamphuis: I know. No matter what, be afraid of evidence. “In fact, the evidence suggests that private individuals left to their own devices are more successful in achieving these goals than is the government.”

Look at our own experience. Partial funding of independent schools in other provinces has not hurt their social fabric. The full funding of Catholic schools in our province has been a wonderful blessing. I have not noticed, and I don't know if anybody else has, an increase in intolerance when that took place. I don't believe there has been one. It has been a positive move for education in Ontario.

So I want to speak in support of this tax credit. We support a strong public system. We have a different idea of how our children should be educated. If other people feel threatened by that, I feel very sorry for them, because people who are secure in themselves and raised on a solid foundation aren't going to be afraid of engaging in democratic debate with people of different opinions.

Interruption.

The Chair: Excuse me. There are a few people who keep insisting on making comments while the presenter is making his presentation. If that continues, I will have you removed from the room. Go ahead, sir. Sorry.

Mr Kamphuis: I'll just make one concluding comment and then if people have—I think there's still a bit of time.

The Chair: You have approximately three minutes.

Mr Kamphuis: Three minutes? Then if there are any questions that committee members have, I'd be happy to address those.

I'd just like to encourage you once again to remember what lies at the heart of this question. This is a move that reflects some vision, some forward thinking that can improve education and include all students in Ontario in the system of education we have at present. Let's not let those afraid of change, afraid of taking on new challenges, dissuade us from this step. Maintain a clear vision, I encourage all of you. A move to an all-party consensus would be fantastic. Let's step forward confidently.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately one minute per caucus, and I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Mr Kamphuis, I don't for a moment doubt your sincerity, but you said a number of things with which I take issue. You said—I'll paraphrase—you don't want to see any harm come to the public education system. You would understand, sir, that public education is on its knees today. Parents are losing confidence in public education. We have crowded classrooms. We have stressed-out teachers. We have an atmosphere that has been poisoned by politics. Forty-two per cent of our schools are now fundraising, and they're fundraising for essentials like textbooks. We've got 35,000 children at the elementary level alone on waiting lists for psychological assessments in order to better learn about their specific needs and how they might be met.

Mr Kamphuis: Our kids can't even get on that list, and we pay taxes.

The Chair: You've got 15 seconds remaining.

Mr McGuinty: I just want to impress upon you, sir, that 96% of Ontario children are attending public education. I'm against spending public dollars in private schools and I'm for beginning to repair the damage that's been caused by the last six years of this government to public education.

Interjection.

The Chair: Order, please, Mr Hudak.

Mr Kamphuis: But I received a letter from you—

Mr Bradley: You should be the last person to talk about that, Hudak.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We have used the time. I'll go to the third party.

1040

Mr Marchese: Tony, welcome. I appreciate your views, obviously. The view of New Democrats is that the public system accommodates, or ought to be accommodating, all of the needs of most of our children. If some people believe that somehow you can't fit in, then you make a choice to opt out. That's basically what we've been saying. We have no problem with people saying, "The public system does not address our needs in this way," and you make a choice to leave it. That's a choice you make, and we respect that.

Mr Kamphuis: But aren't you saying really, "We're going to set the rules of the game and then, if you can't play by our rules, then you're out"?

Mr Marchese: Yes, basically.

Mr Kamphuis: I resent the idea that a government bureaucracy or an educational elite knows better for my children than I do.

Mr Marchese: But this is generally a policy accepted by the majority of Ontarians. We work out our problems and our differences through the system. We have parental involvement where, if things are not met by the system, we go to the school, we go to the board and we attempt to address them and—

The Chair: Mr Marchese, we've run out of time.

Mr Marchese:—and if after that, it doesn't work and you opt out, that's the choice you make.

The Chair: The government side. Mr Hudak, you have one minute.

Hon Tim Hudak (Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation): Just two quick points. First, I want to congratulate Tony on his presentation today, staying very calm and making some excellent points here. I know you're not a professional speaker. There are a lot of average folks like yourself before the committee today, and I want to congratulate you for coming across quite well despite some interruptions from a very small but vocal minority in the crowd. So congratulations on your courage and your presentation today.

My second point I wanted to bring out is that I have eight independent schools in my riding of Erie-Lincoln. If you drive through the parking lot when a parent function is going on or a school weekend, an open house, you see average middle-class families driving average, modest cars. I really appreciate the point you brought out, that it was absolutely shameful—

The Chair: With that, Mr Hudak, we've run out of time—

Hon Mr Hudak:—in the House for Dalton McGuinty to categorize people in my riding as elitists.

The Chair: Mr Hudak, we've run out of time.

Hon Mr Hudak: I hope he'll take a chance to apologize today for that unfair characterization of the citizens of Erie-Lincoln.

The Chair: Mr Hudak, we've run out of time.

On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation here this morning.

HAMILTON-WENTWORTH
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' LOCAL
HAMILTON-WENTWORTH COUNCIL OF
HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

The Chair: Our next presenters this morning are representatives from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Hamilton-Wentworth local. Could you please come forward? You have 20 minutes for your presentation. On behalf of the committee, welcome. Could you state your name for the record also, please.

Ms Kelly Hayes: I'm Kelly Hayes from the Hamilton-Wentworth Elementary Teachers' Local. This is Michelle McNabb from the Hamilton-Wentworth Home and School Association.

The Hamilton-Wentworth Elementary Teachers' Local represents more than 2,300 members who teach and work in more than 120 sites in the Hamilton-Wentworth area. We're a local of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. HWETL works tirelessly to support and advance the cause of public education. It's amazing the level of opposition to Bill 45 among the teachers, parents and the general public—it's astounding, actually.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario has three policies that were passed at our annual general meeting in 1998. The first is regarding charter schools: that the use of public funds or tax rebates for the support of charter schools be opposed; private schools: that the use of public funds or tax rebates for the support of private schools be opposed; and voucher education: that the development of any educational program based on the educational voucher concept be opposed.

I spoke to a parent last night who is considering sending her child to a private school. It was interesting to hear that her main concern with the public education system was neither the teachers nor the schools, but class sizes. Three years ago, a class in Hamilton-Wentworth "won"—and I use that term very loosely—a class size contest. We had the largest class in the province, a music class of 44 students. Last year, we had a French class of 40 students. Over the past five years, we've seen alarming kindergarten classes of 28, 29, 30, 31 and even 32 students. These class sizes are not proper learning environments for children. Can you imagine teaching 31 four-year-olds? How would you conduct a fire drill? The health and safety issues are frightening. Therefore, one would expect the government to look at these staggering statistics of class size and think, "You know what? We've got to fix this," and not just from a health and safety perspective but from a pedagogical perspective, a child-centred perspective and an excellence-in-learning perspective.

But it's really interesting because what seems to have happened is just the opposite. The government actually has fixed this problem, but instead of putting back the \$2 billion that has been removed from the public education system, they've created Bill 45. This will allow for a two-tier, inequitable education system, which seems to have been this government's goal all along. The \$300

million it will take of public money to fund the private system is money that could and should be used in our public schools, money that could and should be used to fund schools that are open to everyone.

The Hamilton-Wentworth Elementary Teachers' Local believes in and strives for public education that is a model of equity. Bill 45 will create nothing but inequity. Public money will be used to fund a system with little or no accountability, a system with no necessity to follow the Ontario curriculum, a system where not all students are welcome and a system where unqualified teachers are actually able to teach children. This kind of funding is unacceptable, particularly when we look at the drastic cuts this government has made to the current system this year, and I'll give you a few of those in Hamilton-Wentworth.

We have to remember also that the government has claimed over and over again that there won't be any cuts to the classroom. In Hamilton-Wentworth, programs such as family studies, design and technology, and guidance no longer exist. Library, special education and the arts have been cut to the bare bone. Lunchroom supervisors no longer exist, therefore taking away the ability for teachers to deliver interesting and diverse extracurricular activities. A moratorium has been placed on psych testing; therefore special-needs students are not getting the assistance they need and deserve. School closures are taking place; hence the breakup of community schools and communities.

It's really a brilliant strategy when you look at it, because when you look at all of those cuts, you think, "Well, no wonder people want to go to a private school system. Look at the decrepit system we have now that's for public children." But really, parents are not actually going to the private system because this system is decrepit. It's because they just don't believe in it—that's it. Parents in the public system are not changing to the private system not because they can't afford it but because they actually believe in a public system. They will fight for it. They will stand up for it. They believe in that system.

One school in the Hamilton-Wentworth that's called Lynden school is currently being scheduled for two multigrade classes this September. One class has 30 students in it; it's grades 1, 2 and 3. The other class also has 30 students and will house grades 3, 4 and 5. The board does not have the money to fund that school properly. Given the large class sizes, the rigorous curriculum and the lack of supports, how does any government actually expect students to learn to their full potential in this kind of environment? It'll be virtually impossible. The individual attention so desperately needed in the early grades will not exist at this school. As the children of Lynden school grow older, their parents will have to explain to them that the reason they did not get an appropriate and equitable education was because the government of the day valued the school on Hamilton Mountain, where the tuition fees are over \$13,000 a year, rather than valuing Lynden school, a public community school.

Teachers value and cherish a healthy public school system. We work day and night to ensure that our students are provided with an outstanding education. We believe in an education system where every child is valued, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, creed, family status or belief system. This respect and diversity is the cornerstone of public education. It's the foundation of a democratic society. Teachers' dedication to this never waivers.

Bill 45 will seriously jeopardize public education as we know it. Bill 45 is laying the groundwork for the government's ongoing agenda to drain the public education system and make way for private education. The crisis, as John Snobelen said, is being created right before our very eyes.

1050

Elementary teachers in Hamilton-Wentworth are opposed to a two-tier system. We are opposed to an education system that values some over others. We are opposed to using public money to support private education.

The public money used to fund Bill 45 could actually be used for several different things. It could buy lower class sizes for Lynden School; it could buy educational assistants' support for our kindergarten students; it could buy special education resources for those students with special needs; it could buy guidance counsellors for our middle school students struggling with the hard task of growing up; it could buy teacher-librarians for our students to learn research skills; and it could buy design and technology equipment to allow for students to develop an interest in the trades.

Or the public money could be used to fund Bill 45 and to further rip the heart out of the public education system.

Do we really have a choice?

I hope the parent I spoke to last night will not leave the public education system. I hope that after careful consideration, she will realize that the public education system is the best place for our children to learn, grow and become responsible, respectful citizens. The government can assist this parent in making her decision. A tax credit will not help her, but lower class sizes and better resources for her children will. It's simple.

We call on this committee to recommend that the education tax credit provision of Bill 45 be removed. That would be the responsible choice.

The Chair: Does that complete your presentation?

Ms Hayes: Michele will now speak.

Ms Michele McNabb: My name is Michele McNabb, and I'm president of the Hamilton-Wentworth Council of Home and School Associations. I very much appreciate the elementary teachers allowing me to share some of their time. I have just a brief letter that we have sent to Premier Harris that I will read to you.

"The members of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations," OFHSA, as we are known, "have been strong advocates and supporters of the public school system in Ontario for over 85 years. Our 16,000 members have worked in close partnership with educators, trustees

and politicians at the school, the school board, and the provincial level to make our public education system the best it can be.

"The members of OFHSA were frankly shocked to hear your government announce tax credits for parents who have decided to opt out of the public education system. We are still trying to understand how a government whose task it is to support the public education system could suggest such a plan. We believe that your announcement in the budget represents an enormous shift in public policy. We have heard no public debate about this issue, and have not seen any evidence that this is a move supported by the majority of citizens in Ontario.

"We understand that parents who have decided to send their children to private schools feel that they are penalized because they also have to pay taxes to support the public education system. But education is funded from the taxes collected from all citizens in Ontario, not just those who 'use' the service because they have children in schools. Parents who choose private education for their children certainly have the right to do so, but they must not be excused from their obligation to fund all public services provided through taxes. Other taxpayers who have no children in school are not excused from supporting education with their tax dollars, nor should they be. All citizens benefit from a strong public education system.

"We have heard the argument that this change will only cost the province \$300 million. Frankly, at a time when our schools are struggling to provide the level of service needed to our students, any reduction in support for our schools will be missed. But our real concern is not about the cost to the system in lost revenue, but about the message that your government is sending us about its commitment to public education.

"Providing an open, accessible, and excellent education system for all students in the province is one of the most important jobs of government. We have heard the rhetoric since your government was first elected that it is your goal to make education the best it can be, to provide equitable funding so that every school can provide the same high-quality program, and to make every school and school board accountable for its results. This tax break belies your commitment to those goals. It is a very public statement that your government supports private schools as a preferred option for Ontario students. This move says that your government is encouraging more people to exercise this option, to remove their children from the public system. OFHSA members are also concerned that public money will be used to support private schools that are not accountable to the public and that they're not held to the same standards as public schools.

"Our members were indeed shocked to hear you say that encouraging parents to send their children to private schools saves the province money. Such a comment certainly suggests that you are promoting private schooling. We are left wondering where your commitment is to public education.

"We have heard you say that you will never support a voucher system for public schools in Ontario. We see this

tax change moving down the road in that direction. Combined with the recent announcement about school choice for parents and knowing that we now have portable funding attached to each student, we are very concerned that this is exactly where your government is going. It would be a small leap from where your government is leading us to to a complete voucher system for schools.

“The members of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations urge you to rethink this change in policy. We ask that you hold lengthy public consultations across the province with all taxpayers before moving forward with this policy. We ask that you remember that your government’s obligation is to the public education system. We hold you accountable, not just for providing funding for public education, but also for promoting a climate in Ontario that says public education is the best option for all.”

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have one minute per caucus, and I’ll start with the NDP side. Mr Kormos.

Mr Kormos: I was speaking to a group of school custodians at the elementary school level last weekend, and they’ve told me that across the province there are public elementary schools where the custodian’s closet, his or her storage closet, has already been depleted and was as of two weeks ago; depleted of all cleaning supplies. All you could see were the rings from where the metal containers of solvents and detergents and wax stripper and waxes used to sit on the wood shelves. I was shocked at that because they indicated it’s been two weeks now since there has been use of those chemicals or detergents for cleaning the school, and there’s no more for the balance of the school year, least of all the end-of-school-year major cleanup. Is this a common phenomenon?

Ms Hayes: I would say that was a common phenomenon in many schools in the Hamilton-Wentworth area, not only custodial supplies but school supplies. Parents are constantly buying school supplies for their own children. Schools are asking them, “Can you bring your own scissors? Can you bring your own pencils? Can you bring your own notebooks? Can you bring your own rulers? Can you bring your own pencil crayons?” School supplies are being bought either by parents or out of teachers’ own pockets.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We’ve run out of time. Mr Hudak?

Hon Mr Hudak: I appreciate the presentations from the panel before us. I just wanted to get a couple of things on the record, because I know my colleagues want to speak as well.

First, one thing is that in addition to the tax credit for hard-working families to send their kids to independent schools, we saw an increase in this year’s budget of \$360 million for public education, including increases to both the Niagara public and Niagara Catholic school boards here in this area, which has helped motivate two new public schools in my riding, one in Crystal Beach and

one in Beamsville, for those who choose to send their kids to the public school system.

I also wanted to add that this morning I was at a school event for two Christian schools here in St Catharines, where there were several hundred kids on the lawn, and teachers and parents. They wanted to send their thanks and their congratulations to the finance minister and the Mike Harris government for their support of that bill, as well as hundreds of people sending letters and petitions and e-mails to my office in Erie-Lincoln and encouraging all members of the committee to support the school tax credit for hard-working families to send their kids to independent schools.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr Hudak. You’ve run out of time. Mr McGuinty?

Ms Hayes: Sorry, am I able to respond to that?

The Chair: No. Not enough time, ma’am. I’m sorry.

Mr Kormos: Please respond.

Ms Hayes: I was going to say, then, since the government—

The Chair: No, I’m sorry, but I’m going to go to Mr McGuinty.

Mr McGuinty, please.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you very much for your presentation.

The government is arguing that this new voucher program will cost \$300 million, and that’s based on a zero percentage increase in growth of enrolment in private schools. In fact, during the last six years, we’ve seen a growth in enrolment in private schools in excess of 20%.

Mike Harris has been kicking the stuffing out of public education for the last six years. It’s no wonder, as you made mention earlier, that many parents are beginning to lose confidence in public education. I would suggest our responsibility now is to restore that confidence. We’ve put forward an alternative plan. Our calculations show that the government would actually spend at least \$500 million on this private school voucher program. We’ve got a plan for \$50 million less that would put a hard cap on classes from JK through to grade 3, a maximum of 20 students.

If there’s one thing experts around the world tell us when it comes to bringing about positive education reform, they tell us, “Start at the beginning and give teachers more time to spend with their students.” We believe that’s a way to begin to restore confidence in public education as opposed to this government which has, as I say, knocked the stuffing out of education for six years. Now Mike Harris wants to nail a sign over the door of all public schools and the sign would read—

The Chair: I’m sorry, Mr McGuinty. We’ve run out of time.

Mr McGuinty: —“Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.” We have a different plan.

The Chair: I must bring the presentation to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

1100

ONTARIO CHRISTIAN
HOME EDUCATORS CONNECTION

The Chair: The next presentation is from the Ontario Christian Home Educators Connection. Could you please come forward and state your name for the record, please..

Mr Jake Zwart: I'm Jake Zwart. I'm the president of the Ontario Christian Home Educators Connection. This is Brenda Risha. She's a home-schooling mom and also on the board of OCHEC.

Just so you'll know a little bit about home schooling, I'll tell you who we are and who we represent. First of all, we're an organization whose most important task is to inform our membership on pertinent issues. This includes an annual convention for professional development for parents who teach their own children; keeping our membership informed on changes in the law; bringing curriculum vendors and home educators together; and maintaining a relationship with other home-school organizations. We have a formal and very fruitful relationship with HSLDA, the Home School Legal Defence Association. We publish a quarterly newsletter to keep our membership informed. We also maintain a network of support group members to give references to new home schoolers when they want to get connected within a local home-schooling community.

Home-educating families have access to a wide variety of curricula from diverse suppliers, from those who prepare curricula for the public, separate and private systems and those who prepare specifically for home-schooling families. Parents can tailor the course of study for their child's learning styles, the parents' teaching styles and the interest of the family. In some cases, the parents belong to a private umbrella school with home-schooling campuses. While being an additional cost, it also gives the child a diploma from that particular school.

We represent not only the home-schooling family that goes it alone, but also those who belong to the private umbrella schools. Just for the record, in the current education landscape of Ontario about 95% of students are public and separate, which are fully funded; 4% are private, by far the majority of which is religiously based; and about 1% is home education.

Just a quick review of education law regarding home and private schools: by law children are required to go to school between the ages of six and 16. However, they are excused if they are receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere. This law covers both ourselves as home schoolers and private schools. In the current education landscape, there are both fully funded public and separate school systems and the non-funded private and home school communities. A parent has full freedom under Ontario law to choose the system they desire, and we applaud that freedom of choice.

We like the current law in Ontario as regards home schooling and private school choices, not necessarily the

funding ones. However, the policy relating to the laws can certainly be improved.

Now I'd like to back up and define what education is. An education is a process of passing on the tools, both knowledge and wisdom, to other people. Specifically, it is youth in this case. As G.K. Chesterton has so appropriately said, "It is a process, not a course that can be taught."

Just a little side note here: I am also not in favour of a two-tier system; I'm actually in favour of a two-million-tier system, one tier for each child in Ontario.

The next question is, who has the primary interest in the education of children? It's quite clear parents have the primary interest in the education of their own children. This is well established under common law principle and is recognized by our legal system in the rulings they make. Based on this, the choice of education, location and philosophy should be made by the parents.

Who can best determine the requirements for Johnny, the student in the school system? Clearly, the people who are most familiar with the child are in the best position to determine what the child needs to best master the material he needs to know. This is obviously the team comprising the child's teacher and the child's parents in a typical school situation. Thus, the decision-making must be made at the classroom level as close to the student as possible.

With Ontario being a large province, the geographic differences alone make a common curriculum hard to deal with. People in large cities have very different experiences growing up as compared to a farming community or a northern community based on the tourism industry, logging or mining. Still, some from each community will have the desire to go on to post-secondary education. University entrance requirements will ensure that their community's education strives to meet that standard of excellence.

Now the state's interest in education: the state also an interest in the education of children. This is limited to ensuring that children grow up to be productive members of society, not a burden to society. Briefly, in the government's 21-step plan for educational excellence the second bullet in step 10 states: "The government will eliminate the institutional bias against home schooling. The Ministry of Education will facilitate home school parents' access to standard tests and other learning tools." We applaud the government on that.

The first item in that bullet is removing a bias against the home education community, and that would be very simple to obtain. When a school board is informed that a student is being home educated, the matter should stop there. There should be a presumption that satisfactory instruction is being provided, just as the legal system's guidelines are that a person is innocent until proven guilty.

In terms of access to standardized tests, we already have access to a large number of standardized tests. Making the current government standardized tests available is a welcome gesture, but the choice of whether

standardized tests should be taken by a child and which standardized test should be used needs to remain the decision of the parent. Since standardized tests tend to force teachers to teach to the test, ultimately the standardized test will force the curriculum upon the students. We resist this, should there be any indication the government would move in this direction.

Facilitating access to standardized learning tools is also welcomed by the home school community. In the current situation, parents who choose an alternative to the publicly funded school system pay twice for the education of their children. This financial burden is normally much heavier for parents who select the private school option than for those who select a home education option. Home-education parents tend to spend more time with their children rather than dollars for their children.

The current proposal the government is putting before us is positive in that it recognizes, first and foremost, that the parent is in the best place to select the particular means of education that best fits their family and their child's needs. It also recognizes the extra financial burden on parents.

1110

It does not remove any per-student funding from the publicly funded systems. Even in the publicly funded systems, some parents have decided that they need additional help for their children. This has, to some degree, been available for their children within the school system through special education programs. In other cases, parents spend time tutoring their children. And on still other occasions, they purchase tutoring services for their children.

What should be done? The current proposal from the government is very astute in that it recognizes that parents should be able to determine the educational choices for their children. A tax credit, by nature, means the lowest probability of government influence on these choices by the parents. The government must resist the temptation to put conditions on the school for the tax credit to be available. The current private school system is functioning very well and will continue to do so.

While the current tax credit proposal is for private schools, we applaud the government for recognizing the extra payment these parents give. It can easily be extended to the home education community to address the points the government has made in its 21-step plan. The following is a basic direction that can be extended to accommodate the home education community.

The scope for the expenses that lead to the educational tax credits should, first of all, include direct expenses incurred for the direction of the children. This would naturally include direct tuition fees but should also include curriculum, books and parent professional development fees. Although most home educators spend much less money on education than the private and public educational systems, additional costs are borne by the home education family, which include the additional wear and tear on the home, including the added costs of heat and hydro; being a one-income family so that the

mother can teach the children; the curriculum; the computers and other school tools; purchase of outside services to aid in the educational process, such as music lessons, language classes, art, phys ed tutoring etc.

All of these items above, except maybe the loss of a second income, are already being dealt with in a variety of ways in the tax system. Self-employed people are able to write off some of the costs of their home, the portion utilized by the business, as well as the costs associated with that business. Finally, the home education community, while caring very much for their children, also tend to have very firm convictions about what they want taught to their children. They insist on maintaining control of the educational process. If there is any hint that control will be taken from them through the introduction of this tax credit or otherwise, the home education community will resist that through a variety of means.

I attended a meeting last night in which many persons representing many various positions within the publicly funded systems expressed their concerns with the difficulties of that system. It was interesting listening to those concerns and how politics seems to drive the decisions being made. A tax credit system begins to address some of the issues that were made at that meeting.

Thank you very much. Now Brenda will give a second presentation here.

Ms Brenda Rishea: I have experienced all three types of schooling, the three basic categories: private secular, religious, and home education. Parents who send their children to private secular schools pay a much higher tuition fee than do parents attending private religion-based schools, which are generally non-profit. Home educators' expenses vary, depending on whether they purchase their materials new or used and whether they purchase the entire recommended program or just parts of it. All three sets of choices incur large expenses in the form of tuition, books, uniforms, transportation and more.

In the Halton region, where I live, the lowest tuition cost per family for religious schools is about \$5,000 per year—excluding books, uniforms and transportation—ranging to about \$12,000 per year for private secular schools.

Home educators can expect to spend at least \$300 to \$1,500 per year per student, depending on the type of curriculum they choose: for example, whether they use used books, new books, on-line learning, computer learning, distance education or correspondence courses.

Private secular school attendees often make sacrifices to be able to attend their schools. Elitism is not always the reason for attending a private school. Some are for special needs or special education of the learning-disabled student that the public schools can't or don't offer: for example, autism. Some are specialized curricula that lead to a specific result, such as the international baccalaureate program. Some are to maintain the cultural heritage of a group of people.

For many families in the religious schools, they must make enormous sacrifices in order to send their children

to the school of their choice. Many have to forgo annual vacations, drive very old vehicles, own only one car, buy second-hand clothes and uniforms, cut back the grocery budget, do not eat out in restaurants, do not send their children to extracurricular sports programs, give up personal luxuries such as orthodontic braces, piano lessons, dance classes, summer camp and much more.

Home schooling is not free of charge either. Home educators do not receive any subsidy for the purchase of school curricula, support materials, computer programs, physical education classes outside the home, resource materials or educational training of the parent-teacher. For every family who home schools, there is a different and unique reason for their choice. We have usually been denied access to our tax-funded public school resources and standardized testing as well as, until the recent past, necessary speech and physiotherapy. We make the same sacrifices and cutbacks for our children even though our expenses aren't necessarily as high as the private secular or religious school tuition.

School tax credits are a welcome and necessary change to the way education is funded in Ontario. This tax credit can be calculated in conjunction with other tax credits that might also take into consideration the number of other school age children being supported. There should be no discrimination against income. Otherwise, it would not be equitable. Tax credits are supposed to be available to all taxpayers, regardless of income level. A person earning over \$60,000 per year does not necessarily have more disposable income than someone earning far less.

Finally, tax credits would ensure that parents are financially responsible to direct their spending on education. Receipts could be provided to validate the spending. The scope of allowable expenses would include materials, courses, evaluation and training as related to the education of the child. It will provide relief to already overburdened parents trying to make ends meet and allowing them a little financial help with their choice in education.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you for your presentation. There's no time for questions.

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION
OF ONTARIO, NIAGARA LOCAL,
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF NIAGARA

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Niagara local. I would ask the presenter to come forward, please, and state your name for the record.

Mr Kormos: You almost lit a match in a pool of gasoline, Chair. Be careful.

The Chair: You know, I've always said I'm not perfect, Mr Kormos.

Mr Kormos: Perhaps we could remind people that there's coffee and tea up here. Make yourselves at home. There are cups and saucers.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr Gary King: Good morning. My name is Gary King. I'm with the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Niagara local. I bring with me my former history teacher the superintendent of education for the District School Board of Niagara. With your permission, he'd like to lead off. His name is—

Mr Eric Mitchinson: Eric Mitchinson.

The Chair: Go ahead, please.

Mr Mitchinson: I'm sorry that there aren't more members of the government at the table to hear this.

Mr Kormos: Perhaps we could adjourn for five minutes to get the government members in here.

The Chair: Could you please start with your presentation.

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Mr Chair: It is rare enough that somebody gets to present to the committee. I'm not a member of the committee, nor is Mr Bradley, but surely the members of the committee could be here to hear these submissions. I don't care whether—

The Chair: Mr Kormos, I don't think that's a point of order.

Mr Kormos: Why are we having hearings if people aren't here to listen to these folks?

The Chair: Gentlemen, could you please start with your presentation. We are just eating your time.

Mrs Marland: Mr Chair, in fairness, everyone will get the time that was allotted to them. We have not been commenting about the fact that Mr McGuinty has been in the hall doing a press conference. Mr Marchese has asked that—

The Chair: Ms Marland, that's not a point of order.

Mrs Marland: No. So why comment on where my members are?

Mr Kormos: Because the government members should listen to what these folks have to say.

The Chair: Gentlemen, start with your presentation, please.

Mr Mitchinson: I speak to you—I think I should clarify first—not only as the superintendent for the District School Board of Niagara, I also speak on behalf of the senior administration of that board. We had asked for an opportunity to speak today, did not get that opportunity and are very thankful to the elementary teachers' federation for allowing me this opportunity. I'll also speak to you as a former member of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. I was co-founder of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party at the University of Waterloo. I say "former." I speak to you with a deep sense of betrayal today.

1120

I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak on this issue of tax credits for private schools. However, it does seem particularly odd that a matter of such great social significance is being addressed as an item in a provincial budget, rather than in another forum more fitting of the topic. This is an issue that deserves to stand alone as a matter for public debate, and perhaps even a plebiscite, as in Newfoundland, in order to determine the true will of the people of Ontario.

I would like to address both the economic and social aspects of the government proposal.

The government speaks of accountability for the public schools of Ontario. Teachers certified by Ontario must teach government-regulated curriculum to students, who must meet government achievement standards and, while doing so, be supervised directly by principals and supervisory officers who have been certified by Ontario and who are answerable to the government. The public boards must present a balanced budget to the government of Ontario and must prove that they have used their tax dollars in accordance with the government's expenditure controls. This is done so that the public schools are accountable to the people of Ontario.

Why, then, does the government now wish to abandon its belief in accountability by giving the common wealth—tax dollars—of the people of Ontario to private schools, where there are no similar requirements for accountability as exist with the public schools? Why the double standard? If this is done in the name of competition, shouldn't we at least be playing by the same rules?

All citizens have as one of the responsibilities of citizenship the duty to support the common good of the people, whether it be a system of health care or a system of public schools. The common wealth of the people must be dedicated to the common good of the people. Both those who collect and distribute our tax dollars and those who receive them must be accountable to the people of Ontario. I believe this, and I thought that my government did too.

Public education is the foundation stone of our modern democratic society in Ontario. Public schools take in all of our children, regardless of race, religion, ethnic background, economic or social circumstances, intellectual ability and physical health. Public schools teach those children that other systems can't or won't help. Within our means, we attempt to provide that essential element of a democratic society, equal opportunity, so that each student can have a chance to reach their potential.

This is done for not only the good of the individual but also the good of society as a whole. Equal opportunity is a necessity if society is to renew itself with each passing generation, thereby avoiding the inevitable stagnation, incompetence and corruption that comes with a rigid class structure where privilege, not ability, determines individual outcomes and our collective future.

In our public schools, children of diverse backgrounds learn not only life skills, but also how to play, work and live together. Public schools teach tolerance, understanding and acceptance. The public school system, open to all, is where diverse identities are being moulded into a single nation.

No society on earth has ever achieved peace and understanding by segregating its children on the basis of their religion or ethnic background. Sadly, there are far too many examples of segregation producing discord and disunity in the world today. Segregation emphasizes that which makes us different, not that which we have in

common, and does so in a way that implies that one is better than the other. The government's proposal today may not lead to disharmony tomorrow, but in time, perhaps a generation or two, it will ultimately lead to disharmony and the balkanization of Ontario society. This will be a greater threat to our national unity than we have ever faced before. From what I have seen and heard today, that process has already begun.

There is a middle ground. The District School Board of Niagara has successfully established an alternative public secondary school which recognizes the diversity within our nation. Eden secondary school has been able to satisfy a segment of our Christian community within the framework of an accountable public school system. I believe that Eden is a useful model for the government, if it does wish to recognize diversity while retaining the principle of accountability, and Eden proves that this can be done within the framework of a single public school system in Ontario. I invite the committee to come to Eden. Visit it, talk to the kids, the teachers and the parents, and see for yourself. It can work.

I invite you to visit all of our public schools and see how diversity can flourish within a single school system, while at the same time a new nation is being built on the principle of equal opportunity for all.

Mr King: My name is Gary King. I'm vice-president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation, Niagara local, here in the district of Niagara. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I'd like to begin by describing the special interest group that I represent. I represent some 1,900 elementary school teachers spread out in about 108 schools, stretching from one end of Fort Erie to Grimsby to Niagara-on-the-Lake to Wainfleet. More importantly, we represent some 30,000 elementary school students who are in our care each and every day during the school year, which according to my estimate is about 15,000 to 20,000 households in Niagara, all of whom are taxpayers and voters as well.

How is it that I feel I can speak for these individuals? Since the government announced Bill 45, we have been petitioning our members and, to date, in the last seven to eight school days, we have received 400 signatures from 44 different schools, and signatures pouring in on this petition against the bill increase each day.

More importantly, we have held a number of community forums on education here in Niagara. The most recent one was in early May in St Catharines. A previous one, virtually identical, was in Niagara Falls in the fall of last year. At those forums, we invited business people, community service people, people from the public sector, teachers, to be sure—a whole cross-section of people from the community, students included—to talk about issues surrounding education. They had some very interesting observations to make about the state of education in Ontario today.

By far the most consistent response on what might need to be improved talked about greater or more relevant supplies resources for school, more money resources

for special education, resources to recognize individual needs and differences, more money for education, better libraries, books that are current to our current curriculum, and something to do about large class sizes.

Their other comments revolved around things like, "There need to be better relations, co-operation and communications between teachers, boards and government, and greater respect for teachers and for the public education system," and, "Government does not understand education. Fewer quick fixes or political decisions and more long-term planning."

They also suggested that they were impressed by our ability to bring together a cross-section of the community to speak about these kinds of issues, because they felt that broad and dynamic viewpoints were shared. We heard from individuals, people said, who we had not normally spoken to. It was wonderful to get different perceptions from other people about the school system, and it broadened my opinion on the topic. They now know what's important in the education system. They understand better the stresses that we are under and they found the evening ever so energizing, and came away with a determination to do something about it.

These people are not special interest groups; they are the voters here in Niagara. They believe in publicly funded public education that is accessible to all, one that will inculcate the democratic and civic values that make our society work.

I'm here today to talk about two aspects of Bill 45, both the process and its purpose. The process or the background against which this piece of legislation is being brought forward is most interesting. I received a call, luckily, yesterday at 4:47 asking me to respond by 5 o'clock as to whether I'd be available for this session here today. Mercifully, there's a thing called e-mail, because I was on my way to organize a retirement party for some 150 elementary teachers, which involved over 730 guests.

1130

Once more the government is bringing forward some interesting legislation surrounding education in June, the very time when school boards, teachers and all those involved with education are very busy, with their heads down, trying to conclude their successful school year.

Against the background of this legislation, we here in Niagara have just been forced to make \$5.6 million in budget reductions, despite what's been said about increasing funding to school boards. Two of the casualties in those budget reductions were approximately \$750,000 for the social skills program that withdraws children from classrooms because they're having difficulty fitting in, and trains them or re-trains them in isolated centres and gives them the skills they need to succeed and reintroduces them back into the classroom; another \$400,000 came from reductions to educational assistant time, the very people who are going to be helping those same children who need that help.

We did receive some additional money this year on our board. I am told approximately \$114 per student was

delivered to the board; however, \$77 of that will be eaten up by increased fuel and utilities costs.

Mr Mitchinson: Actually it was \$100 per student, but the government took away more grants from our board than they gave us. The net loss was in the neighbourhood of a \$2-million drop in grants, contrary to what Mr Hudak was saying.

Mr King: I want you to look across the street at some point today. I want you to look at the education centre, originally built by the Lincoln County Board of Education, and remark on what a wonderful building it is and how that building was put up without one nickel of debenture money. It was done through frugal business practices long before this government existed and long before all these changes came down. Not one nickel of loan money was needed to put that up. That is the kind of business practice that has existed both in the Lincoln County Board of Education and in Niagara South, the two predecessor boards of the District School Board of Niagara. It is the same kind of stuff that exists here today.

The process for this: in 1985, when full funding was extended to Roman Catholic schools, we had 68 days of hearings across the province. While I'm delighted to be here today to speak to you, I'm not sure that five days is truly respectful of the democratic process in which we supposedly all believe. A government that prides itself on accountability and on reflecting the wishes of the people: I'm not sure this process does much other than contradict it.

The purpose of this legislation, as far as I can see: on the surface, people are saying it is about choice and it should be the ability of people to make decisions in a free market background. The facts suggest that over the next few years upwards of \$3,500 will be made available to parents who wish to send their children to private schools, yet OISE recently conducted a survey that says only 26% of our population is truly in favour of this kind of thing.

Our fear is that this is the first step toward full funding for a variety of other kinds of education ventures or other kinds of education programs. But the pie we are being given for education right now seems to be getting smaller. If we continually slice it up, there won't be enough to feed anyone effectively. The projected cost of \$300 million, against a background of all the other cuts that have occurred in education over the last few years, is potentially staggering.

There is a political cost involved in this as well. I point out that just as recently as last month, the government made a clear reversal of its position. Michael Harris's personal claim to private schools would not be supported. Just over a month ago, Premier Harris stated that the government had no plan to introduce vouchers for private schools. To argue that this tax credit is not a voucher is truly deceitful and insults the intelligence of the voters here in Niagara and across the province. The government has no mandate to proceed with this thing as it stands.

I'm left with one of two conclusions: either this government is completely out of step and is poorly advised

and is going to have to live with the consequences of a decision if they decide to push ahead with this, or this is some cynical Machiavellian calculated gamble that flies in the face of everything I believe democracy stands for. I would ask the committee to seriously consider withdrawing this aspect of Bill 45 and dealing with this issue publicly across the province and in a manner that is worthy of our democratic process.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning. There is no time for questions.

ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF

The Chair: I ask the next presenters to come forward, the Association of Christian School Teachers and Support Staff.

The Vice-Chair (Mr Doug Galt): Thank you very much for coming forward. We need to have your name for the record.

Mr Andrew Regnerus: My name is Andrew Regnerus; it is improperly spelled on the agenda for today. My position is assistant secretary with the Association of Christian School Teachers and Support Staff, a local professional association working for the last six or seven years representing teachers at Calvin Memorial Christian School and Beacon Christian High School.

Mr Chairman, members of the government and members of the opposition parties, first of all, I would like, on behalf of the Association of Christian School Teachers and Support Staff, to extend congratulations to the government for its courage to do the right thing with respect to equity in educational choice. We thank Mr Flaherty and Mr Harris for their leadership in addressing a longstanding injustice in our school system. We encourage them to stand up to their critics because justice demands it.

Speaking of justice, to deny public funding to faith-based schools is inconsistent with the recent UN declaration about which many have spoken. That indictment alone in our world community should compel all Ontarians to action in supporting the government's proposed legislation.

Some history, I think, is helpful. Our current public education system could be considered a denial of natural justice for Christian parents and teachers. Public schools at one point in time were Protestant Christian in nature, at the outset. Roman Catholic schools and their funding was the alternative. With growing religious plurality in Canada, the ongoing Christian character of the public schools became untenable.

Government could have supported equally schools of alternative faiths and philosophies, but until now there has been no move in that direction. Our mandate of tolerance, about which we've heard much, as society demands acknowledgement of religious and philosophical plurality, thereby making a Christian philosophy of

education in public schools not universally supported by the populace. Whether we have a cultural mosaic or a melting pot, it leaves no one faith as the guiding world view.

Some Christians, Jews and Muslims accept a neutral education and accept that religion or philosophy of teaching is a parental duty, to be done at home. We would challenge that notion. We would challenge that any philosophy of education, or outlook on life generally, can be neutral. Many Christians, Jews or Muslims either do not accept the notion that neutrality is possible, or do not accept neutrality as an appropriate model and therefore have established alternative schools.

A little bit about our schools and our teachers: the Association of Christian School Teachers and Support Staff is a group of professional educators that recognizes, in fact shares in, the right of parents to make the best education choice for their children. In our tradition, we are guided by a belief that every part of society is governed by a faith response, or a values response, if you will. That has been expressed succinctly as follows: "There is not one square inch of this world about which Christ does not say, 'This is mine.'" If you're not a Christian and you don't believe that, you could still say, "There is not one square inch of society for which our values don't contribute to the way we think about them." Education is one of those parts of society.

1140

The establishment of Christian schools is an expression of that belief, and such an expression has been made necessary by the dilution of Christian values in Ontario's population. That's not meant as a criticism. It's simply a fact that there are many competing values. Our province had Christian Protestant schools, but no longer does. Those who have kept a Christian character of education in private schools deserve full funding, but a tax credit is a compromise solution.

Our schools meet and exceed provincial standards, and they are well known for academic excellence. Quality education has been at Calvin Memorial Christian School for 40 years and at Beacon Christian High School for 30 years. That quality education has been provided to thousands of students. Third-generation students are now attending our schools. Our graduates do well in post-secondary education and become meaningful contributors to society in Ontario.

As our employer schools are unfunded, we as teachers share in the parental economic crunch by accepting salaries considerably lower than that of teachers in public schools and separate schools. In fact, our wage is about 20% lower than that of our funded counterparts. We as teachers also make a salary sacrifice.

Speaking of salaries and wages, our staff is representative of the school's supporting constituency. We are in no way among the elite private school supporters that all private schools are depicted as serving. Even so, the application of a proposed means test is unfair. Equal access to education is a justice issue, not an economic issue. Our choice to be separate is a fundamental justice

matter involving freedom of association and freedom of educational choice. We are asking that our supporting families have these basic freedoms respected financially.

A few words on tolerance: that same recognition of tolerance in a religiously pluralistic society also demands acknowledgement of faith-based schools in Ontario's provincial budget for all children of Ontario and for all schools which provide their education. According to some, we teach intolerance. We've heard today that our schools breed intolerance. In fact, teachers teach love for neighbour, they teach dignity of all as created persons, and they teach that it's God's desire to include all people as his people.

Intolerance is an accusation by many who view moral standards for society as fluid, moral standards that change and evolve from generation to generation. Why is the alternate view, that is, that moral standards are absolute, considered intolerant or segregationist? It's ironic that a belief which was widely accepted in the past is so vehemently opposed when still held by some today. It's ironic also that the existence and funding of the Roman Catholic separate system has not led to intolerance or hatred and hasn't caused segregation.

It's also ironic that critics say our teachers systematically create an intolerant character. Well, we've heard and read plenty of intolerance from opponents of the proposed tax credit, including opposition MPPs and leaders of the public education system.

Committed Christians who teach historically had jobs at government-supported public schools. The Christian world and life view was the norm. Now it's not tolerated.

Our ability as teachers to teach from our hearts in those schools is compromised because the character of those schools has changed. Justice demands that those who hold an explicitly Christian world and life view and teach from that perspective should be supported by at least the citizens of this province who share in that view.

Choice is good. Other provinces which experience funding to some degree include British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec. In those provinces, public and alternate schools are thriving. There has been no crumbling of public education, no mass exodus to private schools. It's unlikely, despite what we've heard today, that the 5% of students in our province who are attending independent schools will change much at all.

In fact, in any monopoly a certain laxness or lukewarmness will occur. It's human nature. The government's bill, which will strengthen parental ability to choose, will at the same time strengthen public education. Long-term strength arises from alternatives. It is remarkable that some say that choice is both bad and harmful.

A little bit about the economics: the proposed tax credit amount would be about \$300 million by 2006. If other options include full funding or an educational portion of property tax type of voucher system, which would also include non-parent supporters of independent schools, it's a solution with a reasonable price tag. Three

hundred million dollars represents about 2% of the approximately \$14 billion that government spends on funded education. The public cost per child, I understand, is about \$7,200. In Christian schools, it's somewhere around \$4,900, about 70% of the public cost.

A parallel can be drawn in our long-term-care industry. In that industry we have nursing homes: private, public-municipal and charitable nursing homes that work just fine side by side and are funded on a per-person basis. Choices are available and quality is not lacking in non-public alternatives.

Whether a criticism is in underfunding of the public school system or overstaffing or a perceived Harris attack on the public school system, all are false dilemmas. I appreciate what we've heard from our leaders in the public school system, but it is a false dilemma. The source of the revenue for the tax credit is not at the expense of public education, any more than it's at the expense of filling potholes, funding hospital beds or increasing any provincial taxes. The public school "crisis," as many have called it, is not caused by or related to the funding for Christian or any other independent schools.

In conclusion, we encourage and challenge all those in government and all those who are critical of the tax credit to support the government's proposal because it is demanded to achieve justice. Our commitment, in return, is to continue to support the efforts of government and opposition to make our public education system better. We need both public and independent schools to function well in order to strengthen each other. Supporting the tax credit concept and being a strong proponent for public education are not mutually exclusive.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Interruption.

The Chair: I would remind the audience that the longer we applaud, the more time we waste that could be taken for questions and presentations. We have one minute per caucus, and I'll start with the government side, Ms Marland.

Mrs Marland: Thank you, Mr Regnerus. I think you were here when Mr Mitchinson was speaking. I understand he's a superintendent of the Niagara district school board. I'm sure that in this area, Christian schools and any of the private schools aren't any different from the public schools from the perspective of if I were to go in them, they would be the same as the cross-section of schools in my riding of Mississauga South.

I am very motivated and very thrilled about this new nation, as Mr Mitchinson described, because of the fact that when I go to commencements in our public secondary schools, our Catholic secondary schools and in private schools, I see this wonderful cross-section of all children of all backgrounds. I support the fact that the opportunity of choice is available for their parents. I'm wondering if you can confirm that these children are representative—

The Chair: Ms Marland, we've run out of time.

Mrs Marland: —of all different groups within your school system.

The Chair: I'm sorry, sir, but I have to go to the official opposition.

1150

Mr Bradley: Sir, you will find almost inevitably that when funding is granted by a government to any entity, with that come conditions. Right now, for instance, the government has announced conditions with hospitals and has a bill before the House that I think talks about accountability in a variety of fields. Do you have a concern that if you receive funding in the indirect manner in which the government has proposed it, you will then be faced with a number of conditions that would be unacceptable to your organization and to the schools in which you teach?

Mr Regnerus: Insofar as the tax credit goes back to parents, it would be at arm's length to expect the schools to meet certain standards. However, if standards for academic excellence were applied, I'm sure our schools would do extremely well. I have no concern in that regard whatsoever. In our schools, at least at the high school level, the OSSD is awarded and certain requirements are made. Our schools are inspected already, so it should be no surprise to you that our schools will do very well if greater or closer scrutiny is applied.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have to go to the third party.

Mr Kormos: Thank you for coming. Look, I hear what you've got to say. Quite frankly, you've made, in my view, the best possible case that could be made. I want you to understand that we in the New Democratic Party fundamentally disagree with you. It's a fundamental disagreement. We do not believe public funds should be invested in private schools, be it directly or through tax credits, and we don't say that that's what we believe today. We don't believe public money should go to private schools tomorrow or the day after that or the year after that. I suspect we're going to continue to disagree, but I'm glad you had a chance to speak at this committee.

My concern is that a whole lot of people haven't had the chance. You apparently disagree with Mr Mitchinson, who preceded you, and that's fine; that's good. It's not unhealthy at all. But Mr Mitchinson had applied to appear before this committee. His name had been presented by the Liberal opposition party and Mr Mitchinson had been turned down. Mr Mitchinson broke the rules—I'm sorry to tell you that—by piggybacking—

The Chair: Mr Kormos, we've run out of time and I must bring the discussion to an end.

Interjection.

The Chair: Mr Kormos, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, sir, I would like—

Interjection.

The Chair: Mr Kormos, you're out of order.

Interjection.

The Chair: Mr Kormos, I'll point out that you're only taking time from the next presenters. On behalf of the committee, sir, thank you very much for your presentation.

OSSTF DISTRICT 22, NIAGARA

The Chair: Our next presentation is from OSSTF District 22, Niagara. Could you please come forward and state your name for the record.

Mr Daniel Peat: My name is Daniel Peat. I'm a teacher and I'm a vice-president of the teachers' bargaining unit of OSSTF District 22, Niagara. I'm here today with our district president, Craig Brockwell.

We represent approximately 1,400 teachers and substitute teachers in secondary schools in Niagara. We thank you for this opportunity to make a brief presentation to the committee. I realize how fortunate we are in this regard, as so many others will be unable to voice their concerns during these brief hearings on a bill that contains so fundamental a proposed change in the fabric of our society.

OSSTF is a democratic organization. Craig and I have been elected to speak for our members and to uphold OSSTF's democratically determined policies, which include being opposed to direct or indirect funding of private or religious schools and to the use of vouchers to fund schools. In the brief time we have available, we will support these policies with reasoning and examples that should sway this committee to recommend the removal from Bill 45 of its provisions to institute an education voucher system in Ontario through an income tax credit for tuition paid to private schools.

We're very proud of our public schools in Niagara. The current city of Thorold, where OSSTF District 22 pays its education taxes, was the location of the first fully publicly funded school in what is now the province of Ontario. To fund that school was the democratic choice of the residents of Beaver Dams approximately 150 years ago. That is a long tradition of public funding going to public education, one that has served Ontario extremely well for generations and one that Bill 45 seeks to reverse.

One of the reasons we oppose Bill 45 is because of the government's anti-democratic arrogance. The education voucher-tax credit provisions in the bill were introduced contrary to a 1999 election promise by the Premier, an action flying in the face of democracy. If the Premier and his close associates in the divided PC Party have any respect for democracy, then they should withdraw the private school tax credit provisions from the bill and take the proposal to the public in an election or a referendum.

Bill 45 is also anti-democratic in its very nature. Canada is a democracy more vibrantly, more diversely and more tolerantly multicultural than any other country in the world. There is no factor more important in fostering tolerance in our society than our publicly funded schools. Ontarians of all ancestral origins, socio-economic circumstances and religions grow up alongside one another in our schools and learn tolerance and respect for one another that is of fundamental importance to our society and its democracy.

Canadians, as an example to the world, respect one another's differences and value Canadian diversity. Bill 45, on the contrary, seeks to balkanize this diversity by

offering parents financial incentive to take their children out of public schools, which are incubators of tolerance, and put them into segregated schools where there's no opportunity to learn at first hand that our similarities as human beings far outweigh our differences.

Further, it's a double blow to democracy. This bill would leave the public education system poor in diversity and perspective with every student who is lured by a tax credit to attend a private or religious school and to abandon the public system. Bill 45 would also make the public schools poor in a financial sense. It would make Ontario the only jurisdiction in North America to actually pay parents to take their children out of public schools. It's very clever. Yes, your ultimate objective is to weaken public education until you can claim that the only thing that can fix it is to privatize it.

Next year, under Bill 45, the cost to the citizens of Ontario to pay off the parents of 100,000 children now in private schools will be \$70 million. If that money was spent on public education, the District School Board of Niagara's share would be enough to return the workload of our secondary school teachers to that before Bill 74, last June's disaster that has increased our workload so drastically that because of our professional dedication to our role in the classroom, we no longer have time for extracurricular activities, our families or maintaining our personal health.

There would be enough funds left to even have full-time librarians in all of our high schools instead of half-time librarians, as our board is currently being forced to do. By 2006, the board's share of the \$350 million that would go annually from the public purse into private hands would be enough to restore cuts our board is now being forced to make to special education programs and personnel and for reduce class sizes and professional development for teachers. We're even cutting the supply budget by 10%, for heaven's sake—pencils, erasers, books.

There's nothing clever about that. It's just plain crazy to take public money out of vital school programs and give it away to parents who can already afford to send their children to private schools.

Why, then, is Bill 45 so dastardly clever? Because of the financial incentive for more parents to buy out of public schools. Fifteen per cent of public school parents are now considering, as a result of the promises in the bill, sending their children to private schools. By the Premier's own estimate, one third of these parents might make that decision, for an annual transfer of \$700 million from taxes paid by all Ontario citizens into the hands of a select few. What's dastardly about it? Because 100,000 additional students will take with them \$700 million a year from the public education system. Even if the government claims it's revenue-neutral, like every other kind of downloading doublespeak they have perpetrated, they will still have a two-tier education system in place and be one step closer to bankrupting our public education system, as the former Minister of Education, John Snobelen, set out to do six years ago.

There's one more clever little bonus. Bill 45 could even solve the teacher shortage, which the present government has worsened by demonizing the teaching profession ever since taking office. After all, private schools don't require teachers to be qualified as public schools do, but then they don't have to accept students with special education needs, which require even further teacher education. They are not required. They're not democratically controlled. They can refuse entry to students. Public systems cannot.

Like all labour unions, OSSTF places a high value on the principles of democracy and equity. We believe that public education is the cornerstone of a democratic society. We believe that the purpose of Ontario's public school system is to provide all students with an equal opportunity to maximize their educational potential. We consider private schools to be a matter of choice for those parents who want an alternate form of schooling, but that choice must not be at public expense, and not to the detriment of the public education system, as will be the case under Bill 45. However, equity and choice are not incompatible.

I'd now like to defer to my colleague, Craig Brockwell, who will acquaint you with a secondary school within the District School Board of Niagara which combines the high standards of the public education system and equity of access with the values of a particular community in Niagara. If it were possible for one unified public school system to exist in Ontario with provision for education in heritage languages, cultures and faiths, then this school might be a model for many communities. Thank you.

Mr Craig Brockwell: Thanks very much for the opportunity to provide a viable option to the government in regard to funding of public education systems.

A number of years ago, Eden Christian School was seeking a new home, probably for reasons of economic viability. Perhaps it saw, as many other citizens do, that the public system could be its saviour. After some deliberation, the public system, as it does with all, opened its doors to Eden. That is key, because the public school system provides for the needs of all. It can also provide for the spiritual needs of a specific community within the umbrella of a publicly funded school curriculum offered by certified teachers.

It is a publicly funded school that provides a religious flavour. Within the legislated hours of instruction, our certified teachers provide the curriculum mandated by the government and the Ministry of Education. Beyond these hours, the school provides the spiritual enrichment that Eden's parent community wishes. This welcoming of Eden into the public system provides the government, along with shared public resources, with their much-cherished element of accountability. As well, it provides a priority that this government asks us to make in many areas under the government purview, that priority being an emotional and a financial commitment to the public education system.

At a time locally when we have seen per pupil funding under constant decline, this provides an incentive to

further erode what society holds dear. I'm talking again about that tax credit.

Eden right now has students from its original community. As well, it has Catholics and people from other faiths who go there to enjoy that atmosphere that they so richly deserve and wish. It's provided by, as I said, certified teachers. It also has beyond those school hours opportunities for that spiritual enrichment that I also talked about earlier. It has pastoral support groups. It deals with all of the elements of the school curriculum. It deals with spiritual insight, spiritual sensitivity and personal reflections. It has a daily chapel program that's provided in advance of the school day where students go to gather and listen, to recognize that God's presence touches all areas of their lives, everything they would want in their religious education.

They have counselling provided by spiritual life directors who help along with the school guidance counsellors. They also have training admissions. They have alternate programs for all of those students who go to this school. However, it doesn't fall under the five hours or so of instructional time mandated by the Ministry of Education. That's not to say that, as in every classroom, those spiritual options wouldn't be provided as examples in debate. That may go on, and it may go on in other schools in the public system as well. But what this does provide is an alternative, a welcoming of those schools that may feel their economics deem that their schools may have to close. It provides an opportunity for the sharing of resources, the sharing of finances in order to provide an environment that their parent community, their student community, the broad community, wishes.

I just offer that up as a viable option. It's unfortunate that we were given notice so late that we didn't have the opportunity to provide a sufficient written proposal, but we will provide that within the next couple of days, along with an outline of Eden High School and, as I say, a different kind of education within the public school system.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you for the presentation.

We've run out of time. This committee is recessed until 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1203 to 1304.

SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION SERVICES ORGANIZATION

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to bring the meeting back to order. Our first presenter this afternoon is from the Settlement and Integration Services Organization. I would ask the presenter to come forward and state your name for the record.

Mr Morteza Jafarpour: I am Morteza Jafarpour. I am here on behalf of the Settlement and Integration Services Organization, known as SISO, from Hamilton. First I would like to provide some information about our agency and the scope of clients we serve. I believe we are the largest settlement agency in southern Ontario. We see

around 7,500 to 10,000 first-time clients every year and over 25,000 returning clients. As you can understand from the name, we serve immigrants and refugees arriving in this area. Some of the issues you're talking about today are going to have direct impact on the clients we serve.

Unfortunately, the way we received information yesterday about being here today didn't give us much time to prepare all the things, but I will try to present the issues in a fair manner.

One of the realities is that immigration is a very controversial issue in many areas, and people can discuss the issues related to that. As a result, when immigrants come here about their rights and responsibilities, part of the reality, when it comes to the issue of immigration, in the short term, is that very often it is a political issue. But for Canada, especially in the last four years, it has been an issue of human resource management, about the future of Canada, about the economic achievement of Canada and about issues other than the social achievement of Canada in that area.

One of the realities we are starting to face is the recruitment of foreign-trained professionals. Canada is in competition right now with western Europe and the States. As a result, people coming to contribute their expertise look at what a country provides to them or to their families. Many people choose to come to Canada or other countries because of the future of their children too. They bring the expertise Canada needs. At the same time, they would like to see the future of their children in that area.

In the last few years, cuts in the education system have impacted newcomer students deeply. They have impacted everybody, but specifically newcomer students. Some of the reasons for that are, for example, in the Hamilton region public board, the number of ESL teachers has dropped from 96 to 21. This means there is less time and teachers per student, even though the number of newcomer students has continued to increase. Another issue in that area is that the time newcomer students are entitled to access ESL classes has dropped from seven years to three years. All these things have had an impact on the academic achievement of the children, who are not immigrant children; they are Canadian children.

The recent suggestion regarding the tax credit for private schools has raised new concerns for people. They've already experienced what's happening with children in the school system. One of the interesting parts, and one of the issues where we have concerns—the main issue in that area—is we feel this issue is being rushed. As a result we don't look at the long-term impact of that on children and the future of Canada.

Even some of the comments we have heard, for example, from the Minister of Finance, contradict values or beliefs of the government we have right now. For example, the government is talking about raising education standards. There is very big concern about the impact of that. It is going to create a double standard in the system, raising the standards for people who can afford it and lowering the standard for people who cannot afford it.

One of the issues the Minister of Finance has raised—he has talked about the reason for this tax credit, which is not for the wealthy but it is to give opportunities to children to go to religious or culturally diverse schools. We have great concern in that area. First, if you look at most of the private schools, noticing diversity is not difficult: you go to the school, you look at the colour of the people and you see the diversity. Most of the private schools are exclusive clubs, because of the cost of the schools and also because of other barriers people are facing in adapting to the schools. The values of some of the schools are built around that.

1310

Another concern we have in that area is that the public education system plays an important role in the adaptation and integration of children and families into Canadian society. We believe creating small pockets is going to create a system having people fail to integrate into Canadian society, because they're going to belong to their own groups.

Another area we have concerns about is that part of the reality when you decide to go to another country to start a new life, is that you sell everything you have and you're going to start at the lowest standard of living. Many of these people are not going to have enough money to pay for private schools. As a result, they're going to settle for the public schools. We are concerned this is going to take more money out of the school system. As a result, we're going to see private schools start to recruit teachers who think they have higher standards.

Another interesting point in that area is that it's not clear what is going to be the certification process or testing process for teachers in private schools. Again, the impact of that is going to be based on people who can afford it going to private schools, and not people who cannot afford it. One concern we have in that area, one of the realities we're going to see—for those of us who are parents, I think many of us can do many things in that area as parents. If I believe I have to send my son to a private school and start to get loans and use my credit cards to pay the school—today we are talking to people who get out of university with high debt, but we're going to get to a stage where people are going to get out of high school with high debt, because families are borrowing money to send their children to private schools.

The last statement I want to make in this area is regarding the issue of these new initiatives. The perception is created outside that private schools have higher standards, and it pushes parents to look for that alternative way, regardless of whether they can afford it or not.

Finally, civilized society is not just based on the number of computers or cars people have. It is judged on people's rights in that society. Canada, as a civilized society, has to make sure the highest standard of education is the right of the children of this country, not a privilege they can buy based on the money their parents have.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus. I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Bradley: One of the comments I noted, one of your genuine concerns, is that in trying to integrate people coming into the country into the system, programs such as English as a second language and other programs which were helpful in enabling people to settle appropriately in the country and to be full citizens, as you would say, in the country were cut back. Do you see that across the province, or are you only familiar with your own specific area?

Mr Jafarpour: We have heard that's happening across Ontario, but I think Hamilton, as a percentage, is the third-largest immigrant receiving city in the country. Very often people don't see that. Twenty-four per cent of Hamiltonians, based on the 1996 census, identified that they were born out of Canada. As a result, ESL becomes more important in places like Hamilton, and we see the impact of that. As I said, from 1996 it dropped to 21% with the public board. It has a great impact on children's academic achievement.

Mr Bradley: I guess it does get to that point of their academic achievement. Do you find that some students are unable to keep up without those kinds of additional resources, at least at the beginning?

Mr Jafarpour: Definitely.

Mr Kormos: Thanks for coming today, along with any other presenters. Goodness knows it was hard enough to get on the list, wasn't it? We've been requesting 80 days of hearings, because we're concerned that people—quite frankly, there are people who support this position who aren't being given an opportunity to express their views. There are a whole lot of people who oppose the position who aren't being given the opportunity.

Look, not everybody in this room applauded you. You weren't looking, but I want you to know that. I suspect that the ones who didn't applaud for you might be more inclined to applaud the next presenter. I'm not sure; that remains to be seen. There were some people who were here this morning who are advocates of their right to have their children taught in a school environment that they have more immediate control over. I hope I've put that fairly.

I want you to know that as New Democrats, we don't believe that public monies should go to private schools—not now, not next week, not next year. That's what we believe: that public monies are dedicated to—just like we don't believe public money should go to private health care or that public money should go to private prisons. We believe that public money should be invested in public institutions. There are folks here who disagree with you and me. What do you say to them? They are committed to their private schools, and most of the people we talked to are from Christian-based schools. What do you say to those who support this bill? I tell you, they know where I stand.

Mr Jafarpour: I came to Canada at the age of 30. Now I'm 42. One of the privileges of coming from

another country is when you live in the system, you see they have a double standard of private and public schools. I come from a country where we experienced that. As a child I went to schools of both systems and you see what is the impact of that on people, on everybody in that society. I think very often—again, I am today a Canadian citizen, but Canadian-born Canadian citizens unfortunately don't see the privilege of having a public system with the health or education system.

If the people who are talking believe in that area, I believe that part of it comes to values. I am not here saying, "This one is bad; that one is bad." As a value, I am standing behind the public system because of the benefit to my children, as a father, and also for other children I have seen coming in that area.

But I think we need to have more time. That's what I am bringing to the round table. We need to have more time to look at the long-term impact of that on the future of Canada and our lives. It's not about poor children or immigrant children or rich children. It's about the future of Canada; it's about the value we give to our children, to our education system. That's why I made my last statement about how we define ourselves as a civilized community.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you very much for your presentation this morning. It's important that we hear from many different voices on the issue. You work with people in resettlement, and clearly that's an important role, to help people to appreciate the benefits of our Canadian society. You speak very well of that and I appreciate that. We do have a wonderful country.

I think the national policy is a multicultural mosaic. A mosaic is made up of independent pieces, not a melting pot society, and as such I would think that you first respect individual differences. That's tolerance, and a part of our culture is to be tolerant and to allow people to in fact celebrate their differences.

I think the government is trying to make a number of fronts—and you have mentioned this, respectfully—to foreign-trained professionals. You did mention that. There is a lot of movement in that area to recognize and to recertify foreign-trained physicians—that's one group that I personally have been working with—to find ways for them to be accommodated in the system while meeting the standards. To recognize individual adults coming to this country with different cultures, values, religions and perhaps attitudes as well—there's some way of accommodating them. Do you think the government can do more to find some equity in recognizing individuals for what they are and what they bring to this mosaic of Canada?

1320

Mr Jafarpour: That's a very big question. I think we need an hour to talk about that.

Mr O'Toole: Would you prefer us to fit into one shoe?

Mr Jafarpour: Put it this way: I came to Canada. In my past life, I was a medical doctor. I came as a refugee claimant because of the political problems and human-

rights-related issues I had back home. In three months, I downgraded from medical doctor to a pizza driver. That's a part of the experience we see happening with many of the people in that area.

Immigration brings people based on what they think are the shortages in the market. When they come here, unfortunately, there is no system to bridge them, to say, "OK, as a doctor, as a lawyer, as an accountant, if you take these courses or you go through this process, you can become certified and you can work in Canada."

Part of that reality is about Canadian experience. I was at a conference where somebody said that the only job in Canada where you need Canadian experience is snow shovelling. The rest you don't need. But part of the reality is you cannot get Canadian experience outside of Canada. There is no bridging. As a result, when foreign-trained professionals arrive in Canada, they don't see a bridge; they see a gate. That gate says, "You cannot practise." I went through that process. I made a decision to change my career because I saw that gate. They are holding that and they are not realizing this is Canada in the 21st century.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

WELLANDPORT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Wellandport Christian School. If you could please step forward and state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Dean Bonsma: My name is Dean Bonsma and I am from Wellandport, Ontario. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today. I appreciate that. I'm here today as a parent and as a board member of Wellandport Christian School in Wellandport. I have three children, two of whom attend Wellandport Christian School, one in grade 4 and one in grade 3.

Wellandport Christian School is a parent-run independent Christian school in the town of Wellandport in west Niagara. Wellandport Christian School is a kindergarten-through-grade-8 school, having approximately 240 students this year. I have been serving on the board of Wellandport Christian School for three years.

I am a self-employed computer programmer and, as such, am a middle-class citizen of Ontario, as are most people who send their children to independent schools in Ontario. I attended Christian elementary and Christian high schools in Ontario in the 1960s and 1970s. I and my wife also attended public high schools and publicly subsidized universities in Ontario. Therefore, we recognize the importance of a strong public education system.

My wife calls me the accidental activist because it is very out of character for me to write letters and e-mails and publicly make my views known. However, I feel very strongly that Christian education is important for our children. I feel that the proposed tax credit is an important acknowledgement of the value of the education

our children are receiving, and of the historical unfairness of education funding in Ontario.

What really prompted me to speak out, however, was the shock of the misinformation and rhetoric I was hearing and reading from vocal opponents of the tax credit. Knowing how many years had gone into working for and requesting government support for our schools, I was surprised to hear people say this tax credit was coming out of nowhere. It was not coming out of nowhere from my perspective.

I have heard the opposition parties argue that the tax credit will fragment the public education system and foster an attitude of intolerance among our students. In fact, just the opposite is true. Our students are specifically taught tolerance and acceptance for all humanity. Our graduates have consistently modelled this in their lives. In respecting and supporting the choice of parents to send their children to independent schools, we are actually demonstrating tolerance by respecting the real diversity in our society.

Independent Christian schools have existed in Ontario for many years. For example, Wellandport Christian School celebrated its 40th anniversary three years ago. Over that time, Wellandport Christian School, and other Christian schools, have developed a well-deserved reputation for caring about their communities, for fostering civic-mindedness in their students, promoting the public good and demonstrating, by parental example, the benefits of being involved. In short, we teach our students not to judge our neighbours but to love our neighbours.

Being on the board at Wellandport Christian School has allowed me to see many of the good things that go on in the school. I now know that Wellandport Christian School families represent a wide range of income levels. I now know that Wellandport Christian School provides tuition assistance for families in financial need. I have seen a community dig deep to provide financial and volunteer support for several special needs students. I have seen the blessing that the special needs students have in turn bestowed on the school community through the polite student who stops to open the door, the accepting students who play the wheelchair games during field day, the class that signs along during a song while singing in an assembly.

Parents and other volunteers are involved in many areas at Wellandport Christian School, from board and committee work to classroom assistance, marking, class trips, painting and school maintenance. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership and commitment that has a very positive impact on the school and the students.

Being on the board has also given me insight into the funding pressures faced by independent schools. A tight budget can result in often creative solutions. Last year our grade 7 and 8 students, with a few parents, got together to make dozens of pizzas. These were sold to raise funds for the launch of a band program. Every year many local businesses support the school through donations in the annual golf tournament. The funds raised are used to purchase desks for classrooms, playground equipment,

and other extra items. Each year I am stunned by the overwhelming support for the annual school bazaar and auction. This event raises thousands of dollars, put towards the operation of the school, to help keep tuition down. There are of course many other creative fund-raising events happening as well.

In response to the statement that this tax credit will fragment the public education system, we need only look to the example of other provinces in Canada that provide at least partial funding for private schools. In these jurisdictions, public education enrolment and quality did not decline as a result of private school funding. I have also heard that this tax credit will result in less money being available for public schools. While it is unlikely and unfounded to expect a mass exodus from the public system as a result of this tax credit, any public school funding difficulties should be dealt with separately and are unrelated to this credit.

I have been asked why we send our children to Wellandport Christian School. Why could we not just give our children Bible lessons at home, or send them to Sunday school at church? My answer is that we believe we need to send our children to Wellandport Christian School in order to be faithful to our Christian beliefs. For us, religion is not a component of education, but Christianity permeates all of education, and all of our lives. We don't just turn it on on Sunday and turn it off again on Monday. It is with us always, and is therefore central to how we wish to educate our children.

I know, however, that not everyone will want to make this choice for their children, which is why I advocate a strong public education system as well. Our nieces and nephews attend public schools. I have family members who are teachers in public schools. I have a sister who's a bus driver for a Catholic school. Some of our children's neighbourhood friends attend public schools.

1330

I would like to say again that the large majority of independent school supporters in Ontario are not the very rich or well-positioned. We are just average Ontario citizens with average jobs. In fact, I'm sure you would be surprised at how little some of our supporting families earn in a year. We believe that Christian education is important for our children, and we have shown that we are willing to make lifestyle and consumer sacrifices in order to support this.

Our family has a joke about the Christian school car. This is a car that you will find in the parking lots of many Christian schools or in the driveways of many Christian school supporters. It is old. It is rusty. It might belch smoke when you accelerate. We probably have our emissions testing date circled on the calendar and we are saving our pennies for that day. We joke about that, but the reality is that we have chosen to forego the big screen TV, the satellite dish, the expensive vacations and the new car in order to give our children a Christian education.

We know this is our free choice and we don't want special treatment. We only ask for fair support for us and

our children as taxpaying, education-supporting citizens of Ontario. Even with the proposed tax credit, we will still be contributing thousands of dollars more per year for education than parents whose children attend public schools.

I received a letter from Mr McGuinty last week, in which he wrote, "My acknowledgement that there is a fairness issue in the way Ontario funds religious schools has never wavered." Later on he says, "I had taken the position that I was not ideologically opposed to funding religious schools." I would like to thank Mr McGuinty for those comments.

I am thrilled that the government has chosen to support all students in Ontario through this proposed tax credit. I believe this represents an important step forward in education in Ontario. Strong public education and fairly supported independent school education are not mutually exclusive but can and should coexist. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. You have two minutes per caucus. I'll start with the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation. Obviously it relates closely to what I've been hearing for a great number of years in my riding, where we have a school of similar longevity to the one that you mentioned. In fact, I had the opportunity to attend the 42nd anniversary last year. So that would, I suppose, put it at 43 years this year.

I just wanted to raise that because that's what I found in my riding—as you put it forward in your presentation—that this is not a school that is attended by a larger proportion, number of parents, who have high incomes. In fact, it is generally the middle-to-lower-income families who are there. One of the reasons they are lower-income is because they feel strongly about the type of education they want for their children. That's why they are willing to contribute and forego things in their lives to accomplish that. I appreciate that.

The presenter before you mentioned that most private schools are exclusive clubs. Would you comment on that?

Mr Bonsma: I'm not sure what he refers to by that. In our school we seek parents who would support the mission of the school, which is that our school teaches Christ-centred education. If we have parents who support that mission, then we welcome those parents into our school. We have an official tuition assistance policy in place in our school, so parents of any income level may apply. If they require assistance, then they apply for that and it's processed for that.

The Chair: I'll go to the official opposition. Mr Kennedy.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): Thank you, Mr Bonsma, for being here. I want to ask you about the school that you have your two children at. What is the breakdown between the religious portion and the education portion of the fee that you pay on behalf of your children? Can you relate that to the committee?

Mr Bonsma: I think it's different for every school—

Mr Kennedy: For your school.

Mr Bonsma: The education component for our school, I believe, works out to about \$2,000 per student. We charge a family tuition rate.

Mr Kennedy: I think in terms of what you are discussing here today, you may acknowledge that at \$2,000 per child, the maximum benefit that your family will get is \$1,000 per child—50% of that education portion is what the government is offering.

Mr Bonsma: It looks that way, yes.

Mr Kennedy: The other part is the 40% or less that you get from a charitable tax credit. When you say that you're not rich and wealthy, we absolutely accept that. We accept all of the sincerity behind your wish to have a certain kind of education for your child. But do you recognize that this tax credit is designed to give three times the benefit to a private secular school family that it does to your family? In other words, the only families in the province who will get \$3,500 are families who do not currently have their children in religious schools.

I'm just wondering, from the standpoint of the religious school community, who are being used as the people whom this is benefiting, it seems a little incongruous. I'm just wondering, do you recognize that this is a wide-open exemption that includes any kind of school? It could be religious or anti-religious; it could be of any nature whatsoever. Also, it seems designed to benefit secular schools over religious schools. I'm wondering, from people representing them, being part of the religious community—I know that it's problematic to be included, but the government has included that, and I'm just wondering what your comment is about why the religious schools are getting the minority benefit and private secular schools are getting three and, in some cases, four and five times the benefit of families like yourselves?

Mr Bonsma: At this point, we don't know very many details about how the tax credit is actually going to be implemented, so we're not sure of how that's going to come down.

The Chair: I have to go to the third party.

Mr Marchese: Mr Bonsma, just as a comment, I want to quote you what the Minister of Education said a while ago: "We've been very clear that our goal is good quality public education. The estimates of \$300 million needed to fund religious schools would be"—religious schools, not the non-denominational ones; they're not included—" \$300 million that would come out of the public school system." That's the end of the quote. I believed her then. That's the worry of most of us, who are concerned that this will take money out of public education. Ecker said it and the Premier said it. Of course, they've changed their position. Are you not concerned about that for the public system, which you said you also support, but you don't see a link between the tax credit and the possible shortfall it might have on the public system? What do you think of that?

Mr Bonsma: We currently contribute taxes toward the public school, and we always have. The amount that we contribute to that will not change. I consider those

things to be two separate issues, really. One is the question of public education funding, and one is the question of a tax credit. I see them being separate.

Mr Marchese: I just wanted to tell you that, ideologically, New Democrats are opposed to funding for private schools, be they religious or not. The fact that the other private schools might get more than you only speaks to a particular problem, but I just wanted to let you know that from an ideological point of view, New Democrats believe in one public system. The people who want to opt out, that's a different choice they make.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

1340

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO, NIAGARA LOCAL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, the Niagara local. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record, please.

Ms Teri Kramer: Good afternoon. My name is Teri Kramer. I'm a teacher here in St Catharines. My day here has been sponsored by my federation, so they have put a supply teacher in my classroom, which has allowed me to come to this hearing. Had the hearing been available after 4:30, we would not have had to do that. Thank you, though, for granting me the opportunity to address this hearing today.

I'm not here to oppose private schools. I'm here to support the public education system. I represent 1,900 public elementary teachers in Niagara, who wish to express their concern about the government's move to use public funds to support private schools in Ontario. We stand united in our opposition to Bill 45. It is divisive and counterproductive to the well-being of education. It is paramount that all Ontarians, including our government, not lose sight of the important of an inclusive, publicly funded school system in our province.

Perhaps the most important attribute of our public education system is its inclusive nature. In our public system, we offer an education to all children, regardless of their religious or cultural background, regardless of their socio-economic status, regardless of their physical capabilities, regardless of their academic strengths or weaknesses. All children are treated as equals and provided with excellent opportunities for learning in our public education system.

Since 1995, the government has taken \$2 billion out of the public education system. Premier Harris will now give \$300 million as a tax credit to the parents who support private schools. This is an unconscionable move on the part of the government. The money should be used to support all students in our province, not just a select few.

The public education system is a fundamental building block for our democracy. History has borne this out. For generations, Ontarians have depended on the public

education system to provide them with the skills and the confidence necessary to make decisions to run their businesses, to live fruitful and productive lives. The future of our democracy, the future of our children, are dependent on an adequately funded and properly supported public school system.

Our public schools are funded on a per capita basis. If a child is withdrawn and sent to a private school, the public school jurisdiction in question will lose that funding. In turn, the funding will be transferred to a private school in the form of a tax credit. This removal of funding from the public system will undermine the ability of public schools to maintain the high level of services they now provide. This is totally unacceptable. Public funds should only be used to support public education.

We have concerns about the transfer of public funds to private education in terms of how that can be affected by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Will this open the door to foreign companies who see a business opportunity in providing private education in Ontario with the aid of a government tax credit? Again, public funds should only be used to support public education.

In conclusion, let me say that the members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario respect the court decision regarding the funding of Catholic schools. At the same time, we believe that children should not be separated on the basis of culture, religion or class. As well, children should be provided with a place which promotes respect for differences and allows them to work harmoniously for the promotion of the larger good. This can best be provided in a strong public education system. We ask that the Ontario government immediately withdraw its plans to give a tax credit to parents who support a private school.

As well, I have a letter from the Retired Teachers of Ontario and I'd like to read that letter as part of our presentation. John Sallmen, first president of the Retired Teachers of Ontario, has asked me to read this letter. This letter was originally sent to Mike Harris, Howard Hampton and Dalton McGuinty. As well, copies were sent to Janet Ecker, Gerard Kennedy and Rosario—

Mr Marchese: Rosario Marchese.

Ms Kramer: I should know from being here. I'm very sorry.

Mr Marchese: That's all right. It's such a nice name. Doesn't the name sing?

Ms Kramer: I know. It's wonderful. I'm just not used to these public things. What can I say?

"RTO is a volunteer organization with over 45,000 members, representing the interests of retired members of the Ontario teachers' pension plan. At our recent spring senate meeting a resolution was approved to register strenuous objection to the government's proposed tax incentive for parents of students in private and religious schools.

"We view this proposed change as both divisive and counterproductive to the well-being of public education in this province. RTO recommends that funding at least equal to this potential loss of provincial revenue be used

instead to strengthen the existing, inclusive, publicly funded school systems in Ontario.

“RTO believes that the future well-being of this province is predicated on an adequately funded and properly supported public school system. We, therefore, reiterate our objection to any measure that will so obviously weaken what our members worked so hard to build—strong, vibrant and well-respected public school systems.

“RTO also joins the growing ranks of those calling for full and comprehensive public hearings on this proposed initiative. Five days of hearings in Toronto does not do justice to those from across Ontario who want to be heard on this issue.

“Any fundamental philosophical change like this tax incentive demands a genuine opportunity for public input. We trust that the views of our members will be given due consideration on this matter.”

This letter is signed by Val Alcock, president of the provincial body of Retired Teachers of Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately three minutes per caucus, and I’ll start with the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you for your presentation. In their letters to me, the Minister of Education and the Premier indicated that complying with the UN’s demand would remove from the public education system at least \$300 million per year; there were some estimates as high as \$700 million. They also talked about how this funding—it says, “Extending funding to religious private schools would result in fragmentation of the education system in Ontario and undermine the goal of universal access to education.”

Can you give us some examples, or at least one example, of some of the needs in your own school within the publicly funded system which are going unmet at the present time?

Ms Kramer: I’d like to say that in our school we make an effort to meet the needs of all the children, and we do the best with what we have. I work in a school where we have two special education classes and we do have children who have special needs. In some cases, they require a one-on-one scenario, which is very, very difficult for us to provide in terms of staffing. We are in positions right now where—for example, in our grade 6 class for next year, which will be the class I’ll be teaching, there are no social studies resources, and I have just put in my wish list for the two textbooks I would need that will allow me to cover the program. These textbooks cost \$30 each, so that’s \$60 per student. The only way we’re going to have that money is if parents in our community raise the money. We simply don’t have it in our budget. I was lucky enough to get science resources last September, and it was because our parents raised the money to give us those books. We are not being funded adequately.

1350

The Chair: Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: But Ms Kramer, M^{me} Ecker claims she has given over \$2 billion of extra funding. The Premier

said that. Mr Hudak said the same thing this morning. How could this money just simply disappear? Are you eating it up somehow on your own? Are you giving it to somebody else?

Ms Kramer: We have very nice lunches. I’m not sure of the figures. I was listening to a professor speaking on the CBC just the other morning. She had done some research about the provincial testing and the figure she used was \$30 million for provincial testing for grades 3, 6 and 9. Her argument, if I can paraphrase a bit of what she said, was that the testing is not in the interests of good education, that it does not identify whether children can in actual fact read or write appropriately or whatever. But \$30 million—it’s unbelievable that kind of money could be just blown away on a week of testing.

Mr Marchese: I understand. Just another quick question: I want to follow up on that, but I want to ask you another question regarding the hearings. Is it your view that the eight days we’re getting for these hearings—most of the hearings end around 4:30, 5 or 6 in Toronto—might be adequate enough, that it allows all of you or most of you or many of you who have these concerns to be heard, or do you think the government should have permitted more hearings, hearings that would also go beyond the hour when most people are working?

Ms Kramer: Absolutely. As I said at the beginning, I wouldn’t be here had my federation not been willing to support my day here. I was one of the very fortunate people, of those who had signed and asked for an opportunity to speak, to be chosen. We, as Ontarians, deserve the right to say our piece on this issue. I’m not just a teacher. I’m a mom and my kids have gone through the system. I still have a son in high school. I am speaking for them, not just for the children in my class. We need to have these hearings right through the summer. There are all kinds of people who have things to say and have a right to be heard.

The Chair: Mr O’Toole.

Mr O’Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation. You are being heard, and I hope you’re speaking on behalf of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario. I’m not sure how many positions there would be, if they would be different from each area, but I do want to put a couple of things on the record that are important since you read a couple of comments into the record.

I have a copy of a 2001 letter by Mr McGuinty. In fact, in that letter he basically says, “Ideologically, I’m not opposed to funding for Jewish schools and/or Christian schools, religious schools.”

Michael Bryant said in the Toronto Star, May 12, “I can’t suck and blow on this tax credit.” He’s a member of the Liberal Party. “I’ve got to support this. It’s a step in the right direction of equity. So I support it.” That’s within his own caucus and he said it on both sides.

The last one, Mr Kwinter’s here and this is to be on the record, “I’ve always supported full funding for faith-based schools. There should be some recognition in the

provincial tax regime, and I'm personally delighted that that's happened. I don't think anyone accepts the argument that Catholic schools should be funded and the others not." That was Mr Kwinter on May 24.

What I'm saying here is that you're hearing two different positions, and neither one is accurate or true that I've heard—inconsistently. I would expect to hear a unified voice from the four or five different individual teacher federations and professional associations. If there's a variance between those eight or nine organizations—of which I'm sure we'll hear exactly the same points.

I believe we should be hearing from independent schools from multi-faith and multicultural backgrounds. That is appropriate. I think there are eight days of public hearings and over 100 different opinions that will be heard.

I can tell you, I've been a trustee since 1982, and it was an issue then. It was an issue when Bill Davis did it. For someone to say this has never been an issue, they just haven't been paying attention.

So I just want to put it on the record, one last thing that has to be on the official transcript of this afternoon's meeting: has your board received more funding this year than last year, adjusted for number of pupils, enrolment? The answer to that is yes.

Mr McGuinty: No, it's not.

Mr Bradley: No, it's not.

Mr Kennedy: No, it's not.

The Chair: Order.

Mr O'Toole: If you think—they say there's \$2 billion removed from education—

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: You actually send me the documents that demonstrate it, because Gerard Kennedy can't do math.

The Chair: Mr O'Toole, you have to pose the question, sir. You're out of time.

Ms Kramer: I'd like my opportunity to respond to what I felt was your first question, and that was the issue of religious schools, or religious groups of children being looked after in terms of funding in this province.

I would like to draw your attention to the presentation that was made by, and I don't remember the gentleman's name, but someone from Eden Christian School here in St Catharines who presented this morning. He spoke very, very highly of the co-operative venture between the Niagara school board and Eden Christian School.

I believe that throughout the public system in Ontario we can meet the needs of every child in this province, and we can, in this example, meet the needs of a religious group within a given school or within a school that is part of the board jurisdiction.

I do not see the need for separate funding for private schools. All children can be taken care of in the public system.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your presentation.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Chair: Mr O'Toole has raised a factual question. I wonder if we could refer it to the researcher with the committee. Mr O'Toole has asked a question around funding for the Niagara area. I'd like to submit it to research, and for the benefit of the committee—we have research capacity here—allow him to check this against what the allocation is for this area. It shows a cut of about \$115 per student in this area, \$1,200 in the last five years. For the sake of this discussion, can the research department do that?

The Chair: You can request that from the research officer.

Mr Kennedy: OK. Thank you very much.

Mr O'Toole: On the same point, if I may, I would like to also put on the record that there was a superintendent of the Niagara board this morning who made a presentation that misrepresented the actual numbers.

Interjections.

Mr Kormos: That's slanderous.

Mr O'Toole: I want this on the record.

The Chair: I'm going to bring this to an end. Order.

ERIE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Erie Christian Academy board of directors.

Interjections.

The Chair: Order. There are 15 conversations. Mr O'Toole, order, please.

On behalf of the committee, sir, welcome. Please state your name for the record, and you have 20 minutes for your presentation.

I'm sorry for the disorder, but that's about the best that I can order. Go ahead.

Interjections.

The Chair: Order, please.

1400

Mr Ron Gray: Thank you, Mr Chairman, for this opportunity to speak on behalf of many of the parents of more than 100,000 students attending independent schools all across the province of Ontario.

My name is Ron Gray. I'm listed as a board member at Erie Christian Academy in Fort Erie, among other involvements that will become evident as I continue. As a retired educator, I have found that they don't really want you to get bored. They simply place you on boards.

These parents will certainly appreciate the proposed tax rebate as some recognition and justice for exercising their parental choice in the very foundational area of education, so related to culture, religion and heritage.

Before I expand on this, let me explain that I am coming here today from a very broad educational and community involvement background. While I am listed in the program as a board member of ECA, a small but rapidly growing—about 30% per year now—independent school in Fort Erie that started only 15 years ago and is facing repeated physical plant expansion as it approaches 100 students, now in my retirement years I am also on the board of two much larger schools in the Toronto area

and, before retirement, was employed at two different independent schools in Ontario. I continue to teach an occasional university modular course in statistics and am serving for the second time as president of the Rotary Club of Fort Erie.

In an education career spanning more than 45 years, I have been a teacher and administrator in both public and independent high schools, in both public and private colleges and universities, in institutions in both Canada and the United States, as well as overseas. My educational background includes a BA, MA and doctoral degrees from major universities. Furthermore, throughout my career, I have been involved in teacher education for both public and independent schools.

During 13 years in Manitoba, I was an adjunct professor at the University of Manitoba all the time that I was academic dean, and then president of Canadian Nazarene College, an institution associated with the University of Manitoba. Also, when my daughter was in public school, I was the western vice-president of the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation. I've heard speakers from a lot of these groups here today and I understand where each is coming from because of this background and involvement.

I genuinely wish we could get beyond all the straw men, myths, scare tactics, biases, vested interests, and loaded political rhetoric that I have heard today from all sides and focus instead on essential philosophy. Therefore, I shall make only a couple of comments to add to the many details we have heard today and then close more with major general philosophical concerns.

On the cost issue, I would simply like to say—and it is not really about money—if parents enrolled their 100,000 independent school students in the public system for this coming September, it would cost the public system vastly more than the \$300 million in this budget proposal.

Secondly, the religious issue: it is not really about religion either. If we followed the arguments of some today, obviously the separate school system should be dismantled. But we all know that can't happen.

Therefore, the issue is really pluralism and parental choice in education. Independent schools are diverse, both within individual schools and across schools, not just religious priorities, but style and method of learning. I think of Waldorf schools. I think of Montessori schools. I sit with educators constantly representing such diverse groups, not just Christian schools but representatives from Jewish schools, from Sikh schools and so forth.

I think we need to look beyond Ontario. I understand the history and tradition of Ontario, so I'm not just harking back to my years in Manitoba. We need to look at other provinces and at other countries that have managed inclusion of diversity and pluralism within educational choice.

I've lived in Ontario a total of 14 of the years since I left Manitoba in 1978. I have been involved on the board of the Ontario Federation of Independent Schools, OFIS, and its predecessor, OAIS over the past 20 years. While my personal independent school involvement has always been in Christian institutions, I have deliberately avoided

seeking government recognition and financial help through any of the religious organizations, such as ACSI, the Association of Christian Schools International, because of a strong belief in the justice of government action for all groups, regardless of religious, philosophical, cultural or needs focus in our pluralistic society.

Integration is the only possible way that we can achieve the kind of pluralistic society that we like to talk about and revere in terms of some of the things that are done by different cultural groups. Segregation, separation, it seems to me, becomes more and more the necessary facet in public education, as it can't favour particular points of view.

I like to think—and I've thought for a lot of years—that Canada, if it really moved ahead with the concept of a pluralistic society, could set an example that isn't likely to be seen in North America elsewhere. We could see a prototype of what is really needed in a pluralistic society, not aping the United States' sharper and sharper separation of church and state, for instance, but recognizing that alternatives are good. After all, Canada has recognized two major cultural groups and has certainly, in those two cultural groups, recognized the importance of education as foundational in the protection of those, as well as language, of course.

I would like to make the plea that we will have the highest-quality, lowest-cost education, the most thorough education and a true pluralistic education without concern for some kind of racial bias or religious bias or something of that nature. It has been said enough times here today that these independent schools do not try to be exclusive. We do teach inclusiveness. We try to emulate involvement in society in broad terms.

I'd like to close with a simple appeal that we seize this opportunity to walk into a kind of vision for a future of parental educational choice where the real vested interest lies with parents rather than to continue with the opt-out choice misnomer of a past era.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have three minutes per caucus.

Mr Marchese: I've got two questions for you. To your knowledge, does the school or schools that you were a part of shut anyone out because they might be gays or lesbians? Would they, if you knew they were gays or lesbians? Or, to your knowledge, does your school or do schools that you've been part of shut anyone out who might have had a disability, mental and/or physical, or other religions, for that matter?

1410

Mr Gray: By and large, it's an open opportunity as long as the parents and the child understand the framework within which the school operates. I don't know of specific questions or issues raised about homosexuality, for instance. I certainly know there were different religious backgrounds among the student body.

Mr Marchese: So if I have a disability and I come to your school and I want to get in, it will probably be OK.

Mr Gray: We have tried to make it disability-accessible and that kind of thing. We have even tried to

meet special needs when that's possible. If it isn't possible, if we don't have the capacity, I would expect the school to say, "We can't do the best job for you in that kind of special situation." I certainly have seen some cases where we have been able to do that.

Mr Marchese: You see, that's part of the difficulty some people are expressing, that they're not as open as our public system is. Our public system accepts everybody—and must and ought to. That's the point of our public system, that it accommodates anyone irrespective of any of the problems we've got. If there's not enough money, we have to lobby as parents to say, "Get the money in order to address those needs."

Mr Gray: But obviously a larger system is much more able to cope with some of those very special situations. If a parent insisted on coming to a school, we'd probably endeavour to help, but invariably a very special case has to be handled in another way. We've worked with the public system on—

Mr Marchese: But you do see the problem of exclusivity here, do you not, in terms of the way you—

The Chair: We've run out of time. I have to go to the government side.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): Thank you for your excellent presentation. Recently I was on a phone-in program and the concern of most of the phoners was how many of these students might move over. That seemed to be the running concern. You're from Manitoba, or at least spent a fair amount of time there, and I believe it was in 1989 that they went to a grant system, which maybe would be more attractive than a tax credit; at least that's what I'm hearing. Their shift was, as I understand, from 5% to 6.6% over something like a 10-year period, and BC had a similar shift, from something like 7.1% to 8.5%.

The big concern here seems to be—at least what I'm picking up—that there is going to be this massive movement to the independent schools and therefore in that way undermine—I see that with the tax credit it's going to be like any other tax cut. They're going to go out and spend it on all kinds of gizmos and services, and stimulate the economy and there'll be more revenue coming into the province. But I come back to this shift. I can appreciate where they're coming from. In your opinion, in your experience, having been in Manitoba, what kind of shift would you expect in Ontario with this policy?

Mr Gray: I wouldn't want to try to be a prophet, but I'm confident, looking at other situations and even at other countries, that the shift will certainly not be damaging to the public system. A great many fears are put forward, but those are among, I think, the straw men that don't deserve to be raised.

Mr Galt: Probably in this neighbourhood of what's happened in other provinces?

Mr Gray: Very manageable, I would assume, yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Galt. We'll have to go to the official opposition.

Mr McGuinty: Thank you, sir, for your presentation. I've always acknowledged that there's a fairness issue

here in the province of Ontario, given that one denomination is receiving funding, unlike the NDP which refuses to recognize there's a fairness issue here. But I've always said at the same time that in order for us to address this—politics is the art of the possible. You must establish priorities and you have to take some difficult decisions.

The first priority for me and for our party would be to address the serious damage caused to public education by this government during the course of the past six years, and that's a system, of course, that must, by law, accommodate all children of all stripes, and 96% of our kids are going to those schools.

When we address the fairness issue, I think there's a very important principle that must obtain and inform any such solution. It's quite simply that public dollars cannot be invested in private schools. Earlier today we learned something very interesting about this Eden school which I found rather remarkable. The concept is one where the public education system finds accommodation within, so that we're spending public dollars on diversity, we're spending public dollars to promote pluralism within the public system. Would you comment on that approach, why you might speak in favour of it or against it?

Mr Gray: I'm very familiar with Eden before and after the change. That is one possibility that has received a lot of attention. It certainly goes some distance, but it still leaves much to be desired on the part of many parents. That would not satisfy all parental choice, by any means. At this point it has only been one school; it really hasn't been anything that's spread province-wide. The independent school movement is much broader and wider than that. It seems to me a much wiser choice to use something that is in place rather than trying to supplement the system when it really doesn't do fully what a parental group would want. I know a lot of parents, I know students and parents in my church, who have their students in Eden, so I'm fairly familiar with it.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation.

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Chair: I'm seeking unanimous consent that E. Mitchinson, who was accused by Mr O'Toole of being a liar, be permitted to attend at the microphone and respond to those slanderous and scurrilous comments by Mr O'Toole.

The Chair: Mr Kormos, I'm not going to entertain that as a point of order. I'm going to go to the next presenter.

BETTY KERMAN

The Chair: I would ask Betty Kerman to come forward. State your name for the record, please, and then you have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Ms Betty Kerman: Ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee, thank you for inviting me here today to present. I'll just wait until my speech has been distributed. You will find in the third sentence that there is a

spelling error. It says “ben” instead of “been.” I was typing this at 1:30 this morning.

Why am I here? Very simply, I want to add my voice to those who openly criticize the Harris government’s proposal to fund private schools.

I am a strong public school supporter and a defender of fair and equitable education for all Ontario students, regardless of their race, creed or religion.

My entire family has been educated in the Ontario public school system. That includes a PhD, a lawyer and three others who have all graduated from Ontario universities.

About 10 years ago I accompanied my husband to England on a sabbatical to Cambridge University. Both my son and my middle daughter were enrolled in the state school system there for that year. During that time I came to realize the degree to which a government would proceed to create and endorse an elitist system and create class divisions within that society by using the school system to their advantage. By denigrating the school system, called state schools there, and their teachers, Mrs Thatcher’s Tories worked hard to steal opportunities for success for the youth of Britain.

1420

Is that now what’s happening here in Ontario? John Snobelen, years ago—and I might add that that mighty defender of education had at least a grade 10 or grade 11 education—told us that the public school system was broken. The Tories are certainly doing their best to ruin an education system that was envied by many countries worldwide. Even the United Nations calls us the best country in the world, based on our standard of life, and has done so for the past several years.

Why is a political party so anxious to sell out our public education system? What do they expect to gain? Unfortunately the current government is bankrupting the public school system and now wants to hand over the much-needed funding for private profit. How sad. Our forefathers would have been appalled and outraged. Think of Egerton Ryerson. I wonder what my old friend former Minister of Education Tom Wells would have had to say about this.

Other countries, particularly the United States, are plowing money into their school system while we bleed ours dry. At least the citizens of England woke up and voted Mrs Thatcher and the Tories out, with their attitude to state-funded education along with them. They certainly were trounced again yesterday in the general election, where they were handed the largest defeat ever.

Wake up, Ontario. Be aware of the plans of this Tory government. This government has been promoting an agenda of a standard curriculum, testing and assessment throughout all schools in Ontario. In this publicly funded system, certified teachers must teach the designated curriculum, assess and write a standard report card. All of these requirements are mandated by the Minister of Education. In the private school system, it is not a requirement to hire provincially certified teachers and they don’t have to fully implement the Ministry of

Education’s curriculum. Their requirements will be set by the Minister of Finance, not the Minister of Education.

Bill 45 also has no restrictions, so funding could go to private companies or to schools outside Ontario as long as the parents reside in Ontario. This tells me as an Ontario taxpayer that some of my hard-earned money could go to an American school, maybe even a Colombian school, with the drug trade. How will this affect world trade and all those who have fought to keep education off the trade talks table? What a Pandora’s box has been created.

Public education is fundamental to our Canadian society and our democracy. Public education should be diversified and allow for all children to learn under one roof. We live in a pluralistic society, a cultural mosaic. In order to understand, appreciate and tolerate others, which is the Canadian way, it is essential that young students not become isolated from one another and ghettoized based on religious or cultural differences. To subsidize the rich and religious fundamentalists simply because they wish to exclude other views in society invites civil friction.

Ninety-five per cent of our population is educated in a publicly funded system. What is to be gained by enticing people to move to the private system? For every child who leaves the system, the public school system loses \$7,000. Already the public school system is seriously underfunded, and this will only worsen the situation and become more detrimental to the education of Ontario’s youth. No less than our future is at stake.

When \$7,000 comes out of the system and \$3,500 is given to a private individual, what happens to that other \$3,500? Funds are given to school boards based on enrolment. If the enrolment decreases, the funding for all the schools in that board is reduced and everything in the school will be reduced, including teachers, supplies, transportation, heating, custodial maintenance, and the list goes on. Every aspect of the school is based on the number of students enrolled. Over time you will see fewer teachers, less money and less students. A school, which was once healthy and productive, will fall below its designated capacity and will be forced to close, all thanks to funding being diverted from the public education system to go to a private education system.

Many of the private schools that will be subsidized are not quality schools. As I mentioned earlier, there are no provincially legislated standards for these schools. Private schools up to grade 8 are not regulated. Only those secondary schools which are awarding secondary school diplomas are regulated. What will happen when these students enter an Ontario college or university?

Janet Ecker has stated that these are issues that will have to be looked at. Isn’t that kind of putting the cart before the horse once again? What direction is this government really taking? Where is the balance and in-depth research? Where is the common sense in all of this? Education should not be like making widgets. It takes patience, time, nurturing and building young minds, step by step.

Why does Bill 45 have to be hurried so quickly through the Ontario Legislature? This is the biggest change in our educational policy in the last century. This Bill 45 needs broad public debate, not just a few days. To really understand the feelings of the majority of Ontarians, why not have a public referendum on funding private schools under the existing Tory legislation for referenda?

A final message to this Tory government: our entire future here in Ontario hangs in the balance—ours educationally, yours politically.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately three minutes per caucus.

Mr Maves: If I may, in your submission, on page 1, you talked about, “This government has been promoting an agenda of a standardized curriculum, testing and assessment throughout all schools in Ontario.” Obviously, you believe that should be applied to the independent schools.

Ms Kerman: Yes, I do.

Mr Maves: You also said that the publicly funded system has certified teachers—which is done by the Ontario College of Teachers, as you would know—who teach the designated curriculum, both of which you support?

Ms Kerman: I do.

Mr Maves: You also talked about assessment and the writing of a standard report card. That’s not in the independent schools. At least they should have the same standard report card?

Ms Kerman: Yes, I think they should have the same report card as well.

Mr Maves: OK, so all of those things—the standardized curriculum, testing and assessment, the teachers certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, teaching a designated curriculum, which you support, and assessing and writing a standard report card—you’ve told me you support. But earlier you said the Tories are doing their best to ruin an education system. It is the Tories that brought in every one of those reforms which you just said you support. I’m just curious how you would square that up.

Ms Kerman: In the last few years, I have found that the Tories have also taken \$1.8 billion from our students in the public education system. We have a lower number of teachers in our system now. They have cut funds for special education, they have cut funds for transportation, they have cut heating funds, and I do believe that this really has been very detrimental to the students in Ontario.

Mr Maves: We will debate, as we often do with the members opposite. We will say that we spent \$12.8 billion in 1995 and we spend almost \$14 billion now on education, but that’s a cut in everyone’s eyes, the Liberals and yourself. I understand that. I’ll agree to disagree with you on that, OK? But all of those other issues—the standardized curriculum, the testing and assessment throughout all schools, certified teachers through the college, a designated, stronger curriculum and a standard

report card—all are Tory reforms and all of those you support.

1430

Ms Kerman: I support the curriculum to a degree. I’ll have to clarify that. I have been in teaching since 1961. I have gone through a lot of changes in teaching: Tories, Liberals, NDP and back to Tories again. I am not a person who opposes change; not at all. What I do oppose, is changing things so very quickly. This is exactly what the Tories have done. They have changed the curriculum so fast they haven’t even thought about the development of the child. There are children who are in that curriculum right now who cannot handle the situation because developmentally they are not ready for that particular curriculum.

Mr Kennedy: I know you said this is one of the biggest changes in this century, and I think what not everybody is aware of is that this is a wide-open back door to public education. It has very little to do with religious schools. Any kind of school that anybody wants to set up will, for the first time in North America, be funded by a state or provincial government. There is no other state or provincial government that offers funding on this open-ended basis. Is it right to assume that that’s the kind of broad problem that you identified when you said that this is the biggest change facing—

Ms Kerman: Yes.

Mr Kennedy: I think part of the discussion we heard this morning ignored what is the majority part of this bill. The bill actually says that anyone in the province who sets up any kind of school will get funding, and it actually gives more money to places that aren’t set up with religious intentions in mind. It gives more money to places in fact that might start up in the future because it really does that kind of encouragement.

You’re familiar already with the education that you’ve seen. What kind of damage would it be if 10 or 15 or 30 students and the funding they have—I guess one of the things that maybe isn’t clear from the government’s presentation is, students aren’t all the same. Take \$7,000 away; there are some kids who need a lot more help and some who need a lot less. When that money leaves, it is leaving with some of what some of the kids left behind require. Can you comment on that?

Ms Kerman: You’re absolutely right. Not every child is a \$7,000 child. I have some children in my classroom who are \$1,200 children because they come to school ready to learn and really all I have to do is prompt them a little bit.

With the children who have already left my school this year, we are down 1.8 teachers. That means that our classrooms now are going to be bigger. We have lost special education classrooms. We have lost special education support for those children in our classrooms, which means that our classrooms are going to have to deal with those children in the classroom. I just got my 27th child in my classroom today. That’s in senior kindergarten.

I don't have money supplied to me to support some of these children for the things I need to teach them. A lot of that money comes out of my personal account now. If you'd just rephrase the question, perhaps I could clarify a little bit more.

Mr Kennedy: Just very briefly—

The Chair: I'm sorry, we've run out of time.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Chair, I have another half a minute. I'd like to use it, please.

The Chair: I'll give you half a minute.

Mr Kennedy: Would you agree with me that it is destructive to the confidence of people in public education to see the government endorsing a private system—

Ms Kerman: Oh, absolutely.

Mr Kennedy: —with no conditions on them, and yet you have these central, Soviet-style things you've got to respond to in your classroom?

Ms Kerman: Absolutely, I agree with that.

Mr Marchese: Betty, thank you for your presentation. You've covered a lot. I want to make one comment and then a question. The first comment is that it is good that you identified that the person who made this change is the taxman, the Minister of Finance. This is a tax credit, having nothing to do with the Minister of Education. So all these other questions we are asking of them don't really apply because the Minister of Education wasn't ready. She hasn't gotten her head around it. I don't think she supports it, because she was opposed to it initially. So there's confusion in terms of what the taxman has proposed and the implications it has on the educational system. That's why so many people are a bit confused and angry.

We New Democrats don't support funding for religious schools or for the non-denominational schools. We think both are not the right way to go.

But I have a procedural question on which I want to ask your opinion. In the past, we three political parties used to divide equally the number of people we could select to come before our committees. So we're divided 25% Tories, 25% Liberal, 25% NDP, and 25% the Chair would select randomly, which is standard practice. They changed that by fiat the other day. Mr Hardeman announced the change.

The change they made says, "Witnesses shall be scheduled according to lists provided to the clerk by each member of the subcommittee." These are magnanimous. They give the opposition parties one extra person because they're nice people. So they get to have eight nominations, they get to have five and we get to have three. But under the previous kinds of principles we had more nominations, so they're stacking the deck is the point I've made.

What do you think about why this government might have wanted to feel the need to have more of a say about who would come here?

Ms Kerman: I can only state what happened to me. I was only called yesterday, at 1:30 in the afternoon, and was told that I had to make my plans and my decision by 3:30 yesterday afternoon.

I'm a worker; I work full-time. I had to really hustle to do that. I feel, if we had a longer period of time and more people come to make these presentations, that we would better serve the people of Ontario. I think we have 12 million people who live here in Ontario, and it was probably Mr O'Toole who said there are at least 100 people who are going to come here to make presentations.

What percentage of people in Ontario are going to be able to come to make presentations for 12 million people? Why don't we have this a little bit more open so that we have every community in Ontario making presentations, every voice in Ontario making presentations?

The Chair: Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon. We've run out of time.

BROCK UNIVERSITY

The Chair: Our next presentation is from Brock University. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Dr David Atkinson: Thank you very much, Mr Chair. My name is David Atkinson. I am the president and vice-chancellor of Brock University here in St Catharines, Ontario.

First, allow me to thank the committee members for the opportunity to provide my thoughts on the recent Ontario budget. Given the very limited time I have, and given that I am here in my capacity as president of Brock University, I will limit my remarks to how the Ontario budget impacts on my own university, and I am not going to talk about tax credits. Necessarily, what I say about Brock will have some relevance for other of Ontario's universities.

First, let me say that the recent budget announced is a good one for Brock University and it is a good one for Ontario's universities. All of you, I am sure, are aware of the challenges associated with the double cohort, which is now only a little over two years away. We must not forget the challenges associated with the growing demand, generally, for university education in Ontario. There will be an additional 50,000 students flowing into Ontario's universities in two years' time.

We all recognize that Ontario's universities play a critical role in preparing our students to live and work in a world that grows more complex with each passing day. We also appreciate the role of Ontario's universities in doing the research and development so necessary for the well-being of the province, economic and otherwise.

My remarks in this presentation are divided into three parts: first, the positive news of the budget for the universities; second, some of the financial challenges we continue to confront; and third, the impact of accountability legislation on Ontario's universities.

First the good news. There were a number and are a number of very important announcements in the budget for the universities. Most important of these is the commitment to multi-year funding in the amount of \$220 mil-

lion for the period 2001-02 to 2003-04. I cannot overestimate the importance of knowing what government funding will be for the next three years. We will now be able to begin implementing our plans for growth. In Brock's case, an institution of 11,450 full- and part-time students, we are committed to growing by 1,900 full-time students, which for us constitutes an enormous challenge.

Also important is that we shall get full average cost per student. For many years some Ontario universities, including Brock, struggled with below-average funding. That this had consequences for quality goes without saying.

1440

Finally, I wish to express appreciation for the special \$100 million made available for deferred maintenance at Ontario universities, although quite frankly we need much more. Our campuses are aging, and there is no question that maintaining our campuses is ever more challenging.

This is the good news, and I wish to congratulate the government of Ontario for its initiative, especially when we know there were limitations on what might be done. I must recognize the Honourable Dianne Cunningham, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, Deputy Minister Dr Kevin Costante, and Assistant Deputy Minister Dr David Trick for their hard work on behalf of Ontario universities.

At the same time, however, we must recognize that there are challenges ahead of us and that there were things that this budget did not contain. I offer these observations not as a criticism but as issues to be considered for future deliberation. In no particular order they are, first, the issue of unfunded students.

It is a fact that many Ontario universities, including Brock, already have students for whom they receive no provincial funding. Remedying this situation is the highest priority for Ontario's universities. I will acknowledge that Brock is better off than some universities, the result of the equity funding and accessibility funding flowed by the government over the last few years. These increases were important for us and have made a huge difference to our operation. But other universities did not receive this funding and they are not anywhere near as fortunate.

We must remember that everything comes down to quality. There has been much discussion about where funding for Ontario's universities stands in relation to that of universities in other Canadian jurisdictions. My intention is not to debate the validity of this assessment. I only wish to make the point that we could be doing a whole lot better if we are serious about creating the best province in Canada to live and work.

Second, some comments about the funding announcement: the announcement in the budget indicated that grant transfers would increase by 1.7%, 3.9% and 12.5% over the next three years. These increases mirror the anticipated growth in university enrolment, as determined from the individual enrolment plans of the province's 17

universities. But there are a number of problems with this model.

First, 1.7% is not nearly enough in the first year. It will be regrettable if the obvious and major support for universities demonstrated in the government's budget is compromised by the fact that a number of universities will be cutting faculty and unit budgets for next year in order to balance their overall budgets. This, it seems to me, is not the right message and does little to address growing public anxiety over the double cohort. In other words, "Will there be a place for my son or daughter in Ontario's universities in the year 2003?" Brock will balance its budget next year without cutting faculty and unit budgets. There will be no position losses and no programs will be reduced. We do this, however, without any sort of surplus, the "rainy day" money needed to deal with the unexpected. Our budget for next year, which exceeds this year, for the first time, \$100 million, plans to have a surplus of less than \$10,000. This truly is a balanced budget, in the full meaning of the words, and is, quite frankly, no way to run a \$100-million enterprise. This situation continues to be of enormous concern for our board.

Second, Brock, along with other Ontario universities, is literally being killed by energy costs and by even modest salary increases. Indeed, nowhere in the current budget is allowance for unavoidable cost increases that will inevitably erode funding that has been specifically provided in the current budget for enrolment growth. Energy alone cost Brock University \$500,000 more this year than last. This cost amounts to eight new faculty positions that could be teaching students. Unlike other areas of government spending, the universities have received no earmarked funding for utility increases.

Third, we have very much welcomed the SuperBuild initiative. Brock received \$15.6 million towards the Brock 2000 Project, which in total is valued at over \$43 million. We did not, however, receive any additional funds for operating these buildings, which will come on stream in January 2002. Costs are about \$5.00 a square foot, which for us amounts to another \$500,000 a year, or \$250,000 for the half-year—another eight faculty positions.

Finally, there is a real problem with the multi-year nature of the funding announced in the budget, because while the universities all have plans for growth, there is considerable chance that some institutions will overshoot. This is not anyone's fault; it is the result of where students in the final analysis decide to go. Thus, we are left with a situation where a university—and I expect Brock to be one of them—may take more than its planned students, with the likelihood that for next year we shall have students who are once again unfunded or underfunded. The multi-year nature of the funding should recognize the dynamic and unpredictable dimension of growth.

A final item I would like to talk about pertains to the government's announced accountability legislation. I mention it here not only because it affects how we budget

but also because it has serious consequences for the autonomy of the universities.

First, allow me to make one thing very clear: universities must be accountable—to government, to their students, to those who fund them, to the general public. Accountability and transparency make universities more responsive and, in the long run, better places.

Our concern is with how they are accountable. The intended legislation groups universities with other agencies and institutions that receive public funding, notably hospitals and municipalities. I would suggest this is a mistake.

It is generally not appreciated how much universities depend on other than the provincial government for funding. As I said previously, we have just determined the Brock budget for 2001-02, which for the first time in history will exceed \$100 million. Of this, however, only 41 cents of every dollar comes from the provincial government; the remainder comes from student tuition, ancillary activities, contract work, donations, other levels of government and anywhere else I can get it. As well, universities have many ancillary organizations attached to them—research units, arts organizations, private sector partners and incorporated businesses. The idea of a single business plan for such a complicated arrangement of organizations, as required by the accountability legislation, would in my view be of dubious value. We must have the flexibility and we must be trusted to be financially responsible. Indeed, the Ontario universities have consistently demonstrated that they are careful stewards of their funding.

There is in the current budget an element of contradiction. The budget allows us multi-year funding, but disallows any sort of deficit funding. My own board has a policy that the university will never knowingly budget for a deficit. But the fact is that there are occasions when this is necessary. Let me give you a good example. We all know the enormous competition for faculty that is currently going on across North America. In the case of Brock, we have allowed hiring against retirements over the next five years to get a jump on the market. While we know there will be a short-term deficit, we also know that, at the end of five years, the program will be a wash, simply because the salaries of retiring faculty exceed those of entry-level faculty. Under new legislation, this sort of creative planning would not be possible.

It is also the case that we have boards who do a very good job of making us accountable; I ask that they be allowed to do so. If there is to be accountability legislation, I ask that the different sorts of organizations and agencies be identified and treated according to how they individually operate. One size does not fit all. It is simply inappropriate to treat universities in the same way as municipalities.

I realize this has been a thumbnail sketch, but I hope it allows you some appreciation of our universities and the challenges they are confronting. We have come a long way over the last several years in dealing with the financial needs of Ontario's universities. Ontario should be proud of its universities; they do a great job for the

people of Ontario. I only ask that the work to come builds on the good work already completed.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you for your presentation. We have approximately two minutes per caucus, beginning with the official opposition.

Mr Bradley: Thank you very much, Dr Atkinson, for your presentation. One matter of great concern, of course, is accountability, but we know that whenever the government gives money, there is accountability that the government demands, and rules and regulations. That will be an issue for another day.

I also want to express the view that it would have been advantageous, this being a budget bill, if you and other university presidents and community college presidents and others were able to make a presentation separate from the issue which has preoccupied the committee to the largest extent today, and that is the tax credit for private schools.

1450

Let me ask you one question about faculty, because that is a real problem that you're going to face. There is a great demand for faculty. You know you will be seeing a number of retirements over the next few years which will deplete many universities of some very skilled people. In the US, they're looking for people as well. What kind of funding would you require to meet the needs of a competitive field out there in terms of trying to get top-notch faculty to enhance the reputation of the university and serve your students well?

Dr Atkinson: It would be very difficult for me to put a number on it, so perhaps I'll just give you an example. In the high-demand areas—and by high demand I mean high demand for students: information technology, computing, biotechnology, anything in wellness and health, accounting and finance. Currently, for us to appoint a new faculty member right out of graduate school, with no experience, a starting salary would be somewhere in the order of C\$95,000. We have lost three faculty members in those areas this year to American schools who are offering them US\$120,000. It's that kind of environment we are competing in. It is not just the brain drain to the south, by the way. We also have another kind of brain drain going on which is even, in some ways, more ominous, and that's the brain drain from the east to the west. Alberta and British Columbia are routinely now picking off the best faculty members from Ontario's universities. Certainly universities the size of Brock are very, very vulnerable.

So the answer to your question is, for us to be truly competitive in what is now an international marketplace—it used to be that faculty came and they stayed for 30 years. Now they can sell their wares anywhere internationally. We would need substantially more money than we currently have. Some disciplines—classics is not exactly a competitive area right now, but in IT, biotech, it is causing us enormous concern, and we lose each year as many faculty members as we hire.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. We'll move on to the third party.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Mr Atkinson, for your presentation. I've got to admit, in your first page and a half you almost worried me, because I thought you were going to kill them with kindness. Then it became a little more balanced and I was happy.

Dr Atkinson: Balance is what I do.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate that that was coming. While you touched on many things, of course, you didn't have enough of a—although you mentioned tuition fees. This is a serious issue for us. Tuition fees have skyrocketed 60% over the last years, and for the unregulated programs it's close to 500%. God bless these Tories. You mentioned the double cohort, that there's close to 90,000 students you've got to accommodate by the end of the decade. I don't think this government is putting in enough bucks to deal with that. Aging facilities: I don't think it's enough to deal with that. The faculty loss we're experiencing all over Ontario: I don't think they're doing anything near enough to deal with these issues—the energy costs you mentioned. Portals and Pathways, that study they commissioned, says that what they're giving is simply not adequate.

I want to ask you one question, because it's about to be over. With respect to the income tax cuts, would you be willing to give some of that up or a lot of that up to have more money for the university system?

Mr O'Toole: Ask Jean Chrétien.

Mr Marchese: No, no. Let him—please, John.

Dr Atkinson: Well, now you're asking me the question as an individual taxpayer.

Mr Marchese: Yes.

Dr Atkinson: I'll be quite frank. The universities, despite the generosity of the government in the current budget, are not anywhere close to being where they need to be in order to do the job for Ontario's universities for the future. That's why I came in here saying this has to be the foundation for additional future action on the part of government, regardless of which party in this province establishes the government. Having said that, I think sometimes there needs to be perhaps another look, a more critical look, at the balance between tax reduction and the needs of social and educational programming in the province. The extent to which that should happen is the responsibility of government, sir, and I would suggest it is the responsibility of government to get on with making that decision.

Mr Marchese: They should look at that seriously, then.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. We'll move on now to Mr Maves.

Mr Maves: It's good to see you again, President Atkinson. Enrolment applications this year: how many did Brock receive province-wide?

Dr Atkinson: Brock University is truly the flavour of the month in Ontario. Our first-choice applications have gone up 15.3%. This is the second year in a row in which we have led the province. Quite frankly, our concern, as I said earlier, is that we will overshoot. My real concern is, are we going to have places for them?

Mr Maves: Last year they were up by what percentage?

Dr Atkinson: Up 12.7%.

Mr Maves: And that's part of a province-wide phenomenon, where our applications for post-secondary are up—

Dr Atkinson: Applications continue to go up on a year-to-year basis, but they disproportionately present themselves across the universities. We happen to be in the most favoured category right now.

Mr Maves: So more and more people are applying to college and universities. Good.

Dr Atkinson: Seventy-five per cent of Brock's students come from outside the region.

Mr Maves: That's excellent. Thank you very much also, on page 4, for your support for the need for accountability and transparency. I'll ask a question around the type of legislation. Hospitals and municipalities and colleges and universities: you seem to think we should have separate legislation guiding accountability measures for each of those?

Dr Atkinson: I don't know whether you need separate legislation, but I think within the legislation you need a way of discriminating among the various agencies and institutions that are being held accountable, if for no other reason than that the way in which they do business is radically different. If one looks at hospitals, for example, the majority of funding which goes to hospitals comes from the government and that determines the way in which they operate. In the case of my own university, 41 cents of every dollar comes from the province. A lot of our money comes from the federal government. A lot of it comes from private business activity. So we operate in a very different way. We have to be much more flexible, much more accountable. In fact, I would suggest that your government has encouraged that with universities. The point is, hold us accountable, but provide accountability legislation that does not take away our ability to be flexible.

The Chair: Mr Maves, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

ECUMENICAL STUDY COMMISSION ON EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

The Chair: The next presenter is the Ecumenical Study Commission on Education in Ontario. I would ask the presenter to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome..

Dr John Johnston: My name is John Johnston. Mr Beaubien and committee, as chair of the Ecumenical Study Commission on Education in Ontario, which is composed of officially appointed representatives of the major or main-line denominations in the province, together with our interfaith subcommittee members, and as past chair of the inter-synod committee on public and private education of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, I represent constituencies which are estimated to compose

a very, very large majority of the people living in this province.

The ecumenical study commission and the inter-synod committee are not recently organized organizations but for over two decades have stood for the highest educational principles and have supported the time-tested Ontario school model which has made our educational system second to none in the world. Our inter-denominational commission met regularly with each successive Minister of Education until the present political party took office in 1995. Since that date, only negative responses have been received to the many requests for such a meeting.

We come before you this afternoon appreciating the opportunity to address you but deeply disturbed and increasingly dismayed by what may be viewed as a step-by-step dismantling of public education by our present government. This current proposal to offer tax credits to parents with children enrolled in private schools can only be seen as the latest step to cripple the public school system.

The Premier of this province and the Minister of Education had previously stated that no form of voucher system would ever be introduced. This about-face needs careful scrutiny by a constituency which has never given its approval for such a radical move. I am not one who favours referenda, but I firmly believe that if one were held on this subject, the tax credit proposal would be soundly defeated.

My first comment is that money is certainly being taken from the educational system by the tax credit proposal. If a grant per pupil of \$7,000 or \$6,500, depending on your figuring, is withdrawn from the public schools for every pupil who transfers into the private system and a tax credit is then offered the parent of \$3,500 or so is then offered the parent, then the government is removing a minimum of \$3,500 from the educational budget.

1500

Since the power to levy taxes was removed from trustees in 1997, and since school budgets have been drastically reduced by systematic cuts in provincial grants, in terms of growth, many programs have been curtailed and curricula restricted. It is recognized that a minimum number of pupils is needed for maximum efficiency in our community facilities. Reducing enrolment in a school means less choice of programming, to say nothing of the occupancy costs of buildings—as we've just heard from the last speaker—often older and with vacant spaces, increasing operating costs, qualification increments by staff etc, all of which must be supported within the present per pupil grant

Of much greater importance, I believe, is the recognition that the public school system is the location of most of the programs which seek to meet the needs of those with physical and mental impediments. Private schools do not have to accept such students, who are very expensive to service, unlike public schools, which cannot pick and choose their constituency.

The media have informed Ontarians today that teachers in private schools will not be subject to periodic examination for competency. How can the government justify directing public money into schools over which it has no jurisdiction in this area? Also, private schools are not subject to human rights legislation. Through conversations with individuals who serve with our interfaith subcommittee, one is told of examples of pupils in religious schools who have assumed a "better than thou" philosophy or an "ours is the only way and we have the whole truth" mentality, which cannot help but influence such pupils in later life. I believe that all pupils, irrespective of colour, culture, religion, orientation or language, are best served by studying together in one milieu, namely the public school system.

To those who quote the United Nations declaration that Roman Catholic rights in Ontario are discriminatory, instead of extending public taxes to any group that wants to start a school in order to emphasize a particular ideology or faith, I would suggest one system in which education about religion is taught. This, of course, has long been the position of the Inter Synod Committee on Public and Private Education, as approved by the Ministry of Education and authorized by the Supreme Court. And that's important: it's authorized by the Supreme Court; it's on our books. But we can't meet with the government. It should be the basis for long-term consideration and consultation; the short-term, however, is to oppose any legislation that will balkanize the present educational system, which has served this province well since the days of Egerton Ryerson and which seems to many of our members to be but part of this present scheme by the present government to privatize schools, hospitals, LCBO, the Ontario savings bank, transportation, regulatory bodies etc, which in so many ways is creating a two-tier society in which the chasm between rich and poor becomes ever wider.

In a letter distributed by Adrian Guildemond, the executive director of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Churches, to which most Christian schools belong, it is stated that \$175,000 has already been spent by that organization lobbying the government behind the scenes—and, might I add, unknown completely to the public at large—and that another \$500,000 is being collected in support of tax credits. In light of such activities and the importance of the issue and possible long-term effects, I repeat that it is imperative to have genuine consultation with educationalists, parents, taxpayers and elected officials of the various levels of government, not just a few minutes allotted to a very few people over a period of a very few days. I myself was only phoned yesterday afternoon, informing me that I could have these 20 minutes with you.

It is the right of any group to develop its own school system. Although one finds it difficult to justify, in a multicultural society, having a fragmented system in which each group emphasizes a position which can exclude or denigrate other viewpoints, it is my personal opinion that religious indoctrination is primarily the

responsibility of the home and a particular faith group, not the public school.

Public tax money should only be directed to a public education system which is open to all, which educates all groups together in community, where students learn to respect various viewpoints, which will then prepare them to successfully relate in, and to, our 21st-century society.

Thank you for the privilege of sharing this position of unequivocal opposition to tax credits in Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus.

Mr Marchese: Dr Johnston, I appreciate the presentation and I agree with most of the positions you've taken. The one I have supported for a long time is the one you have emphasized on page 2, which is: "I would suggest one system in which Education about Religion is taught." That is a position that I believe most Ontarians can easily support. It would be good for most young people to understand about religions and that, I think, would make us more tolerant to each other.

What do you say to those other groups, quite a number, who say—the Jewish faith being one, and others who said this morning—"Christianity permeates all of our lives," suggesting that simply talking about religion or learning about religion is insufficient?

Dr Johnston: This is a very simple question to answer. My children went to school with Jewish children, with children who were brought up by the Koran, Hindu children. There is a community there. By introducing Education about Religion, this is enabling those children to appreciate the literature that they are studying, the history that they are studying in terms of how religion has influenced them and the things that are part of the educational system. It isn't teaching indoctrination, Mr Marchese, it is teaching an understanding of the fatality of life as expressed through the studies and the faiths.

Mr Marchese: I'm not sure it was as simple as you say because, while I agree with what you just said, when I talked to a number of people from the Jewish community who were supportive of this initiative, they said, "I'm sorry, just teaching religion is not enough. Our religion permeates our entire lives. Therefore, just to study our religion is insufficient and inadequate." That's why they advocate for a system of their own, where—

Dr Johnston: But, Mr Marchese, Christians say that their faith has affected all of life. Whether they are practising Christians or practising Jews or not, their ethos is part of their educational understanding. This is where the home, this where the synagogue, this is where the church enters the picture. But the public school is not the place to teach that, "This is the way because Father says so."

Mr Maves: I'm not that familiar with your organization. How many members do you have?

Dr Johnston: We represent the Anglican Church of Canada; we represent the United Church of Canada; we represent the Presbyterian Church of Canada; we represent the Roman Catholic Church of Canada, the Baptist federation, the Lutheran Federation. Not on all matters are we always in agreement but, hey, this is the church.

Mr Maves: So would your interfaith subcommittee with the Roman Catholics, if they were here, support your position on repealing Roman Catholic funding?

Dr Johnston: No.

1510

Mr Hardeman: Doctor, thank you for your presentation. I think you mentioned in your presentation that you have concerns about this taking money out of public education. You are aware that in fact the public education funding was \$12.9 billion in 1995 and it is \$13.8 billion this year. I just wanted to make sure we understood—

Dr Johnston: I've heard you say that before, sir, but as a trustee, I know that the money that is being supplied today has caused the school boards to cut out the most essential of programs.

Mr Hardeman: I'd just like to ask you, first of all, are you suggesting that presently there is more than enough religion taught in the public system, that no one should have to make that choice to have other types of education or other choices for the parents?

Dr Johnston: Obviously, you don't realize there is no religion taught in the public schools. There is a program called Education about Religion, which has been approved by the Supreme Court, which is on the books, in which there are the principles set forth in books by the government.

Mr Hardeman: Your position, then, is that's sufficient; no parent should need to make their choice that they want more of something in their children's education than—

Dr Johnston: I firmly believe this. I would say that if the Education about Religion program, whether discrete or not, had been applied, if the government—and I'm talking about the present government—had provided curricula and monies to train teachers in the particular facet, we would not have the problem that we're having today.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Kennedy: Our caucus?

The Chair: I'm sorry. Dr Johnston, I'm sorry; I forgot about the official opposition. I apologize.

Mr Kennedy: We know we are actually top of mind for you, Mr Chair. We take no personal offence whatsoever.

Dr Johnston, I want to ask you about how you see the two dimensions of this. There's been discussion—and you've addressed the religious question. About 70% of the benefit of this tax credit, if you look at it, is actually going to groups who are not being brought forward here today. They're not being contacted in advance and they're not being asked to present themselves. The government wants to kind of, I guess, hide them away a bit. That's private secular schools.

I want to rely a little bit on your experience within the school system and ask you how damaging it could be to have private groups, whether it is companies or other types of groups, operating and offering unregulated edu-

cation, unchecked education of any variety. Because this bill, the one that we have in front of us, is a wide-open exemption to public education. What might that do to the ethic that you're talking about? I think the ethic you're talking about is broader than the religious ethic.

Dr Johnston: One word: awful. It would be a destruction to what we understand as life as we've known it in this province. Let me point out, we talk about, for instance, the Buddhists. All three Buddhist organizations in this province stand with me and what I have said today. They do not want private Buddhist schools.

We've heard from Jewish organizations—they are a minority, but they're nevertheless very much a part of this—who say, “We don't want tax credits.” In my interfaith group—I shouldn't say “mine”—in our interfaith group, we have all of these organizations represented. There is a wide divergence. There is no one group which says, “We want tax credits.” Who wants tax credits are the majority of Jewish schools, as far as I can see, the majority of Christian Reformed or Christian schools and some of the schools who follow the Koran.

To carry this further and to say that persons who are going to do this for profit—and I know schools near Woodville, Ontario, which are being operated for profit. Goodness knows what's being taught, but nevertheless they're for profit. This would destroy, I feel—and the government, by not setting forth regulations which are important—is undermining what we stand for here in Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and I apologize again for forgetting about the official opposition.

Mr Kennedy: Just give us double time next time.

The Chair: Yes. My mistake. I guess a lapse of memory here.

GREG REID

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Ontario Parent Council. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr Greg Reid: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, honoured members of the committee. My name is Greg Reid. I'm the chair of the Ontario Parent Council for education. First and foremost, I am a parent of two boys I'm very proud of, one in secondary school, one in elementary school, in the Niagara region. I've been very active as a volunteer in the Niagara district at the school level, particularly the elementary school level, for the last seven or eight years. My involvement at the school council level led me to my current involvement in the Ontario Parent Council as a parent representative.

I want to point out a couple of things right off the bat. The Ontario Parent Council is currently under a restructuring process. We just had a meeting last week, which was only our second meeting of our full new council. It's comprised of 20 members from all walks of life. All of us have one thing in common: we consider our children's education first and foremost, and volunteer a lot of time

and hours to looking into aspects of our children's education and to volunteering in the school system.

The council as such, when we met last weekend, chose not to take a formal position at this time on the issue of tax credits, the main reason being that we are a council that is tasked with reporting parental concerns and encouraging parental involvement in the education system. We consult with the education minister on issues of parental concern, and as this was felt to be more of an issue of finance or of fiscal concern at this point, and as we did not have it previously scheduled on our agenda, we chose not to take a position at this time. So I'm here as an individual parent today to express my opinions on how this legislation is going to impact my sons in particular.

Let me begin by saying that one thing that did come up in discussion at our council meeting last week was the issue of choice in education. It's an issue that I'm very well ensconced in, having a son who was faced, only a couple of years ago, with a choice of where he wanted to go and what he wanted to do in secondary school education. My son's choice consisted of this: he had a presentation made by the high school principal of the district we lived in. There was a presentation made by a principal from a different district whose school offered a separate curricular program called the international baccalaureate program, and as it offered this program, the school was open to any student for application for the program. The third choice he had in education, when it came time to choose his secondary school, was a Catholic school in Welland, by the name of Notre Dame, with a very good reputation in the community, a proud sports tradition and particularly well known for its computer programs. It has just built a whole wing of the school that's dedicated to computer programs and computer learning.

To say that there's no choice in the education system right now would be a misnomer, but to say that the choices are very, very limited for parents would be a very accurate statement to make. When my son and I attended a grade 8 forum where the principal of the high school from his district was making a presentation, he came away less than happy about the possibility of attending that school. The principal of the school in his presentation made many references to how inadequately prepared he felt the school was in terms of implementing new curriculum, in terms of budgets for things like textbooks. Basically, he left us with a pretty negative impression of what school life would be at that particular school.

1520

The principal of the school my son wound up attending, which offers an international baccalaureate program, was very positive. In the midst of all the change that was going on, the implementation of the new curriculum, all the changes that were taking place in education and at a very rapid pace, he chose to see the glass as half full and advised us in that meeting, in that forum, that they were downloading information as quick as they could from the Internet with regard to new curriculum documents. The

teachers were actively working on them. He felt very upbeat about the potential for a good school year coming up.

My son attended that forum and came away with a much better impression of that school than the original presentation he'd received from the school in his district. At that point he had made up his mind. When he told me that he had made up his mind where he wanted to attend and that he wanted to take on the challenge of this international baccalaureate program, we visited with the principal of the school in our district which we were required to attend and had a meeting with him, a meeting that stretched for over an hour and a half as he tried to dissuade my son from attending this other school.

My son wound up having to sign a document that said that if he were to attend this other school to participate in the international baccalaureate program, he would have to participate in it fully, and if at any time he chose to either drop a portion of the program or drop out of the international baccalaureate program completely, he would have to return to the school of his own district.

That wasn't much of a choice for my son. He didn't see that school as being the best school for his particular interests. He saw the other school as being such. The international baccalaureate program that's offered at the school he's now attending allows for kids to drop out of certain programs and still maintain standing in other particular programs in the IB program without jeopardizing their standing at the school.

Faced with that kind of a choice, he signed the document even though he didn't feel good about it, because it was restricting his choices as he went through the school system. He came away with a clear sense that he didn't really control his own destiny in secondary school education and that it was going to be a very difficult stretch for him because he was now making a commitment that four years out he was going to have to live up to in order to have the choice of what school he wanted to attend.

Ultimately, I became a member of the school council at the school he's now attending. I heard of different situations where parents had children who were entered into private school education in the area at a very well-respected private school, and had chosen to pull their kids out of the private school to go to the public system. So I've seen both sides of the coin.

What galvanized the issue for me mostly was in discussions with other people I've encountered, other friends I have, other people I've encountered being a member of the Ontario Parent Council who also suffered the lack of choice, and as such the school system was not being accountable to them as parents, as taxpayers. They were limited in what response they could have to it.

An individual approached me who was the chair of a school council at an elementary public school in Toronto. He said that he and the principal didn't see eye to eye on some of the terms of the school council, how it operated, operating procedures, meeting procedures. When he said that he was the chair of the council and as such he was going to set the agenda at the pleasure of the council and not at the principal's whim, he was subsequently in-

formed that his children were no longer welcome at the school.

They had found a loophole that, four years before, he had moved outside the district and would now have to move his kids to a different school in September of the following year. Basically he was blackmailed into taking his kids out of the school, a school they had attended for eight years.

Another friend of mine approached me and said—and I've discussed this with a lot of individuals who have come to the same conclusions—he was upset with the public system the way it existed. He wasn't receiving the answers he wanted to receive that he considered adequate to his questions when his grade 7 son was placed in a class with 40 other kids. He did not feel the teacher had time to spend on remedial help with some of the kids, himself included. When this individual went through the proper steps of protocol in registering his concerns—he spoke to the principal of the school and the trustee, he wrote the director of the board—he didn't receive anything back in terms of an adequate description as to why there were 41 kids in this class. He felt he'd run into a brick wall and, as such, he started looking at his options.

Given his economic circumstances, his only option wasn't the well-to-do or, shall we say, higher-priced private school in our area, but it was a Christian college that offered tuitions of approximately \$6,000 for students. When he pulled his son out of the school, it was like he had entered into a black hole. Nobody talked to him from the school. Nobody talked to him from the board. Nobody talked to him from any aspect of public education as to why he left, why his son felt he had to leave to get a better education, what caused him to leave or what it would take to get him back into public education.

At the private Christian school he chose to attend, he very quickly fitted in. The student became very pleased with the education and attention he was getting, with all aspects of school life at this particular academy. When he started telling some of his friends from his old classroom about it and they started spreading the word to their parents, three others followed him in short order, within months of his leaving the school, and not one of those individuals received any form of contact as well from the public education system, from teachers, principals, trustees or board administrators. They just disappeared into the black hole.

In fact, in the last 15 years private school enrolment in Ontario has increased 34%. Despite that, it still only amounts to 5% of the entire student enrolment in Ontario, but it's growing rapidly.

Mr Chairman and committee members, what I'm saying is, given the lack of choice for parents and students in education, given the fact they are told where they have to attend school, under what terms they have to attend school, under what terms they're welcome at those schools in some situations, parents become very upset. They become distraught at the fact they don't feel they are in control of their own children's education. If

anybody here is looking for a reason why children are leaving the public system, in some cases the public system doesn't fit them and it doesn't have the answers they want with regard to their education.

I see this tax credit issue as an opportunity for the public system. I guess I'll relate it a little bit to my business background. I've been in sales and marketing all of my life, and any time I lose a customer or am threatened with losing a customer to a competitor, I'd like to find out why. I'd like to know the circumstances that are causing my customer to consider leaving and what it would take to get him back and retain him as a customer, what would make him happy, if I can answer any questions that may be of concern in order to prevent him from leaving.

The opportunity I see for the public system, given this tax credit situation, is that there's a five-year phase-in period for the tax credit. I consider that a five-year shot across the bow for the public system in terms of being able to say, "We need to develop an immediate and a five-year plan to address why in an independent poll published in the *Globe and Mail* 72% of Ontarians feel their children would get a better education in private school than in public."

1530

These are issues that just aren't going away. The issue of enrolment in private schools is increasing. Given the fact there is now on the table an opportunity for more parental choice in the system, which I happen to agree with, there really needs to be an examination by the public system of why, and if anything good can come out of this entire situation for the public system, it's the recognition that they have an opportunity over five years before this program becomes fully implemented and they can take a look at their situation and say, "Hey, how can we improve? How can we communicate better with the people who are leaving? How can we make it a better situation for all of the students in this province so as to preclude any further decimation of the public system?"

I see the light on.

The Chair: No, no, that's fine, if you're not finished. You've still got approximately five minutes.

Mr Reid: There are a couple of other issues I'd like to address very quickly, the first one being the lack of competition in the school system. I myself was subjected to a principal who chose to deal with a situation I brought to her attention by saying that if I didn't like it, I could remove my son from the school and go anywhere I wanted, that she would sign a release and allow me to do so. I was simply seeking clarification on an issue that occurred in the school classroom. This lack of accountability, this lack of communication with people who are having difficulties with the school system or who ask questions of it and don't get answers is extremely frustrating to parents, and again they feel they're losing control over their own children's education. Given the fact that most parents would probably throw themselves in front of a bullet for their children, it's something that is very concerning to all.

Seventy-two per cent is the number that was published in this poll in the *Globe and Mail*. It was an independent poll, not skewed to any direction, that said 72% of Ontarians feel they would get a better education for their children in the private system than they would in the public system.

I think the breaking point for a lot of parents in the system has been the constant labour disruptions in publicly funded education, particularly in the last five or six years. One of the breaking points for me where I started to seriously question my commitment to publicly funded education came during the strike in 1997, the illegal walkout by teachers at the behest of the unions, when my sons were being used as a political pawn in the negotiations and the ongoing dispute between the federations and the government of the day.

To draw an analogy, you might go back to the baseball strike where the world series was cancelled one year and the attendance subsequently at baseball games has never really recovered in the last 10 years. A lot of parents feel the same way after that strike in 1997, that again they don't have control over their children's education and they feel ostracized by the entire system. They feel disappointed in the system and they start to look for alternatives. They look for choice. They look for ways of getting the best of what they can get for their children out of the system.

I don't want anybody to misconstrue the fact that I give my total support to the publicly funded education system. In spite of the slams I've endured personally and that I have heard from other people from the system, we want to work to make it better. One of the things we think will make it better is to have some accountability brought into the system by allowing parents choice over where their children attend school and, as such, many of us support this tax credit initiative.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr Reid: OK. I just want to summarize by saying that some of the other factors in this budget have not been well publicized, and yet they have a lot of bearing on parents with children in education. My older son is classified in that "double cohort" group. He's currently in grade 10 and will graduate at the same time as the OAC year when double the number of children will graduate in one year. I was very pleased to see in the budget that over \$2 billion has now been collectively invested into expanding post-secondary education in the province—through the SuperBuild Corp and through other initiatives—over \$2 billion expended to make sure that parents and children are confident that there are spaces available. This money investment is going to free up or create 73,000 new spaces in post-secondary education. Initiatives like this are very concerning as well for parents, because there is a lot of conjecture out there about the double-cohort year.

The Chair: I'll give you 30 seconds to wrap up, because we are running out of time.

Mr Reid: As such, this is an issue that bears much more public scrutiny. In spite of all this money being

spent, the concern that parents have about the double-cohort year is that there are adequate numbers of instructors to go along with the spaces that have been created. We are following the issue on a close basis and will continue to do so through the creation of it. I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity to come here today.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Reid: I was under the impression there was 20 minutes.

The Chair: We've used the 20 minutes.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Chair: We have an agenda in front of us where it says the Ontario Parent Council is represented. I'm asking for the Chair, maybe through the staff, to ascertain for us later on whether Mr Reid was here in that capacity; I thought I heard him say that he was not. I know he's a past candidate and so on in political parties and that kind of thing. But in what capacity was he here today? The Ontario Parent Council is a public body. I just want to ascertain whether he was here in that capacity or not.

Mr Reid: Mr Chair, I might clarify that. When I put my name forward, I did it as an individual.

1540

WILLIAM CLARK

The Chair: I would ask Mr William Clark to please come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome.

Mr William Clark: My name is William Clark. I'm a resident of St Catharines, a father, a taxpayer and an educator. I thank you for the opportunity to address this committee, particularly in view of the fact that I'm a teacher in the secondary panel of the public education system. However, I'm here as a private citizen, not as an OSSTF representative. I will be presenting my own views as a taxpayer, a father and an educator.

I entered the educational system in 1973, taught for three years and then was attracted to private industry. After a 25-year career in shipbuilding, specifically the computer management aspect of shipbuilding, I took advantage of the opportunity created by Bill 160 to return to the classroom to teach others how to do what I'd done for 25 years. I thank the government for the opportunity due to the outflow of teachers caused by Bill 160. It should also be noted, gentlemen and ladies, that in the transition from private industry to education my pay package went down significantly and my workload went up. I've seen it from both sides.

I'd also like to reflect on the fact that in 1995 I had the opportunity to speak privately with Mr Mike Harris, our Premier. His wife was the sponsor for a ship that was being christened at my then-employer. At a reception after the ceremony, Mr Harris and I struck up a conversation. It happened to be the day after Brian Tobin announced to the world that he was going to run a plebiscite concerning the faith-based education system in Newfoundland.

I asked Mr Harris if indeed he had the gumption to do that in Ontario, because I reflected that indeed there were four school buses that went by my house in the morning. There were two principals of high schools, one in the Catholic system and one in the Protestant system. Surely there must be some savings to be had by amalgamating all educational systems into one. Mr Harris, bless his heart, said, "The Catholic issue is entrenched in the British North America Act. It is a politically dicey one to attack. However, we are looking at public education and we indeed will shake it up." Ladies and gentlemen, he certainly has kept his word.

The scope of my presentation is to address issues associated with the proposed legislation, Bill 45. In particular, I'm interested in the educational vouchers that are hidden deep within that bill. I'm not going to speak about choice, obligation, commitment, religious freedom, partial funding, full funding, charter of rights, accountability, teacher certification, curriculum, Texas, Milwaukee or any other examples of educational systems that have gone wrong. You'll hear plenty of that from others.

Instead, let me share with you my experiences from the trenches. What's it like to be a teacher teaching in a school under the influence of this government's policies? Because of the changes in the taxation methods, we now have centralized control, decentralized blame. The government controls the money centrally. When things go wrong, the government blames the local school boards, the teachers or the support workers for the problems.

The central, government-controlled public education spending has been reduced by 15% since the current government has taken office, down \$2.4 billion dollars from the extrapolated 1995 levels. The government is now in a position to legally starve public education by virtue of the dreaded funding formula. The local school boards are at the direct mercy of the Minister of Education—or is that the Minister of Finance?

School boards are required to manage their affairs with the funds allocated to them. They may not legally run a deficit. They can't levy taxes; doing so would result in personal fines of up to \$5,000 and other significant consequences. How do the school boards cope with this? They cut programs. They cut staff. They cut services. They cut, cut, cut.

At Collegiate, where I teach, down the street here, our library is rarely open. We don't have a full-time librarian. Until recently, my computer lab was outfitted with significantly old technology, antiques that would have been retired long ago in industry. As for the computer allocation to schools, the funding formula provides for the renewal of computer technology every five years. Each school is allocated one computer for every 10 students plus three labs of 21 computers. Fortunately, my lab was recently upgraded with 21 brand new computers. I was in heaven. But I started out the semester with two classes that each had 30 students. You do the math.

The new curriculum that is being introduced by the government is so significantly intertwined with the

Internet that in order to properly fulfill the requirements of most of the classes—not just computer classes; I'm talking about math class, English class and careers—there really should be an Internet-ready computer on every desk in every room of every school, if we wanted to do our job properly. Yet the government is providing sufficient funds to give the computer class 21 computers, to run a class with 30 students.

Let's talk about textbooks. The funding formula provides monies to purchase texts for the core subjects of the new curriculum, math, English. Surprisingly in this day and age, the computer classes are not part of the core subjects. I have no textbooks. How do I survive? Let me show you. This is the material I have to prepare. Actually, these two books represent my preparation work for one semester. I don't have a textbook.

Let's talk about morale. How much money did this government spend on province-wide advertising to publicly denigrate teachers in the last five years? Teaching used to be an honoured profession. Now, thanks to this government, it is not.

Let's talk about pay issues. My colleagues—and I've only been in teaching now two years—have had one pay raise in the last 10 years. My daughter, who successfully graduated from the Ontario public education system almost exactly a year ago today, now earns more money than my colleagues with five to seven years of experience. My daughter has one degree. My colleagues have two.

Let me talk about workload. I'm required by law to deliver 1,250 minutes of material per week. That's only 20.83 hours per week. What a soft job I have. But for each hour of class time, a good teacher—and I'm trying desperately to be a good teacher—will spend at least two hours in preparation and/or marking. Now let me do the math: 20.83 hours of class, 62.5 hours of work per week, and that doesn't count talking to parents, going to meetings with guidance councillors, administration, giving extra help to students and coaching.

Ha, coaching: extracurricular activities. This year, I gave the government the benefit of the doubt. Bill 74 mandates that I must teach 6.67 credits per year. To accommodate this increase from six credits, I was given a workload increase of 33% and a workweek reduction of 6.5 hours, all in the name of increased excellence in education. Instead of 90 kids I've got 120. How can that possibly increase excellence in education?

Mr Marchese: It's more contact time.

Mr Clark: Right. And while indeed in my first semester, ladies and gentlemen, I was teaching five different subjects, four thanks to the 6.67 load, and one of my classes had two groups of 15 students, a grade 12 and a grade 13, I managed to coach two sports. Never again. There just are not enough hours in the day. It just about killed me.

Speaking of the 6.67 issue, which seems to be a hot button, what a stupid way to force Ontario teachers to fulfill their legal obligation of 1,250 instructional minutes per week. It's been rumoured the Minister of Education is currently proposing a workload of 6.25 classes per

school year in order to restore extracurricular activities. Does that really mean we're going to subject some of our students to taking a semester with four different teachers? Part of being a good teacher is building a relationship with a student. How am I supposed to do that in a quarter of a semester?

I still have not addressed standardized tests, teacher testing, literacy tests, new curriculum, the speed of change, quality of materials coming from the ministry, if indeed the materials do come from the ministry at all, or the teacher recertification program announced just yesterday. When I showed my wife this document yesterday, which is the press release on teacher recertification—my wife happens to be a very good, competent teacher; you don't want to lose her—she burst into tears. Just in case you guys haven't read this yet, let me read a couple of paragraphs from it. It's a news release dated June 7, 2001.

“Toronto: to continue to improve student achievement, approximately 40,000 practising classroom teachers and 6,500 new teachers will be the first to participate in a proposed new mandatory recertification program announced today by Education Minister Janet Ecker.

“The proposed recertification program would require all teachers to successfully complete seven core courses and seven elective courses as part of professional development” every five years. I am now putting in 60 to 65 hours a week. Do you expect me to do these 14 courses? When am I supposed to do them? When I sleep? Am I supposed to give up sleeping in order to achieve this, all in the name of increased quality of education?

1550

Last summer and the summer before, both my wife and I participated in an OTF-run summer institute. So did thousands of other high school teachers. We did it on our own time, at our own expense and without pay. The ministry provided some of the funding to facilitate this retraining, and for that I am very appreciative. Unfortunately, I and more than 300 other teachers who applied were unable to participate in a particular high-demand workshop held at the University of Waterloo. It seems the ministry provided sufficient funds for only 50 participants, but there were 350 applicants. Does it not make sense, and I mean common sense, that if 300 public educators were willing to take this course on their own time and without pay, the ministry could at least expand the funding to accommodate that demand? It's interesting to note that that course is being offered again this year, and indeed there are 50 places available. However, there's a \$50 tuition fee in order to reduce demand: centralized control; decentralized blame.

Unfortunately, I digress. I'd better get back on topic. This government is very good at downloading the traditional, moral and financial obligations of the province to other levels of government and/or individual taxpayers. Just ask Mel Lastman or any other non-provincial politician.

I view the proposed indirect educational voucher as yet another example of this downloading. The govern-

ment kicks in 3,500 bucks and daddy or mommy kicks in the rest. The parents pay for part of the education that used to be the province's obligation.

Bill 45 is indeed a bribe to parents: "Take your kids out of the public education system. The province will subsidize you up to 3,500 bucks" in five years. "The province will subsidize you up to 3,500 bucks" in five years. I said that. "Look how lousy the public education system is. Let's help you get your kids into private education so you can get away from that awful public education system. Let's help you help us bring an end to the public education system." That's what I see here.

For each parent who chooses to do this, that dreaded funding formula will send approximately \$7,000 less to the public system. Let me do the math. You pay \$3,500. You save \$7,000. The province actually pockets \$3,500 in the transaction. That's after the five years. This year, you pay \$700 and save \$7,000, the province pocketing \$6,300. A good tax grab, Mike.

Suppose seven of my students—less than 1% of my school—accept the bribe, leave my school and go to Ridley or some other private institution. My school will receive \$24,500 less next year. Over the next five years, that amounts to \$122,500 less. In that same five-year period, my school will be allocated approximately 130 new computers, based on the funding formula. The lost funds, caused by less than 1% of my students going to private education, will mean a loss of enough money to purchase all 130 computers—centralized control; decentralized blame.

The voucher system will lead to the eventual destruction of public education.

I wish to present only one additional point concerning Bill 45. Earlier this year my Premier, the Premier of this fair province, was credited with saying, and I quote, "They"—vouchers—"have never been espoused by me or the Minister of Education, nor have I seen a suggestion anywhere around the cabinet table, nor do I think it will come as long as I'm Premier."

Mr Marchese: That was then.

Mr Clark: That's a direct quote. Bill 45 proposes a tax credit scheme that is nothing more than a paperless voucher. The mechanics are slightly different than a normal voucher system, but there is no denying that this is indeed a voucher system.

Let me quote again: "Nor do I think it will come as long as I'm Premier." I firmly believe that the current government does not have the moral right to enable this legislation, legislation that will change the entire fabric of equal accessibility to all to an educational system regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity or economic background.

This proposal is 180 degrees out of phase with the government's policy upon which they were elected. If this government truly believes that this change is in the best interests of Ontario and of the youth of Ontario, then please have the courage to put it to a vote as did Brian Tobin in Newfoundland. Hold a referendum on the subject and only on this subject. Let the people of the province decide.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

DALTON LINDSAY

The Chair: The last presenter is Dalton Lindsay. Is Mr Lindsay in the audience? Welcome. Could you please state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, again, welcome.

Mr Dalton Lindsay: My name is Dalton Lindsay. But my presentation wasn't on the education question.

The Chair: As long as it deals with Bill 45.

Mr Lindsay: Mine is on the small business tax relief. While it is encouraging that the provincial government is continuing to reduce taxes, there is still much to do. Some of the things that small business—and in fact business in general—is experiencing are the multitude of forms and papers required by the various levels of government. Duplication of information and reports to the province and federal government, as well as those originating from the local levels, is beyond excessive. The small business person has no time to look after his own business. He is too busy complying to all the various levels of governments to ensure that he has sent in all his taxes and all his fees.

The province has done a good job of downloading local items to the region and municipal governments. Unfortunately, these governments have downloaded all the expenses to the business community. Our mayor likes to say that personal residential taxes have not increased for the past 10 years, but this is not so for the business community. They have been taking the brunt of the increases.

Perhaps I should start first on the paperwork that is required by local small business people. Surely the federal and provincial governments could exchange information on companies and not require the duplication of reporting that goes on; also share audits of businesses, not have the province audit the business this year and then the feds come back and audit the business again next year.

Next is the layer upon layer of taxes that are required by small businesses: corporate tax, GST, in some cases PST, the EHT, just to name a few. There are also local business taxes, waste management fees, inspection tax, development fees and environmental fees, just to name some of the things the region and municipalities have downloaded on to small business. If you do something today, there is a fee to a government. This endless reporting and completion of forms requires small business people to keep their accountant close at hand. But who pays the accountant? Certainly not any of the levels of government that keep manufacturing the reports, the taxes and the fees.

It is nice to see the capital tax eliminated for projects under \$5 million, but it does not take a very large project to be in excess of this amount. I would recommend this level be increased to at least to \$20 million.

1600

Please continue to reduce the red tape that is hindering and costing the small business so much in time and money. The province is doing a good job, but more must be done at the federal, regional and municipal levels. It seems that when the province eliminates a tax or a report, the other levels add two.

The margins are so thin for small business that many can't survive and are being taken over by large corporations that can afford controllers and accountants to provide the reports and multiple fees and taxes demanded by governments today.

The downloading by the province gave the regional and municipal governments a blank cheque to tax and charge businesses for anything they can think of. They do not want to increase taxes on personal property, because it is politically embarrassing, but it is easy to make small business foot the bill.

In summary, any reduction or elimination of tax for business is welcome. Cut more red tape and duplication of reports. Use modern technology as much as possible; ie, small businesses cannot use electronic filing for tax returns. Why not? Thanks for the positive steps that have been taken to date. But please, please do more. Thank you for having me address this forum today.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately three and a half minutes per caucus.

Mr Galt: As you were going through some of the red tape and taxes, it brought memories for me of when I practised back in the 1960s. I thought there was way too much at that time. Of course, it has escalated a long ways since then.

One of the problems government has is a balance of enough information, which some people would call red tape, against having that information to protect themselves. Most governments don't want to end up in a situation like HRDC did about a year ago and the hammering that Jane Stewart took at the time. I think you can appreciate and understand that.

I toured my local councils—I'm from east of Toronto—back in the spring. The number one red tape issue at that time had to do with SuperBuild, that one of the forms was some 44 pages long. I took it to SuperBuild—I have this verbally right now, not in writing—and they were looking at reducing it by a third because of my writing to them expressing concerns coming from my municipal councils.

I would recommend that you list some of the items that you're seeing and make it known to them. They're certainly very active and very responsive. They've been doing quite a bit for our government. That's sort of a suggestion for you.

The question I would like to direct to you: as a small business person, you talked about the tax cuts. What did it do for you and for other people who you know in business, in small industries and small business in your area?

Mr Lindsay: I think it helped offset some of the fees and expenses and increased taxes that the municipal and

regional governments have put on. Unfortunately, when the province reduced the rates, the other municipalities and the region increased theirs. All it really did was maybe kept the status quo or it increased a little bit. The local governments just increased their fees, that's all. They did it under the presumption that, "The province is downloading to us so we are downloading"—

Mr Galt: That's a great word they play with, "downloading." I could walk through all the steps and demonstrate to you that instead of downloading, it has really been uploading. They're using that as an excuse for some of their inefficient operations.

Mr Kwinter: I want to follow up on your last comment because I hear that a lot. I hear that the government, with their red tape and with everything else, makes this great thing with the tax cuts they're giving to corporations and to small business, and then, as you say, they download it on to the next level or two levels and you find, as you've just stated, not only does your overall expenditure on taxes not go down, in some cases they've gone up because of this downloading.

I'll give you an example. There are some real discrepancies when it comes to the educational portion of your realty tax as your assessment is a business. That has gone up quite dramatically, and not only has it gone up but it's disproportionate to some of your neighbourhood communities or other places in Ontario. It's exactly the same business occupying exactly the same type of location, but there is this discrepancy. Have you found that?

Mr Lindsay: Yes. The thing we noticed about businesses in Niagara is they seem to be going out because of the high municipal and regional taxes on them. We've lost several large firms that have gone either to the States or somewhere else. Niagara is one of the highest-taxed business areas. I think out of the 16 regions, we're 15th or something like that. So this is driving business away.

Mr Kwinter: I also heard you complaining about, notwithstanding there was a Red Tape Commission and they're supposed to be cutting red tape, it's still a major concern of yours, all of the forms, the reporting and the duplication that is still going on.

Mr Lindsay: I talked to my accountant today, and he said, "I like it because it keeps me in business." What small business can afford to have an accountant who has to get all these forms filled out all the time? It's impossible. You're just driving the small business person out of business really.

Mr Marchese: Mr Lindsay, the corporate sector always laments they're paying too much tax. Small business and medium-sized business say, "My God, we're getting killed with taxes." Who, in your view, should pay taxes or a sufficient amount of taxes to be able to have a good-quality education system, good-quality health care, good-quality social service that provides for our seniors and others? How do we raise the money for these things?

Mr Lindsay: Business profits for small business are so marginally thin today that this is the reason so many are going out of business and can't keep up, and then to augment that with all this government bureaucratic

reporting, the fees, the taxes and the various levels of taxes makes it so onerous that they just go out of business.

Mr Marchese: I remember the auditor saying a couple of years ago there was about \$4 billion or \$5 billion that was not collected from the small business sector.

Mr Lindsay: They probably went out of business. They're not there any more. How are you going to collect them?

Mr Marchese: I don't think that's what he said. I think he said if we had more people to go out there and collect, we'd probably be able to get a few more dollars from that sector. Do you think he was wrong?

Mr Lindsay: Yes. I doubt it.

Mr Marchese: Maybe we need more, is that it? What do you think? Was he wrong?

Mr Lindsay: I don't think we need more government red tape and more government taxation—not to keep the business community alive anyway.

The Chair: Mr Lindsay, on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

First of all, I would like to thank all the participants and the board members today for your co-operation. I would also point out that this committee will resume consultation on Monday, June 11, at 9 am in room 151 at Queen's Park, Toronto.

Mr Bradley: Mr Chairman, I just have a quick point of order for you because I know you'd want me to share this with you. I did want to indicate to you the great disappointment of the regional municipality of Niagara being unable to make a presentation to our committee today. I just wanted to share that with you in case you can share it with someone else who would help us out.

The Chair: Thank you. We're now adjourned until Monday morning.

The committee adjourned at 1609.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Chair / Président

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex PC)

Vice-Chair / Vice-Président

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland PC)

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex PC)
Mr David Christopherson (Hamilton West / -Ouest ND)
Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland PC)
Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford PC)
Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre / -Centre L)
Mr John O'Toole (Durham PC)
Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt L)
Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre / -Centre PC)

Substitutions / Membres remplaçants

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina ND)
Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South / -Sud PC)
Mr Bart Maves (Niagara Falls PC)
Mr Dalton McGuinty (Ottawa South / -Sud L)

Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines L)
Hon Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln PC)
Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park L)
Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre / -Centre ND)

Clerk / Greffière

Ms Susan Sourial

Staff / Personnel

Mr David Rampersad, research officer,
Research and Information Services

CONTENTS

Friday 8 June 2001

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Responsible Choices for Growth and Accountability Act (2001 Budget), 2001, Bill 45, Mr Flaherty / Loi de 2001 sur des choix réfléchis favorisant la croissance et la responsabilisation (budget de 2001), projet de loi 45, M. Flaherty..... | F-35 |
| Smithville District Christian High School | F-37 |
| Mr Tony Kamphuis | |
| Hamilton-Wentworth Elementary Teachers' Local; Hamilton-Wentworth Council of Home and School Associations | F-41 |
| Ms Kelly Hayes | |
| Ms Michele McNabb | |
| Ontario Christian Home Educators Connection | F-44 |
| Mr Jake Zwart | |
| Ms Brenda Rishia | |
| Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Niagara local, District School Board of Niagara | F-46 |
| Mr Eric Mitchinson | |
| Mr Gary King | |
| Association of Christian School Teachers and Support Staff | F-49 |
| Mr Andrew Regnerus | |
| OSSTF District 22, Niagara | F-51 |
| Mr Daniel Peat | |
| Mr Craig Brockwell | |
| Settlement and Integration Services Organization | F-53 |
| Mr Morteza Jafarpour | |
| Wellandport Christian School..... | F-55 |
| Mr Dean Bonsma | |
| Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Niagara local..... | F-58 |
| Ms Teri Kramer | |
| Erie Christian Academy | F-60 |
| Mr Ron Gray | |
| Ms Betty Kerman | F-62 |
| Brock University | F-65 |
| Dr David Atkinson | |
| Ecumenical Study Commission on Education in Ontario..... | F-68 |
| Dr John Johnston | |
| Mr Greg Reid | F-71 |
| Mr William Clark | F-74 |
| Mr Dalton Lindsay | F-76 |