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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 20 June 2001

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 20 juin 2001

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

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

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)

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

Président : Marcel Beaubien
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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

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

Wednesday 20 June 2001

Mercredi 20 juin 2001

The committee met at 1000 in room 151.

**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): It being 10 o'clock in the morning, I'd like to bring the committee to order. The committee is here to consider Bill 45, An Act to implement measures contained in the 2001 Budget and to amend various statutes. We are here for clause-by-clause consideration. I would ask the members whether there are any questions and comments before we start.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I should've asked the clerk this earlier. Have we had a response back on your two letters? If I might just comment on that, we are being asked to make a huge decision here and I think most people who look at this would say that it's fundamental education. We heard from the Fraser Institute and the National Citizens' Coalition last week and they said this is the most major move in education, one said in North America and the other said in the last 100 years.

We have from the government a brief which they presented two years ago to the United Nations—I think it is 82 pages long—arguing against doing this in the strongest possible language. They made some very, very powerful arguments against funding for private schools and private religious schools. Now, two years later, we are being asked to approve a direction that's 180 degrees in the other direction. I find that unusual, and I would urge the public to read the language the government used in its brief arguing against this approach, against extending funding to private schools, because it used language such as will “undermine the ability of public

schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding.”

It goes on: “would result in the disruption and fragmentation of education in Ontario.... The benefits which Ontario receives from a public education system which promotes the values of pluralism, multiculturalism and understanding, would be diminished ... would compound the problems of religious coercion and ostracism ... would undermine the goal of universal access to education ... would have negative fiscal impacts as there would be a marked increase in the duplication of services and capital costs to fund the religious schools ...

“If the state ... were required to fund private religious schools, ... a detrimental impact on the public schools, and hence the fostering of a tolerant, multicultural, non-discriminatory society ... This position of the province of Ontario is supported by expert evidence in reports and affidavit form as cited below.”

They go on with the research. “One of the strengths of a public system of education in a province and a country which are committed to a policy of multiculturalism is that it provides a venue where people of all colours, races, national and ethnic origins and religions interact and try to come to terms with one another's differences. Such a process is not without its problems and frictions, but the fact that the public school must deal with the varied needs and interests of the total population makes it a valuable institution for the creation of better understanding among the various groups. In this way, the public schools build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding....

“Extending public school funding rights to private religious schools will undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding.”

We have page after page of strong language arguing against this approach. Consequently, Mr Chair, as you know, this committee sent a letter to the cabinet—to Mr Flaherty, whose bill this is—requesting that the government forward the research that was used to reach the decision to institute the tax credit program. You're telling me today we have not heard back yet. Where is the evidence? You submitted the evidence to argue against doing this; now where is the evidence that led you to reach this conclusion?

Furthermore, on a very straightforward request, we asked for the documentation indicating the basis and

nature of the calculation used to determine the cost of the equity in education tax credit of \$300 million. Surely that one is absolutely straightforward. It's in the budget. There's a \$300-million cost attached to this. Surely the public is owed an explanation of that.

Interjection.

Mr Phillips: This may be it arriving right now. Consequently, I would like to see that. Barring that, I would like some explanation of the basis on which we won't see it. Maybe this is it arriving now. I hope it is.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): No, it isn't, Gerry. Continue.

The Chair: No, it's not.

Mr Phillips: That's not it?

The Chair: That's research material.

Mr Phillips: We have one of the parliamentary assistants here.

Mr Marchese: Who's that?

Mr Phillips: I believe it is Mr Hardeman, who can perhaps give us an explanation of why we don't have that material.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr Hardeman.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have no comment. Obviously, the Chair has written the minister. We would be expecting the minister deal with that.

Mr Phillips: No, that's not it. You are the parliamentary assistant, Mr Hardeman. Why do we not have the information?

Mr Hardeman: I think you've made a reasonable argument why you think we should have that information. I'm hoping the minister will get us that information. The Chair of the committee has written the minister for those items. If he has that information, I'm sure he will be forwarding it. I have no further information to—

Mr Phillips: Could you go out and get on the phone to the minister and find out whether we're going to get this or not?

Mr Hardeman: I would suggest that we get on with doing the job that we're supposed to do and Mr Phillips can do the job that he's supposed to do. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any further comments?

Mr Marchese: I'll speak to that section which deals with the issue generally. I'm sure I'll have plenty of time to do that.

The Chair: Before we start on the clause-by-clause, are there any further comments or questions?

Mr Phillips: Maybe a question to you, Mr Chair: have you followed up?

The Chair: No. I'll be very forthright with you that because of my scheduling and the personal circumstance that I had to attend to yesterday, I did not have the opportunity. I was in Sudbury on Monday and, if I recall, one letter went Thursday and one went Friday of last week, so I haven't had a chance to follow-up personally on that.

Mr Phillips: The request on the \$300 million was made a week and a half ago.

The Chair: Initially, yes, the first time.

Shall we proceed with the clause-by-clause? I will go under section 1.

Shall section 1 of the bill carry? All those in favour? Opposed? Section 1 carries.

First of all, there are no amendments for the first 39 sections. Shall I collapse them into one vote?

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): Yes.

The Chair: OK. Because we've already voted on section 1, shall sections 2 to 39 carry? All those in favour? Opposed? That carries.

Shall section 40 carry? There is an amendment by a Liberal motion and, apparently, the amendment is not in order because you do not need a motion to vote against a section. You can vote against the section, but you don't need a motion to vote against the section.

1010

Mr Marchese: I just want to support the Liberal motion as a way of making a point to confirm that we are against it. In that respect, I think that motion is in order, Gerry. So I wanted to support you in that regard.

Mr Phillips: Thank you.

The Chair: Shall the amendment carry?

Mr Phillips: What is the amendment?

The Chair: I'm sorry, the amendment is out of order, really.

Shall section 40 carry? All those in favour? Opposed? It would be easier if the members put their hands up so I can see them. Some of them are pretty short, I must admit. Maybe it's my eyesight. Section 40 carries.

There's an amendment for section 41.

Mr Phillips: It's out of order too, I think.

The Chair: Exactly, yes.

Liberal motion number 3 is in order. I need a mover for Liberal motion number 3.

Mr Phillips: Are we going on to section 41?

The Chair: Yes, that's section 41.

Mr Phillips: I'm actually going to withdraw all our amendments. I think this has turned into a sham when we don't even have the information that we requested.

The Chair: So you are withdrawing all the amendments?

Mr Phillips: That's right.

The Chair: So we'll just go section by section?

Mr Phillips: That's right.

The Chair: Then I'll go back to section 41.

Shall section 41 carry?

Mr Marchese: No, this is where we need debate. No. This is the subject of all our hearings. How could we let that one go without discussion?

You recall that we were opposed to Mr Hardeman's move when we were in subcommittee, when the opposition parties were arguing to maintain the regular procedures around deputations and the selection of them, which was divided in four ways: the Tories would get a third, the Liberals would get a third, we would get a third and you, Chair, would get a third, and you would draw them randomly. We thought that process worked very, very well. We thought it was fair.

Why do we think it's fair? Because the government is able to introduce bills and, through that power, they're able to set the agenda. We felt that in committees at least, the opposition parties would have a greater say as to how these deputations should be dealt with in a way that was fair. There was never any disagreement in the past about that way of dividing the deputations and, all of a sudden Mr Hardeman, as a spokesperson for the government, decided the rules needed to change.

What does Mr Hardeman propose as to the way the deputants should be selected? He came up with the suggestion that it wasn't sufficient for these members, by virtue of being in government, to introduce bills, that they needed a greater say in the selection of the deputants because their members wanted to choose more of the deputants that reflected their world view. We thought that was wrong. We thought that was foolhardy. We think it'll catch up to you because you'll be in opposition, you see. Someday you will; it's just a question of time. Then you'll have to suffer the effects of that.

To be fair, Bob Rae, our former leader, did the same in terms of changing the rules. At the time, we felt we were being impeded from being able to do our work, because you guys didn't like being out of power and you used all the measures to oppose us—and that's a fair thing, obviously. But I've got to tell you, I was in disagreement with the changing of the rules—I was. That changing of the rules caught up to us because we, you see, went out of power and became the third party. So we suffered the effects of those changes, as I suggest you will too when you get on the other side and someone else moves into your place. So I say to Mr Hardeman, I'm trying to help you, in spite of yourselves, to be a little more reasonable and fair in terms of how you deal with those rules.

They changed the rules in order to get more deputants who reflected the position they were taking around this issue of tax credits for private schools. So half of the deputants came from the government and the other half came from the opposition parties. That's why we've seen, on the whole, many religious schools come in front of this committee to make a deputation and we saw two people from Montessori schools coming to depute, but we saw no one from the other private sector. No one came from those schools that would benefit the most, those non-denominational schools, the majority of which would get most of the money.

An example I cited often is Upper Canada College—not to cite them for any specific reason, but as an example—where they pay 16,000 bucks in tuition fees, and if they bunk down there, they pay 28,000 bucks. Not bad. I say those people really don't deserve public support. They made a choice to have their children in private schools. You see, they don't want them to consort with the others. As a result, of course, they have their own private school, they pay the big bucks and they have their own club.

All of a sudden, this government says that's not good enough. They need our money. They need public support so we can help them to the tune of, in four years or so, 3,500 bucks, because we think these poor rich people

need a little break from the public. It is their desire to be private but we, the public, ought to support that choice.

So the majority of these schools get the bulk of the public dollars, but the Tories didn't have the courage to invite one of those people from those schools to come and make a deputation pleading, perhaps, for our money. They get the bulk of our money, they don't make a deputation, and the Tories don't bother to invite them to come and speak so at least Marchese could hear what they have to say.

Mrs Tina R. Molinari (Thornhill): Why didn't you invite them?

Mr Marchese: Why didn't I invite them? I'm opposed to this measure. It's not my business to invite them; it's your business to invite them. It's my business to invite the people who would come in front of this committee to say, "You people are taking \$2.4 billion out of the education system, you're hurting public education and you want to hurt it some more by giving public dollars to private schools." That's my job. Your job is to invite your friends to come in front of this committee to defend themselves.

Marchese wanted to hear them. I wanted to be able to engage them in some debate, engage them at least with the minute that I would get from time to time, if I were lucky, to be able to ask a question.

Mrs Molinari: You should have invited them.

Mr Marchese: Yes, I know. On second thought, I might have invited them and said, "Please, come in front of the committee. Come, because I want to hear you. I want to hear what you've got to say." I should have, perhaps.

That's a little bit of history which I wanted to provide about how the committee changed the rules so as to be able to get more of the people who reflected the government's view to come in front of us. I say those rule changes will hurt. I say that what the opposition parties also asked during that subcommittee meeting was to have hearings that would go beyond 4:30 outside of Toronto, that they would go until 9 o'clock. The opposition parties asked for more than just the eight days of hearings that we got; we asked for 80 days. As painful as that would be for me as a New Democrat because I am alone here on these ranks, I felt it was important—because this issue is one of major importance—that we have hearings that would reflect the importance of this major policy change that you people have introduced. So we argued that eight days was insufficient.

When the Ontario government at the time decided to extend funding to Catholic schools beyond grade 10, the Tories at the time asked for 80 days of hearings, and they got them. They got them because they said they said to the new Liberal government that got into power, "Without it, we're not going to support it." So the Liberal government said, "OK, you're requesting 80 days of hearings? We'll give you 80 days of hearings."

1020

We thought it was a major change, in need of public debate. This is a major policy direction that needed long

debate, and it needed hearings to give people an opportunity to have their say. Not that we wouldn't know within a couple of days where people stood, in terms of the deputants, but the point was that we needed to hear more people give their views on this matter. The government decided to give us eight days—with pressure, by the way. It was not something where the government said right away, “We're going to give you hearings.” We had to pressure these people. They knew the majority of Ontarians were opposed to it, and so they wanted to dispense with hearings altogether. But because of the pressure the public—and the opposition parties, to a great extent—put on them, they caved in and magnanimously gave us eight days of hearings.

We argue that the public wanted more time. Opposition parties wanted more time. The Ontario public deserves to have more time—or deserved, because I suspect it will be over today. We think that too will catch up with you. We think you have seen the polls. While Mr Hardeman might think that in some areas a lot of people support this bill, I think the majority of Ontarians oppose it and for good reasons.

Why do they oppose it? For various reasons. The most important one we heard from the deputants is that you have starved public education while you feed the corporate sector with the tax cuts they don't really need. They have done well in the last six years without public support, and you've decided they need our money in order to reduce their tax load because, good God, these people haven't been making enough money. They need more money, presumably to create more jobs, of which there is no evidence other than the government's saying so.

The public and the deputants we heard—that we invited—said you've starved public education of \$2.3 billion. People like Anna Germain came to this committee, right here in front of us, and said, “I'm sick and tired of hearing the government, the minister and the government members on this committee say we're giving more money than ever before to the educational system.” She was sick and tired like me. I'm sick and tired of hearing it too. All you get is the manufacturing of figures, the manipulation of figures, the subterfuge, the confusion and obfuscation of figures to pretend and give the impression to the good citizens that somehow you're giving more money while everyone involved in the system knows they're getting less. You're hurting the system and parents are saying, “We're sick and tired of the cuts that have been made to the teaching profession, where we've lost librarians, we've lost music teachers, we've lost guidance teachers, we've lost technical—”

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I've got more to say. Please.

Show that sign. Show it up.

“We're sick and tired of the losses to the teaching profession. We're sick and tired of seeing fewer caretakers. We're seeing schools that are dirty. It means there are fewer caretakers in the system to clean our schools. We now have more mice in our schools than we have

teachers.” You've got to deal with that. There are no caretakers, Madame Molinari, to deal with the cleanliness of the school. You guys are firing them. It's not the board; it's you firing them. Why is it you? Because you've taken control of education finances. And because you've taken control, boards no longer have the flexibility to hire the people they need to run an educational system and run it well and qualitatively.

They don't have textbooks. We've got 36,000 people waiting for special ed services. There's no money to provide for young people who need special education services. Monsieur Hardeman and the rest of the gang say, “We're giving more money than ever before.” Some 36,000 people are waiting, and the number is ever incremental. They need help, and they can't get it. We have fewer social workers, fewer psychologists than ever before. Young people are waiting to be assessed, and we don't have the staff to do that. So these young people with incredible needs languish in the school system, and you people say you're giving them more money than ever before. It's nuts, right? It doesn't make any sense.

People are saying, “We don't have enough textbooks.” People are saying, “You've introduced curriculum too fast.” People are saying, “Because of the curriculum changes you're making, a whole lot of people are being faced with the difficulty of not coping with aspects of this curriculum.” They need help and there's no remedial assistance being offered, because the teachers don't have the time any longer to provide the help those students need, so they're dropping out. As a result of the curriculum changes you've made and as a result of the compression of five years into four, you're streaming young people, and some of those young people who are not able to cope are dropping out because there's no support.

So while you're proud of yourselves—Madame Molinari, former trustee of a certain board up there in the north—while you clap yourselves on the back for the great work you're doing, kids are dropping out. How can you be proud of the fact that more and more young people who deserve the attention of government, because school is an important component of how we cope in our daily lives, are dropping out and you people are happy about the great amount of money you're putting into the system and the changes you're making that are affecting an entire population of young people and affecting parents?

More and more parents are fundraising than ever before. We've heard parents say that some schools are fundraising to the tune of \$70,000. We've heard the other religious schools say they volunteer on a regular basis, that they are constantly there on different committees helping out the school, but we have parents from the public system doing that day in and day out. They're volunteering in many ways, and they're volunteering to raise money because there isn't enough money for basic things to provide the quality these kids need. Imagine parents having to fundraise for basic things in the school system. It's nuts. We've never seen that before.

Mr Hardeman was so proud of saying in the hearings, "We put in \$350 million more." Then board after board came, here in Toronto and outside Toronto, to say that tremendous losses have been sustained as a result of the cuts and that the millions they claim they are given are simply insufficient to deal with the problems they're facing in the educational system—board after board. Not one board came and said, "Thank you for the largesse of Madame Ecker," with respect to the money that has been given to these boards—not one board, not one parent, not one teacher, not one federation. While you might say, Mr Chair, that you might expect these people not to come and support the government, some of these people have no interest, necessarily, in simply inventing numbers. Like Mr Snobelen, who wanted to invent a crisis, parents and teachers don't come in front of this committee saying, "We've inventing numbers, because we just love to invent myths." Unlike the government, which created the crisis, parents have no such interest. Their main interest is taking care of children—taking care of their own children and taking care of the collective problems they have in a school system and doing their best to try to make it better.

We've heard from countless parents about the tremendous sacrifices they make in the public system and the inadequacy of a funding formula that is based on square footage and not on needs. They talked about how the one-size-fits-all funding formula is inadequate and foolhardy, because it doesn't address needs. Yet we had Mr O'Toole and others saying the one-size-fits-all funding for the various schools we've got in Ontario is simply not a proper way to go. The one-size-fits-all funding formula was OK for Mr O'Toole, but the one-size-fits-all for those students was not OK, and it was OK for him to say, "We need to provide support"—public money—"for private schools," the bulk of which, we have argued, goes to non-denominational schools that don't want our money. That's why they're private. They don't want public support. They want to shut out the public from their private schools. That's why they do it.

We believe in a public system that is well funded, and we believe in a public system that worries about the public good, not about an individual choice someone makes to take them to a private school, but about the public good, which is what public schools are all about. It's concerned about citizenry. It's concerned about the collective and not about individual decisions someone makes that, "The public system is not good enough for me. I'm taking my kid to some other school." If that's the choice you make, God bless you. But our concern, our role as government, ought to be to worry about the larger public good of our collective needs and how we address them. That's our job as government.

1030

We said that the way to address our diversity and multiculturalism is to reflect it in the public system; not to reflect it homogeneously and uniformly, but to reflect its diversity in fact. How do some systems do it? In the Toronto board of education we have international lan-

guages, formerly called heritage languages. The international languages teach language and culture. It's a wonderful way to reflect diversity, because it teaches the languages and cultures of the different communities that come into our system.

It took tremendous effort on behalf of those parents in the 1970s at the Toronto board of education to convince the Toronto board that the introduction of heritage languages by extending the school day would be a good thing for the system and a good thing for the various constituencies that come to our system from different countries.

It was a wonderful program. We fought strongly for it for years. We fought for it in spite of the fact there were many Tories on the Toronto board, and quite a number of Liberals, dare I say, who didn't want the introduction of international languages at the Toronto board. But eventually, because of the makeup of the board, we were able to win it, and it was a good thing.

We said it's good psychologically for students to be able to speak their own language so they can communicate with their parents and their grandparents. It was good intellectually to be able to speak another language, because the more languages you know—you can learn two or three or four; unilingualism can be cured. We showed that, and we showed that many of those young people who come from different languages and cultures were able to get into a language program that didn't even reflect their own language. It was a wonderful thing we had in some of our schools where Chinese was taught and we had Spanish-speaking kids and English-speaking kids in that class. It was wonderful that we did that. It's a way of reflecting our diversity, not homogeneously but in a way that respects culture, as it should.

We have multi-faith readings at the Toronto board. We compiled a big book this thick that reflected the different religions in our public system. The readings reflected that diversity. We didn't have one uniform prayer. We had many readings that reflected all the different communities. Contrary to what some people say about the uniform public system, it wasn't so uniform. We reflected the diversity very well.

We have black studies at the Toronto board of education, which reflects people of colour, and it should. We introduced native studies. By the way, we introduced labour studies as well, as a way of reflecting that diversity at the Toronto board. One of the Conservative trustees at the time said, "Oh, my God. Now we are tipping the balance. Now we've got labour studies. Poor marketplace capitalism is about to go out the window." Imagine that. One little labour studies section in that big curriculum of the Toronto board—the curriculum that comes from the ministry with one little section dealing with labour history—and the Conservatives were so worried. David Moll was so concerned about labour studies taking over. Anyway, I just point that out as a way of saying we were reflecting labour studies as well.

We could also reflect our diversity—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: I've got more to say. Hold on. Just relax. We've got lots of time. We've got today and tomorrow.

We also said, Monsieur Beaubien, that if we teach the different religions as a course of study, we then would be able to reflect the differences of the various religions that come into our system in Toronto, in the GTA, Madame Molinari, everywhere.

Mrs Molinari: Thornhill.

Mr Marchese: Thornhill is not so far. What is it, 40 minutes from here?

Mrs Molinari: It's not that far.

Mr Marchese: Not even 40 minutes?

Mrs Molinari: No.

Mr Marchese: My God, I tell you. It was far for me. But by car, I'm sure, 40 minutes. It's not far. You could even teach that in Thornhill, even there, because you've got so many different communities that come into your part of the world. Wouldn't it be nice for us to reflect those religious differences as a course of study, rather than saying, "The way to reflect it is to put them outside the system"? That's true multiculturalism, some of you have argued. I couldn't believe that. It's funny to hear Tories argue that. It's a bizarre twist of events that they would argue that the way to reflect diversity is to set them apart in a different system, that's true multiculturalism. C'est bizarre, Monsieur Beaubien, quant à moi au moins.

I argue that the way to reflect it is in the system, not outside the system. That's the argument New Democrats have made. We oppose funding for private schools of any kind. We oppose it. We've been very clear from the very beginning, unlike you, unlike your government, where Monsieur Harris and Madame Ecker—poor Madame Ecker. I know Madame Ecker didn't want to put out a letter that said that if we fund religious schools, \$300 million would leave the public system. She must have felt so bad to have been probably forced to write such a letter. I'm convinced she didn't want to do it, that she wouldn't want to put out a public letter that said \$300 million was going to come out of the public system if we funded religious schools.

By the way, at the time, in that letter, she didn't refer to the non-denominational schools that get the bulk of this money; she only referred to other religious schools—300 million bucks. You see, Monsieur Beaubien, she knew that was going to be a problem. And Monsieur Harris, in his wisdom, said at the time that \$500 million would come out of the public system if we did that.

He also made some wonderful philosophical arguments that were written on his behalf, which have often been referred to by mon collègue, Gerry Phillips, when they did their brief to the United Nations. It's a wonderful statement of his concerns. He spoke so beautifully through the person who wrote it. He was good in reflecting the concerns we have about how we potentially fragment society in religious silos and fragment it further by providing support to private, non-denominational schools, and fragment it further by—you see, I believe

there's going to be an emergence, a proliferation of private schools, not necessarily just religious but other non-denominational ones. You're going to encourage a whole lot of entrepreneurs to set up other schools where they can make a few bucks, set up private schools on the basis of who knows what? They will proliferate, Monsieur Hardeman. But you don't have to worry about that, because reflecting individual differences is so good, as you proclaim—the sovereignty of the individual. If all these individuals have some great entrepreneurial ideas to set up their own schools, so much the better.

Harris and Ecker were right at the time.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr Marchese: How could that be?

Mr Gill: Because you're repeating yourself.

The Chair: Mr Marchese, standing order 107 says, "In any standing or select committee, the standing orders of the House shall be observed so far as may be applicable, except the standing orders limiting the number of times of speaking. Unless expressly provided by the standing orders or by unanimous consent, no member shall speak for more than 20 minutes at a time in any standing or select committee."

I think you're aware of the rule. You have about 45 seconds to wrap up.

Mr Marchese: Monsieur Beaubien, you have been a fair judge, I must admit.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr Marchese: If there was that Liberal motion, I could debate for another 20 minutes. Could you bring it back? Just bring it back so we can have a little more time.

Mr Chair, New Democrats are clearly opposed to this. We don't support it. We want a recorded vote on this section. Hopefully, I'll have an opportunity to respond to the others.

The Chair: Yes. You can speak again, except you have 20 minutes. I have to go to somebody else now.

Mr Marchese: I'll have so much more time, once they speak.

The Chair: Next I have to go to Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Just to get on the record our concerns about this: first, this is a very major step. The government has attempted to say it's just a small step. But the people who have studied this have told us—earlier I mentioned the Fraser Institute, the National Citizens' Coalition, other groups. One said this is the most major development in education in North America, another said it's the most major development in 100 years.

1040

We are stepping off the curb and heading down a road which will fundamentally change education in Ontario. People have the right to disagree with my point of view on that but that is my strongly held point of view, that this will fundamentally change education in the province of Ontario.

The second thing I'd say is it's a fact that it's a complete reversal of Mike Harris's position held only two years ago, where he argued before the courts and before the United Nations that public funding for private

religious schools would do dramatic harm to our education system in the province of Ontario, that it was wrong and it was something the government did not support. I urge people who are interested in this issue to examine the various briefs that were presented by the province of Ontario to the United Nations. It couldn't be clearer in those briefs about the very substantial harm that would be done to what has been the cornerstone of Ontario: it has been, I argue, our publicly funded education system.

If people wonder what the arguments are against it, I say there's perhaps no better argument than the well-prepared brief presented to the United Nations and to the courts and it is 180 degrees the other way from where the government's now heading.

Many of the groups that came to us to support the government made it very clear that they regard this merely as the first step. Many argued, and one can understand completely their point of view, that they face religious discrimination. The Catholic community has public funding; they don't. There was a leader from the Jewish community. He said, "I live next door to someone whose faith is Roman Catholic. The government is practising religious discrimination. They fund my neighbour's school, they don't fund the school I want to go to."

That is a core belief and one that we can all understand. But also, I think we have to agree that this is only a step down the road to where they want to go and they will argue forever, because that's their belief, they must have full funding. It wouldn't just be the leadership in the Jewish community. It would also be true in many—virtually every other religious group that was before us would argue that this is, I think they would use the language, "a good first step."

But if we are agreeing to this or if the government's proposing this because there has been religious discrimination, every year, for obvious understandable reasons, those who say we need to move on this for religious discrimination reasons will continue to make that argument until there is full and equal funding. For this bill, full and equal funding will not be just for religious schools, it will be for all private schools. I'm opposed to this on its face in terms of the implications. But make no mistake, the pressure, for understandable reasons, will be relentless. Ten years from now, if we were looking at full funding for all, you can imagine the fragmentation.

The fourth point I'd make is the government has estimated the cost at \$300 million. The public should be aware that we've asked the government to show us the basis on which they reached that number. They have refused to do that. We have the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance here. He won't even call over to find out whether we're going to get that information. That's obscene.

If this were a city council and the public was saying, "Tell me how you reached your estimate of how you're going to spend my tax dollars," and you refused to give it

to them, they would be storming the city hall. I cannot understand why the government members would ever sit still for essentially the Minister of Finance thumbing his nose at us, not giving the public what they deserve. The public, the taxpayers, pay the salaries of our civil servants. You have in the budget a \$300-million estimate and I want to know, and the public wants to know, how you reached that.

In briefings during the budget, the ministry staff told us that assumes the enrolment in the year 2000, last year, stays exactly the same as it is now. So we've assumed for the next five years that there is zero growth in private religious schools. Does anybody here believe that? The growth has been going on at 5% a year with no incentive. We heard from presenters, and we assume, that when you give someone an incentive it changes behaviour in some ways.

So \$300 million is a number that I don't think—I'd like one of the government members to tell us how they reached that assumption. But it's at least a \$500-million expenditure we're looking at, assuming that there isn't any change in the \$3,500 tax credit and assuming that the percentage doesn't go up from 50%. Does anybody here believe that? Does anybody here believe that five years from now we won't be looking at a higher number than \$3,500, that we won't be looking at a minimum of a 50% increase in enrolment in the private schools? It would be going up 5% a year without this program; that's 30% over five years without an incentive.

The next point I'd like to make is, that is at least \$500 million in forgone revenue that could be used to invest in education. We can debate the education numbers, but I'll just take the numbers presented to us by our research staff here. If anybody can dispute whether those numbers are accurate I'd be happy to hear their argument.

The research staff prepared us some numbers using ministry numbers. It said a couple of things: one is that while inflation's gone up over the last five years by about 12%, per-pupil expenditures have gone up by about 3%. While the rest of North America is investing in public education and is enhancing public education, we in Ontario are taking money out of education. These numbers also show that actually the government is spending \$75 million less in 2001-02—that's the year we're in right now—than they did last year. These are the numbers presented to the committee.

So here we are. The government's about ready to ram through a bill that will cost the treasury about \$500 million a year in forgone revenue at the same time as we are starving public education. I might also add that in post-secondary, our colleges and universities, today in the province of Ontario—the government made an announcement yesterday on spending on universities and colleges—we are spending \$200 million less, investing \$200 million less than when Mike Harris became Premier.

The rest of the world believes that the way to a sustainable, strong economy is through investment in our education. I watched the commercials of the state of

Pennsylvania and Governor Ridge says, "Come locate your business in Pennsylvania. Why? Because we have the best education system. We graduate more engineers, more technologists than anybody. Come to Pennsylvania." They've been increasing their investment, as every state in the US and every province in Canada has. But in Ontario, check the numbers. Look at the numbers yourselves, members of the Conservative caucus. The province is investing \$200 million less in post-secondary education in this budget, the one this budget bill approves, than they did when you became the government in 1995.

1050

Here we are deciding that we are going to implement a program that will, according to the government, have a profound, negative impact on public education. That's according to the Harris brief to the United Nations two years ago. We're about to implement a program that heads down a road—and this is just the first step, as serious as it is. This is just the first step. We're about ready to head down a road of \$500 million less money available for education. If the numbers presented by our research staff are incorrect, I'd like one of the government members to tell us that and correct it. But it certainly shows we are starving public education.

I also want to talk a little bit about consultation. It was ironic yesterday. One of the Conservative members asked the Minister of Transportation about an interchange on Highway 400 in Barrie and whether there would be any opportunity for public input. The minister proudly got up—rightly so—and said, "Yes, there's going to be a public meeting where we will first lay out the plans we've got. Then there will be another public meeting where people can come and comment on the plan. Then there will be a third public meeting where the final plan will be presented and you'll have input." There will be three public meetings on an interchange on Highway 400, and that's good.

But here we are about ready to ram through a fundamental change in public education that came out of the blue. I don't think anyone, other than people who were involved in the preparation of the budget, ever anticipated that the government was going to proceed with substantial public money for private schools. That came straight out of the blue. We took the government at its word in its brief two years ago, the letters the Minister of Education, Ms Ecker, sent, the letters the Premier sent arguing against it, saying how much it would cost, how much it would fragment education. This came completely out of the blue in early May. Here we are at not even the end of June, less than six weeks later, about to approve fundamental change in education with barely any consultation.

I repeat: on an interchange on Highway 400 the public is allowed three separate meetings to provide input on that, but when we're looking at fundamentally changing public education, it has to be rammed through in a matter of days with very little opportunity for real public input and, frankly, the government not even having the courage

to provide publicly the basis on which they reached the decision. The committee, as we all know, sent a letter to the minister saying, "We've got your research on why you didn't want to do it two years ago. Give us the evidence of why you want to do it now," and nothing from the minister. Nothing. We are going to have to vote on this in the next two days, and it's all over.

Does anybody believe that's an acceptable way to develop public policy? Does anybody in the public support a government being this secretive and, frankly, I think undemocratic? The public has a right to know the basis on which the government's made its decision, how it reached its financial conclusions and how it reached its policy conclusions. But here we are, having asked for the information, the minister knowing that we're dealing with it today and having the arrogance to not even respond to us. The somewhat interesting thing is that his parliamentary assistant, who is supposed to be involved in this, won't even answer the question, "Where is it and are we going to get it or not?"

For all those reasons: the huge issue of the 180-degree turn for the government, the first but a very significant step down a very disruptive road, a \$500-million decision but with one number and no justification from the minister—I don't know how any Minister of Finance can justify not being prepared to tell the public the basis on which he's going to spend at least \$300 million of their money. It's not his money to spend. It's the taxpayers' money. To have the arrogance not to tell the taxpayers how he arrived at this and the justification for it is beyond me. It's arrogance at its worst setting in, in a government.

The facts are, as presented by the research staff, that we are starving public education, but we've got \$500 million to spend to undermine public education. When I say "undermine," I am using the words and the language of the government's own brief. For those and other reasons, Mr Chair, I will be voting against this section of the bill.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I am not pleased to participate under these conditions. I think the hearings, the lack of any movement by the government, the whole means of conduct, have shown that these proceedings have been a sham, have been a public relations exercise of the lowest order. This is not bringing dignity upon this House to drag staff and equipment and money spent to cater to people around the province for the sake of a show on the part of a government that doesn't have the courage of its convictions. Instead, we are here today at the tail end of a tawdry process that brings all into disrepute around this House. We were subjected in London to a slide show about art that had nothing to do with anything in this bill, except for the government's wish to block other people from being heard. The government aggrandized unto itself a power rarely used to control more of the witnesses than is usual and then abused that power by not letting it reflect what the people of this province wanted to be heard.

As we've learned and as people participating in this committee will each learn in their communities over the

course of the summer and fall, the numbers will out. The experiences of your public schools will be put in stark contrast to this reckless measure and this lack of courage. The \$950 per student less that is demonstrably, palpably the result of your other government policies is going to stand alongside the drain that this particular policy in sections 40 and 41 puts forward. The lack of courage is even more startling for the manner in which this is put forward. It's put forward hiding behind people with some legitimate claims to fairness, or to be heard at least, and it deliberately exploits them in a way that isn't factually supported by the structure of sections 40 and 41 vis-à-vis their situation.

It is in every respect a low watermark for this government, unable to put on the table what it really means, unwilling to hear from people, a government actually afraid of its own citizenry, afraid to hear from them, afraid to discuss with them, afraid to put to them a proposition in a fair and open manner, because if that proposition was so put, then it would be put in the following fashion: that sections 40 and 41 create a private secular education network in this province supported for the first time ever by public funds. That's what the two sections together would foist on this province, yet not one person, except using code words, would contend that in public. Instead, we have only buzz words and re-direction.

1100

I have here a copy of the so-called talking points of the government and in each and every case that they're asked direct questions—some already raised by my colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt, Gerry Phillips—the advice given is to defer and get around and answer something else. Don't talk about why this doesn't really benefit religious schools, don't talk about how this can harm the public education system, but rather talk about something else. Mouth meaningless things like "choice," when you're taking choice away from thousands and thousands of children in this province to a meaningful education. When you set up the artificial, obvious dichotomy of setting some against others, this has been a hallmark, but it certainly reverberates a certain character on the part of this government, when it has to subject the institutions of this country to such a low usage in terms of the potential we could have had for a proper debate.

I think what people are starting to draw from this debate, even as the government moves today to muffle it, even as the government uses, in abusive terms, its own power to control this committee, even as it does that, is that it hasn't succeeded with its main task, which was to muffle this particular initiative, to hide it from the light of day, keep it away from people's consideration. These members of the committee and this committee as a whole, in the influence of the government in its charge, has failed, because several thousand people have responded in the negative to this initiative directly to us, and we know that many thousands more have responded directly to the government, a government that needs no reminding that it has no mandate. It has no legitimate

means to put this proposal forward, to misappropriate \$300 million or \$500 million or \$700 million. It has no mandate. It sought no permission. It has formed no question to get an answer, and in point of fact it is running directly counter to promises it made in the course of the last election campaign and in writing, deliberately and publicly, to the people of this province.

Further, using the resources of this province in the preparation of a case before the Supreme Court, the highest, most serious panel of probity we've got in this country, this government made arguments on the other side of the proposal which we have in front of us today. That's how severely reckless the government is prepared to be. It is prepared to cast aside the reasoned facts that it put forward over the course of almost a year in front of various tribunals including the United Nations Human Rights Commission. It stands here today absolutely without a fig leaf of protection to try and claim that this is a legitimate initiative of theirs, when a year and some ago they backhanded the very groups they say they're championing today.

This government has not only no mandate, they are usurping a certain moral authority. I would say, within that will come some of the government's return on this particular initiative. To exercise power simply for power's sake may seem like an easy thing to do. This may seem like the simplest thing in the world for the government to shove through, because they have the numbers. But it bespeaks a level of arrogance that will catch up with the government. There is no place to hide from the baldness of this particular initiative.

If there is one thing that has succeeded over the last number of days, it is the number of people who have woken up and been alive to the fact that the government has set itself on a particular course that it has not advertised, that it does not have permission to enter, that it has not scouted the terrain of, and it is just veering off in that direction and hiding behind all manner of pontifications that it doesn't even have the civility to separate from its real intentions here. This particular measure confers main benefits, two to three to five times the financial benefit, to private secular schools because it's designed that way and because it's the particular measure this government had in mind.

Why is it being celebrated by the Fraser Institute and the National Citizens' Coalition and by groups who are of the hard right-wing variety? Because it is cause for celebration for people of extreme ideology throughout North America. At least those proposing this particular proposal in other jurisdictions have the honesty to call it what it is: a tax credit and a voucher, one and the same thing. Potato, potahto, it's the same thing in practice: it's money in the hands of individuals to pursue whatever institution of education they should like. It was turned down in 33 US states, where those proponents did not hide behind their majorities in their respective Senates or their respective Houses of Representatives. Those people didn't hide behind phony hearings where they screened out the people in this province who wanted to be heard.

We in the opposition heard from more people than this committee did by setting up hearings in Peterborough and Mississauga, in London and in other points all around the province. It could have been done. This committee could have shown some respect. It could have sat at 9 in the morning until 9 at night. This government wouldn't do it. It could have sat all summer. The insult that's inferred in this is that not only is the government going to have its way, it's going to have its way in a fashion that is calculated to serve upon people their lack of consequence to this particular government. It says to each of them that, even though this government has by any reasonable estimation at least 18 months in which to put in practice this particular bad policy, it won't give 18 days to its consideration; that it has such low regard for what the people of this province might do or might find out if this was to continue for a reasonable length of time as bears the seriousness of the proposition that the government has put in front of us, or at least has now been centred by the intervention of others as being in front of us—but rather than that, the government scurries for the hidey-hole.

That's why we're here today. We're here to denigrate this process by bringing closure to something that does not bear any relation to the consequence of what's been brought before it: an expenditure of \$300 million in the same year when the government cut the amount of textbook funds from \$30 million to \$15 million. Every member opposite is going to have in their home communities kids without textbooks for entire subjects next year, on the premise put forward by their Premier two weeks ago that this is predicated on there being enough money to consider it, on the economy and on other things that they've calculated to cause to make happen, which have actually made this surplus amount of money available, when all across the province school boards are making wrenching decision after wrenching decision.

This committee stands guilty of not having reckoned with those consequences. We have individual responsibilities here in this committee. We're elected by individual constituencies. We stand in our place and are responsible to them. I wager in every single one of our communities our school boards are removing essential services to students because they can't have the money you propose to throw down this particular path.

I heard a member from London talk about, "Well, it's only \$15 million this year." That \$15 million is the other half of the textbook money. And you can't guarantee what it will be. You can't guarantee what the costs will be, because the Minister of Finance, who is charged with over \$60 billion of expenditures, hasn't done a single iota of homework, hasn't done due diligence, hasn't put any staff on this. The only research we've seen was conducted in progress by the researcher on this particular committee, incredibly.

Yesterday in the estimates committee we found that the Minister of Education, the minister charged with the responsibility for learning in this province, couldn't even

give this a full-fledged endorsement and also has done no research. The Ministry of Education has not examined, not one bit—there's not one piece of paper to be put forward to say how this proposal, wherever it was hatched, will affect the public education system. It's incredible to think a government elected with that responsibility would suddenly toss it overboard.

1110

What has seized this government to make this kind of reckless measure? I think this is the time and this is the place to propose that this government is jerking off to a direction that is ideological, that is opportunistic and political in nature. It can't be conviction.

You've heard, day in and day out, from my colleague quoting the United Nations, quoting the minister, quoting the Premier. The sophistries aside, let me tell you something the minister said yesterday which just shows you how alarming all of this is. The minister said the reason that she wasn't completely against this proposal was because it wasn't the direct funding that is found in other provinces. That would hurt kids, and that's what she meant last year when she said it would hurt kids. Yet when we asked that minister or the other minister, the Minister of Finance, "What do you have to say that this won't hurt anyone?" then they say, "Well, there's the research of other provinces, which do direct funding," which the Minister of Education of this province believes would be harmful. So what do we depend on? Cleveland, Milwaukee? In Cleveland, 1,500 kids are part of a voucher tax credit program, and we're supposed to believe that on the basis of that you're going to subject 2.1 million kids in this province to this suspect policy? Where is any reasonable foundation for people to do this?

The members opposite have an obligation today to put on the table something more than slogans, to tell their constituents, and ours as well, why they would take this kind of risk, why they would subject it to this kind of undue haste; to even tell us what the political gain to be had is going to be, because from the reaction we've seen outside of these hearings, in the places where people have just wandered in because they're troubled, when we read the thousands and thousands of coupons we've had sent back from the little notices we've put in the paper, and thousands of e-mails, these people are motivated. These people are not going to give up on this particular measure because you usurp your power today. You don't have the moral authority to pass this and have it go away. It simply isn't there. I don't care what kind of government you think you are; you can't play around with 2.1 million children. You don't have that kind of authority. None of us would and none of us should.

There's a whole fantasy, I think, to this particular proposal today, that somehow, just because we pass this law, out of whole cloth you're going to be the first jurisdiction anywhere in North America to give children a back door out of public education. Every other place it was considered it was shot down, and the margins were heavy—70 to 30, 75 to 25—when people had some free will. What the heck has happened to this particular

government that it would not only not offer that opportunity, but it wouldn't have the decency to make this proposal and wait until the next election, if it's so confident in what it's doing?

This government is setting a very sad example. There was a time when, even in the midst of some very severe disagreement, there were some reasonable people who would ascribe to the governing party some of the values that went before, some of the values shared by other parties and some of the values shared by previous governments. I think that illusion is shot to heck. Every day I get more and more people saying, "I used to be a Conservative." You got some in your e-mails today saying, "This is it. This makes no sense whatsoever."

There used to be a Conservative Party in Ontario that had some reckoning with community. This is an anti-community measure. This is the laziest possible way you could address the issues in education in this province. By bringing no amendments forward, you're endorsing the idea that anyone can exempt themselves, can walk away from public education. It's the absolute counter to any thought established over a couple of hundred years in this province that we pool some of our resources and we pool some of our challenges. You say to us here today instead, "Forget about that." You are ignoring what used to matter to Conservative Parties: some tradition and some community. That's why you're not going to get away with this. It is not as if you just get to pass this and it walks away. Every small school that shuts down in your communities is going to be your responsibility. What do you think, Mr Hardeman, is going to happen to some of those small schools when they can set up in schools of five and the funding formula is the same one that threatens five schools in your board? There are rural areas that are losing funds. There was a little bit of funds injected this year. There must have been some nervousness in the caucus, because up to now, up to this year, Mr Harris had \$500 per student in rural areas and most of the rest, like Mr Beaubien, had \$10 per student in rural compensation—not fair, not built on a sense of community.

In the last minute, I have to say something that I would have put forward as a proposition. I would have given the benefit of the doubt to this government, at least in the alternative, but can no longer, that this has been your plan all along; that the ideological lurch that this represents today has been well set up by your defunding, your decommitment. You can't say you're committed to public education when you open up a highway out of it. You can't be seen that way. You have set up a financial structure where you'll never again have a financial interest in public education doing better. You've shown it this year. According to the research, it was \$75 million gone. We can expect more of that in the future because the more kids you chase away, the better off you are.

The Chair: Any further questions and comments?

Mr Hardeman: I guess I just want to say that I won't be going on a tirade with issues that do not relate anywhere near the facts, as we've been hearing from across the room.

First of all, I want to address the issue that Mr Marchese brought forward about the deputants who made presentations to our hearings around the province and here at Queen's Park and the fact that the lists of deputants, of course, were sent in for anyone who wanted to make a presentation. The lists were then circulated to every member of the committee and every member of the committee had the opportunity to look over the list and select the deputants they felt would be most helpful to them in making a decision on this bill. In reality, every member of the committee got to pick two members out of 14, since there are seven members on the committee.

Having said that, I think it is also important that Mr Kennedy spoke to a deputant who, in his opinion—of course, that's not necessarily shared by other members of the committee—did not make an appropriate presentation to the committee. As the Chair will know, everyone, as they made their presentation to the committee, was told that they had 20 minutes to make a presentation in whatever manner they deemed appropriate to point out their opinions and interest in this issue. I presume that the individual who made the presentation that Mr Kennedy rated as not a passing grade for him deemed that that was the most appropriate way to express his opinion. I fully support his right to do that.

I also point out, as I mentioned earlier, as to how the presenters were picked for the committee, that that day, of the long list of people who had applied to present, there were three presentations made by one federation. I have nothing against that. I just would look at that and say that's not a broad section of public opinion, particularly when two of the three were from the same local of that federation. I would question whether that is—not that I have anything against that. Those people have a right to speak as often and as thoroughly as anyone else. But I just point out that, as we are looking for a cross-section of people so as to get a feel of where the public in this province is on the issue, a broader cross-section may have been more helpful. But I sure would not want to suggest that any member of the committee did not make an appropriate choice on who and what information they deem most appropriate to have for our perusal to help make our decision.

1120

We also hear a lot of discussion about funding for public education. The committee has heard a lot about the issue of funding for public education. As recently as this morning, we got the information from the committee researcher as it relates to the figures, in fact, the figures that we have been putting forward in the committee since its initial meeting, that education funding in the public system has gone up from \$12.9 billion to \$13.8 billion in the public education system. This year's budget, the budget we're talking about right now, includes \$360 million more into the public education budget to show our government's commitment to public education.

But this really is an issue—and I think that's the one area the opposition may be right on—of fairness and parental choice. I think we heard a considerable amount

about that. A lot of the presenters who presented before us looked forward to the opportunity to make it more accessible to them, to send their children to an education of their choice.

I think the majority who spoke on the religious choice didn't put forward a position that they wanted the academics to be different, but they wanted and really felt for their children that the principles and the type of lifestyle they lived at home needed to be included in the children's total life, including the education portion. There were others who made presentations who felt that the way something is taught has as much impact as what is being taught. They felt that for their children, they wanted that choice. Those who supported that choice also felt that it was fair that there was some recognition in the tax structure for the contributions they make toward that choice. That's why this is being put forward.

I want to speak just quickly about the amount of money that the opposition keeps throwing out. They start with the budget figure that is mentioned, which at the end of five years, when it's fully implemented, is estimated by the Treasurer to be \$300 million. That's what the opposition starts with, and then, for some strange reason, they come up with that it could \$500 million, it could be \$700 million, it could be anything. But the truth is that the Treasurer has put it in the budget as \$300 million, because that's what he has projected it to be.

Mr Phillips: On what?

Mr Hardeman: There is nothing in the figures, as we look at other provinces, to suggest that people are going to move in great numbers into a system different from what they are presently in. The opposition seems to have this vision that parents don't have their children in the public education system by choice. My children are in the public education system and that's my choice. I'm not waiting for some reason why I wouldn't want them in that system. I like them in that system, and that's great. I think the people who are in that system feel that's appropriate, but it's not appropriate for all parents. That's why I think it's so important that this budget allow for some of that parental choice; that we don't do what one of our presenters told us in London when we met, that the public system was doing a great job of assimilating the children into the public education system. I don't believe that's what all parents want for their children and I don't think government should force parents to put their children into that if that's not where they want to go.

It's important that we recognize in the comments of Mr Kennedy, as he goes on his tirades, that this is not, I dare say, at least for my part, a decision for which I have to put out the political reasons why I'm doing it. I think we're doing this because it's good for the parents. It gives parental choice and it gives fairness. We heard numerous presentations during our committee meetings on the unfairness of the present system and the fairness of putting a system in place that provides some opportunities for independent schools that presently do not have it. I think Mr Phillips made the comment about the neighbour who was in a Catholic system. One of the

presenters made that point. He complained because his neighbour, who was in the separate system of our public education system because of choice, was getting fully funded, whereas he was making a choice for his children in something different, in fairness, and he was getting no funding at all, and that definitely wasn't fairness.

The other thing I found interesting during the presentations is that I think Mr Kennedy made some comments about his children being in Montessori education but in the public system, which is great, but that's not an opportunity that's available to all other children. In great parts of the province, our children do not have that option in the public education system. I think it's appropriate that if that's the choice parents deem appropriate for their children, they get some assistance to help make that happen.

I think we could go on at length, but I have no interest in spending all morning going on.

Mr Marchese: Speak your mind, Ernie. Say what you want to say.

Mr Hardeman: No, I will conclude by saying that Mr Phillips made the comment that we refuse to get the information. We are working on getting the information for him and hopefully it will be here—

Mr Phillips: Before the vote?

Mr Hardeman: —as soon as we can. It's not being refused; we just haven't received it yet. So with that we'll conclude our presentation.

The Chair: Mr Marchese, you have the floor.

Mr Marchese: Monsieur Gill, I thought I was going to listen to you first.

Mr Gill: I want to. Is there unanimous consent that I may?

Mr Marchese: We can come back. We'll come back in the afternoon.

Mr Gill: I thought you said you wanted to listen to me.

Mr Marchese: No, I'll hear from you again.

Just a couple of things. I've been fascinated by the discussion, as you might imagine. I was fascinated by Monsieur Flaherty when he came here and talked about people wanting an education in their own language and culture. I was startled by that revelation of Mr Flaherty's. I didn't know he cared so very much about these multicultural groups.

Mr Gill: We all do. I'm a prime example.

Mr Marchese: Yes, of course.

In the context of what he did in the past, that statement surprised me. What did he do, along with all of you other fine Tories on the other side? You got rid of employment equity in short order. It didn't take you long. The intent of the employment equity bill was to give greater fairness to groups that had been discriminated against, and they were four: women were one group, traditionally; aboriginal people; people of colour; and people with disabilities.

Mr Gill: On a point of order, Mr Chair: Could we ask the member to stay on the point, please, and not repeat himself? Is that in order?

The Chair: No, I don't think it's a point of order right now.

Mr Marchese: Merci, Monsieur Beaubien. You're much wiser than he, obviously.

The point of it is that in the context of what this government has done and in the context of his statement that people want their own education in their own language and culture, he seems concerned about the immigrant groups, the multicultural groups. In that context, I say, why would you get rid of employment equity, which is an attempt to bring fairness to a whole lot of groups that have been discriminated against? One big group was, of course, people of colour, people with disabilities and aboriginal people. They got rid of that in short order. They extirpated all references to words such as "equity" in the new curriculum that they brought forward. There's no mention of words such as "equity." You would think that a government that is concerned about education in their own language and culture would worry about issues of equity for those very groups. But those references to equity are gone.

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The word "anti-racism" does not appear in any curriculum document. I'm bringing it in. They have extirpated the Anti-Racism Secretariat. It's gone, presumably on the notion, Monsieur Gill, that we're all equal. We don't need an Anti-Racism Secretariat because we're all equal, as you know, right? And if there's an issue of discrimination, Monsieur Gill, the Premier argued you could take it to the Human Rights Commission and that would deal with the problem.

I think Mr Gill recognizes that we are not all equal in society, generally speaking, and that some people suffer more discrimination than others. People of colour certainly experience that, and many other groups in society. The Human Rights Commission isn't there necessarily to solve the collective issues that people suffer, but only individual problems, and only if people have the courage, the stamina, the strength and the money to take an issue through the system, which sometimes takes three years. So we know the Human Rights Commission is not the solution to racism and that the Anti-Racism Secretariat was a pro-active measure we took as a government to deal with issues of racism before they even happened.

The government says, "Now we've got rid of that." They got rid of the Welcome Houses. They got rid of the \$750,000 for ESL programs that were under the Ministry of Citizenship. That's you guys. Maybe you didn't know. Now international languages are virtually disappearing in the Toronto board because there's no money. They got rid of all the very things that address issues of culture, issues of differences, issues of multiculturalism, yet Flaherty comes and says, "People want their own education in their own language and culture," and he is going to provide it for them. So you understand. Monsieur le President is very amazed by that statement.

He's also amazed that it was Flaherty who introduced this measure—and all these wonderful staff who are listening to our debates are Mr Flaherty's people, right?

They are here listening to our discussion. I hope you're enjoying it, by the way. But it was a financial decision that was made.

Here we have a decision on a tax credit that has huge educational and social implications, but the tax people say, "This is only a tax measure. It isn't intended to solve or deal with educational issues. Yes, perhaps there are consequences as a result of it that may accrue or may impinge on the educational system, but that's not our problem. Our problem is to give a tax credit that provides relief to parents, be they middle class, be they upper middle or be they lower working class."

I find it odd that a measure that has huge implications for society in general has no corresponding connection to the Minister of Education; that the poor woman, the Minister of Education, had no chat with Monsieur Flaherty before he introduced it. They didn't bother to say, "Gee, how do we deal with this issue, because it's going to have all these other implications?" She was, of course, as equally surprised as we in opposition.

I am amazed that they didn't prepare adequately for the considerable questions that have arisen as a result of this policy. I wanted to put that issue on the record, to defend poor Madame Ecker. If I were a minister and Flaherty didn't consult me, I would have been angry as hell. I'm sure she was privately angry, but you can't say that publicly. I am convinced, Hardeman, that there's a whole number of you who don't support this measure, but I've been in government too, you see, and so have the Liberals. Some of them are very new, but Gerry was here. You understand that when you're in government, you can't show the public that there are divisions. You all have to play the game. I understand that. So I am convinced there are a number of you who think this is a crazy measure, but you're muzzled. I know some of you would love to say, "I am opposed to this."

John Hastings, MPP, I know this. I know that someone like you over there in Etobicoke isn't so crazy about this measure, but I know you can't reveal it.

Mr John Hastings (Etobicoke North): You wouldn't know my mind if you could read it.

Mr Hardeman: I don't know about this time, but I'm sure there are others when you were—

Mr Hastings: You're always assuming.

Mr Marchese: There are divisions in some other caucuses possibly, no doubt.

Mr Hastings: It's arrogance.

Mr Marchese: No, John, to be fair, you know I'm trying to be—

Mr Hastings: You're just being arrogant.

Mr Marchese: No, I'm not being arrogant.

Mr Hastings: It's just silly.

Mr Marchese: But it's not silly.

Mr Hastings: It is silly to assume that I—

The Chair: One discussion at a time, please.

Mr Marchese: Yes, John, get on the record.

Mr Hastings: I'm on the record.

Mr Marchese: But, please, speak. We've got a whole day, today and tomorrow.

Mr Hastings: Be a little more entertaining.

Mr Marchese: OK, but you know that I'm right in saying—

Mr Hastings: You're impugning.

Mr Marchese: —that there are a number of people in your caucus who oppose this, but you can't say it.

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: All right. Well, maybe I'm only guessing on the experience I have as a member.

John, let me tell you something. We had a debate in caucus on the auto insurance plan. I was opposed to our not proceeding with making auto insurance a public governance issue. I defended my view that we should proceed as we had said before the election, but the majority of caucus went the other way. I was against that measure but I didn't publicly go out and say, "I'm against Bob Rae." I didn't do that. Do you understand what I'm saying, John? I am saying to you that I believe, in your caucus, there are people who are objecting to this measure and they're not saying. That's all. But you don't have to tell me if you don't want to. That's OK. I understand. But the public probably will find out one way or the other.

To continue with some of the remarks I made and some new remarks I want to make, the Fraser Institute came in front of our committee. You remember that, Ernie. Claudia Hepburn was her name, a wonderful mouthpiece of the Conservative Party and the Alliance.

Mr Hardeman: Was she Conservative? I don't remember her saying that.

Mr Marchese: Would Claudia say, "I'm a member of the Conservative Party"? Of course not. But did I say that they're a mouthpiece of your party? Yes, I said that. They're a wonderful mouthpiece of yours and the Alliance party's.

Mr Hastings: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—another socialist name.

Mr Marchese: You don't like us very much, do you, John? They're socialists, yes, I know. They're so evil and they're so great in numbers that you've got to really worry about them, right, John?

Mr Hastings: I'm never worried.

Mr Marchese: OK. Claudia Hepburn of the Fraser Institute said, "This tax credit functions like a voucher." Ernie, do you remember that? Mr Chair, you remember that. She says it functions like a voucher. You remember that most opposition members are saying, "It's a voucher." But it's not really a voucher. That's how the Premier gets away with it, right? Because it's not. How does he escape not saying that this is a voucher? By calling it something else. It's a tax credit. But it functions like a voucher. It was wonderful that Claudia made that point because that is the point, right?

Ernie, you're looking very quizzically with your squinting eyes. That's what she said. I wrote it down.

Mr Hardeman: That may have been what she said but that doesn't make it so.

Mr Marchese: I wanted to point that out for the record, just to remind people about Claudia Hepburn

from the Fraser Institute, who came to support this government on this issue, whose statement was that on the issue of the voucher.

I've got to say to you that Duncan Green, a former director of education—he opposes this measure—was quite right when he said, "Usually a tax credit is introduced to encourage a particular action or behaviour. We cannot think of a tax credit that is designed to discourage activity." He's right. A tax credit is an incentive for people to take it up and decide, "I'm leaving the system, because this is now a little bit of help. It encourages me to leave the public system. It's enough money that I can now go to a private system." It's an incentive. It doesn't discourage people, it encourages people.

The \$2.3-billion cuts you've made to the educational system, Mr Hardeman, in spite of your protestations to the contrary, coupled with this tax credit that is an incentive for people to leave the system, will create an environment for a potentially high number of people to leave the system. Is it going to be an exodus? We don't think so. But it is a tax credit and it will encourage people to leave the system, and because you have destroyed public education with your assault on the system, many people will take advantage of leaving it.

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So will it be \$300 million or will it be more? We think it's going to be more. We obviously believe it will be more. Your Premier believed it too. You can say whatever you like and, of course, history will tell, but we believe it will be—

Mr Gill: What if they all came back to the public system?

Mr Marchese: Mr Gill, if they came back to the public system, I'd say, let's embrace them. Then I would say, let's pay the bill.

Mr Gill: It's \$700 million.

Mr Marchese: So what? If people were in our system—sorry, Raminder, but I'm for public education. I suggest to you that having them in the system is a better thing. I'm not saying it's great, John Hastings, MPP for Etobicoke North, that it's good to have people outside the public system. No, to the contrary. I say if the tax cut were not implemented, as you have done—and you will have taken about \$12 billion, more or less, finance people, by next year. By the end of the next two years, \$12 billion will have left the system. Imagine if we'd kept that in the system, we'd easily be able, Raminder Gill, to incorporate those individuals outside the public system, because we'd have the money, you see.

But with \$12 billion gone—at this moment, it's about \$8 billion or \$9 billion—of course we wouldn't be able to incorporate these young people into the system, because the money's gone. We don't have it any more. You've given it out in tax cuts.

Mr Gill: So we get rid of the Catholic and the francophone? Is that what you're saying?

Mr Marchese: Raminder, I want to finish before 12 o'clock.

I am opposed to the tax cuts that you have given to individuals in our society, individuals who don't need the money. People who are wealthy don't need money. I am opposed to your tax cuts that you've given to your corporate, rapacious sector that is never satisfied with any cut that you give them, because money leaves our system. We won't have the money to be able to deal with our health care system, our education system, our social services, home care, nurses, anything you can think of. You've destroyed our public service, because you've taken the billions and billions of dollars and given it away in tax cuts that we will never recover.

I say to the Liberals, they're going to have a hell of a problem when and if they form the next government because when the recession comes—and it's coming, by the way, not because I am omnipotent enough to cause it, but I'm prescient enough to be able to suggest that it will come. If it comes and should Liberals be, in their minds, lucky enough to be in power, they will face the same problems we faced in 1990: recession, probably full-blown, because I think the next recession is going to be uglier than the one we had in 1990.

Imagine the poor Liberals being in power, should they be, in their minds, so lucky. Are they going to be able to tax people back those billions and billions of dollars that have left the system? They're not going to tax people in a recession. New Democrats are the only ones who proposed that we take some of that tax cut back, and obviously we would take more if we were elected, because we need the money.

Mr Hastings: It's an addiction with you guys.

Mr Marchese: I know it's an addiction for us, but it's an addiction for you to give my money away to your corporate buddies, those rapacious individuals whom you consort with on a regular basis. You're giving my money to them, and they don't need it.

I'm suggesting that the Liberals have got to think this through. Recession is on its way here, money won't be coming in, people will be unemployed, welfare will be going up and \$12 billion of my money and yours, good citizens who are watching—or hopefully watching—that money won't be there to provide for the services that we will need. I wonder how the Liberals will cope with that. I put that on the record, Gerry, just in case you want to comment on that.

But it's a serious concern, you see. I've got a serious concern. I'm opposed to those tax cuts absolutely, always have been. You certainly don't introduce those tax cuts in a good economy. You don't do that. Imagine giving the corporate sector a tax cut in a good economy.

Mr Hastings: We all know what you did; you increased taxes during a recession.

Mr Gill: You'd spend your way out of a recession.

The Chair: One minute.

Mr Marchese: One minute again? I can't believe how time flies.

I was interested in Mr Hardeman's views. When the religious schools came, he loved the fact that they won't be supervised or made accountable in any way. He said

that's OK, that's really cool. But for the public system, it's not OK. For the public system, the law of the land applies to them, isn't that right, Ernie? The rigour needs to be put into place, isn't that right, Ernie? The public school system is so bad that the we, the provincial government, need to centralize, demonize and supervise the public system in order to make it better.

But for the private schools, ah, choice is the norm of the day. That's OK, because they don't need to be supervised and made accountable. Isn't that funny, Ernie, that you could be so inconsistent with your arguments, with respect?

Mr Chair, we may come back to it possibly. Who knows?

Mr Kennedy: The government may comfort themselves by saying, "The opposition's being unduly negative." I want to be certain that they understand the nature and the depth of the opposition here. The government had an opportunity, as it has had in other circumstances, but perhaps more clearly here, that if they wanted to do something useful, they could have done so.

This is the nut of the objection: a government that skates away from opportunities, that runs from chances to do useful things, that when trying to wrestle with choices between goods or avoiding poor outcomes for people, isn't prepared to roll up its sleeves and do that. The government could have spent a number of years or months—certainly probably at least a number of years in reality—creating an education system that would be excellent for every student in it.

With the same amount of money they've nominated for this purpose, they could have lowered class sizes to 20 in the primary grades. That's what the government could have done. They could have started in September. We could have been rushing through a discussion of how to do lower class sizes. That would have been tolerated in this province if the research had been done, if the proposal had been put forward.

There's a tremendous amount of startlingly good research that says, as every member in this committee probably already knows, that an action we could take could improve the quality of life for a young child and the eventual adult for a pretty nominal cost, for the sake of making sure there is someone who can pay attention to that child as they hit the younger years, as they get into the primary grades. We know that.

Right now, we've heard from presenters, both at these hearings and at the other more extensive hearings that we held, of classes of 32. Last night in Mississauga, a woman from Brampton had to pay to put her son into a private special-needs school in grade 3, not because they had expertise but just because they were going to give smaller class sizes and pay some attention. This woman did not want to do that.

There is also the next of the objections: rather than give people real choice of a public education that's been committed to, that starts to put measures in place, that conspicuously gets all the people on side, why is it so difficult for this government to get educators, students,

parents and others working together? You've had six years. You couldn't find a single thing that everybody would agree on and row their oars in the same direction?

We should be fighting ignorance; we shouldn't be fighting among the various factions you're so good at creating within education. Lower class sizes is where you could have started. Then, rather than break up and fragment, as your minister and your Premier have said you will be doing with this measure, you could have looked at ways to enhance both the diversity and the effectiveness within the public system.

I think every single member opposite has to concede you can probably find centres of excellence in your riding. If you've made it out, and I have to say that a number of you have, our MPP back-to-school report card will be out next week, and a number of your colleagues will be on it with good marks. But some won't; some won't have bothered.

But if you did and if you'd been there for a whole day, you would have seen excellence in your schools. What you could have done is said, "Where we find excellence in the public system we're going to pay, as the central government, to make it available. We're going to stop interfering and pretending we know everything. We're going to actually allow those insights to be shared. We're going to allow for some diversity."

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Real choice means the choices available to most people and that's what you could have done. You could have had something like our lighthouse programs and said to people, "What's happening down the block can happen in your school too, because we're going to make it happen." It doesn't take huge amounts of money; it takes a will and a commitment to make things better. You could have done that. You didn't have to bring us this. You could have also said that you're prepared to invest money.

I think you know that all these negatives, all these push elements, don't work in most reasonably sophisticated businesses. You can't thrive. You can get by pushing workers around or pushing people to your objectives, but you can't actually do a very good job, especially in industries like aerospace, and so on. They have team leaders. They don't have heavy-duty bosses that bring the hammer down, because it doesn't work, and it doesn't work in education. This idea we have in front of us today is vintage 1950s. What the heck is it doing being taken off the shelf and dusted off, here of all places, when it has been proven that kind of negative incentive—what some of these people have talked about as competition—is nothing but?

If you wanted to achieve things, you could have lined up some real engagement in the communities by providing the supports and the incentives. You could have looked at some meaningful ways, for example, to do teacher training. If you want to teach a new curriculum, make sure that your instructors are trained in it and take responsibility for it. We're prepared to do that, but you're not, so you've mismanaged your curriculum out there.

You wouldn't provide the texts, and you don't provide the training time. You could have been doing that.

We could have been talking about that today: how you were going to make up for that lost time, how you were going to deal with the kids that fell behind in that literacy test last year, how you were going to make sure in some form of commitment. We still haven't heard an iota.

In estimates committee this afternoon, \$50 million spent on testing—that's what you're wanting to do—\$50 million, up from \$8 million three years ago, you're spending to test kids, and you don't spend any money on helping kids do better, to make sure that they're going to get their literacy and numeracy, starting with the most basic elements, which we would say you should be focusing on in the elementary grades and the primary grades, a product of that class size but also a product of something you could also be doing. Give back to the community some control over their education. Stop acting like you know it all here. We're sitting in the throes of something that makes that advice sound pretty hopeless to anybody objective and watching. How could this government walk away from this big power surge that they're going through that makes them believe that in their plush chairs in Queen's Park they can control 5,000 schools? In fact, you don't even have to be the Minister of Education to do it; you can be the Ministry of Finance and you can dictate the impact.

Instead, you could have conceded something that every other jurisdiction in the world that has done an excellent job in education has done: the most important thing is to have a motivated, well-trained, well-functioning teacher at the front of the class in a learning community that is well supported, with a great principal. Those are the kinds of things that can happen, and you're getting in the way of that. You could have done that today. You could have granted more power. You could have done what we're prepared to do, which is to take away all those centralizing powers and allow standards to get met in ways that are appropriate for different communities. But you're not going to do that. You could have done that. You could have done that today and you could have gotten applause from this side of the House and probably from most of the province. But it's as if you're stuck in a groove, like your wheel is caught in this ideological lurch and you can't really examine what's good for kids.

You were asked to put students first last December, to deal with the extracurricular thing. The minister said in committee, "What do you think we're up to? What would we possibly be doing to kids in public education when we have kids there?" What were you thinking last year when you passed Bill 74 and you took away extracurricular activities from 400,000 or 500,000 kids in this province? Nobody at the beginning of the year, least of all you, would have admitted that's what you were going to do—take away extracurricular activities. That starts to look mild by comparison with what you're prepared to do today.

You can't do it with your head stuck in the sand. You can't say, "We're forced to do this; there's no other way

to address the needs of the children in this province. This is the best thing we can be doing for them.” You can’t say that. There’s a whole roster of possibilities that we’ve put forward in our Excellence for All package that you could have done. You’re the government right now. You could have made some of these things happen for fall, and instead we’re got all these half-hearted measures in Bill 80 taking place in the House.

It’s obvious the minister couldn’t get any money for education, can’t get any support to do things in education—I mean, the minister is still there and she must have a level of comfort, a level of agreement—within your caucus and I guess within this committee, because we’re not hearing it from you. There’s nobody advocating for public education. You’re advocating for private secular schools—brand new entities that you want to see get this credit.

Not one of you will even have—I guess we’ll see by the end of the day—the fortitude to stand up and say, “That’s what we want. This is what we’re doing. We’re not going to hide or deny,” and actually stand away from the script and say this is what you like. Some of you have said it in your side comments, but none of you have actually given a speech and said, “We want flat-out, individualized competition to take place between private schools, secular schools and these.” I don’t challenge, because that’s for you to see what kind of statement you want to put forward. This is the time. This is not the time to hedge your bets and cut off your statements. If this government has a point of view, you’re it. This committee’s on the record. If you continue to hide behind the slogans and you continue to hide behind the idea that this doesn’t matter, that’s something that speaks for itself. There is a better way to go here, and if at least for every time that you’ve put your advocacy behind this particular reckless measure—the first time anywhere in North America it’s been done.

The first four schools we talked to about this were all going to increase their tuition. Did you know that? The first four private schools we asked, “What does this mean for you?” said, “It’s great. We’ll put our tuition up.” Do you know what that means? The private schools are going to get smaller class sizes—yet again, at the public expense—while this week or next week in the Legislature you’re likely to vote for Bill 80, which is going to increase class sizes. You didn’t have \$100 million to to restore some of the cuts that you’ve made and bring back some of the teachers; instead, you’re increasing class sizes. Every other province in the country, every single state, is reducing class sizes and you guys are rushing, pell-mell, the other way. I guess you know better. That’s what you’re telling us today: you know better; it is a better thing to put a backdoor to public education than try and work out the problems at the front door and see how many more people we can fit into education.

How can we accommodate needs in this province? We can make the best public education system possible. We can give people confidence in that. We can give people a chance to be part of that. But that would have been the

more difficult route to go down. Instead, we’re on this branch which I think is going to be a dead end.

The hopeful thing about these hearings and the reaction that’s been had from the public is that you may think you get to do this, you may think you get to pass it, but you know at the end of the day it doesn’t matter. You aren’t going to get permission from the province to go ahead, and therefore the people who are listening and watching and reading the minutes of this should know that they have time to advocate and push even your government away from this and toward the other fork in the road, which is toward excellence for all in this province, excellence for publicly funded education in this province—to stop this kind of misdirection of our attention—toward the things that really matter. There’s one thing—

The Chair: You have one minute before we recess.

Mr Kennedy: There’s one thing that I think will linger as people see these various manoeuvres we’ve been through today and in the course of the last 10 days. They’re going to understand that it’s not a government stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility. This is you shirking, throwing off responsibility, saying to parents—a very small minority of whom have either the religious conviction, which you’ve continually hid your program behind, or the financial means to walk away from the system—“We give up on you and we’ll look at the agent of change as just being that other very small percentage of parents that we hope grows to a larger percentage.” It’s incredible, really. We’re here as public legislators. We’re here charged with that responsibility, and for some reason it’s fallen flat.

The Chair: Thank you very much. This committee will recess until—

Mr Marchese: Mr Chair, there was Ministry of Finance staff here. From my point of view, we may not need them. I don’t know if the Liberals have a similar view with respect to the finance staff. When we come back in the afternoon, my suggestion is that they need not come back.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent on that?

Mr Phillips: My only comment would be if they’re bringing back the information we requested from them, I would like them to bring that. If they haven’t got that, then I don’t think we would have a need for them.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent on that? OK. This committee is recessed until 4.

The committee recessed from 1201 to 1601.

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. It is 4 o’clock, so I’ll bring the committee back to order. One short announcement: I did receive a letter from the Minister of Finance. I haven’t had a chance to read it myself. The letter is being photocopied right now and will be distributed to all the members. I think we just got the photocopies.

Mr Marchese: They must have been working overtime.

The Chair: I don’t know. It’s just been delivered, so it will be delivered to you.

Mr Phillips: I've got the United Nations one. Is it as big as this? That's what I want to know.

The Chair: I guess we're on section 41, and the next speaker on my list is Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Just give me half a moment to see what this letter says. It doesn't seem to have—

Mr Marchese: Is there's something missing, Gerry?

Mr Phillips: The government, as we all know, tabled with the United Nations a well-researched brief.

Mr Marchese: Very philosophical.

Mr Phillips: I think they talked about it being supported by affidavits and research papers. That was a mere two years ago, as you know, when they were arguing against it. I'm looking for in this letter, which I just received—

Mr Marchese: It's not there, Gerry.

Mr Phillips: —the research they've done to indicate why they changed their mind. Maybe the parliamentary assistant knows whether that's coming or not.

Mr Hardeman: I'm not aware that there's any more coming than the letter you have here.

The Chair: I'm just informing the committee members that I was handed the letter. It's there for the members' interest and information. With that, I guess you have the floor, Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Thank you very much. We have had a fair debate on this, and I just want to respond to some of the comments that Mr Hardeman made. This is a move that we regard as very significant. To try and suggest that it's a relatively modest step—I think even the minister's letter makes that suggestion. I believe that the Fraser Institute and the National Citizens' Coalition were right when they said this is a very significant move. One said it's the largest move in 100 years in education; the other said it's the biggest, most significant development in education in North America at this time. I would just say, as we move forward, let's not underestimate where we're heading on this. It is dramatic, regardless of which side of the issue you're on, by the way.

The government often says this is not a voucher program, but, again, the presenter for the Fraser Institute, which frankly has studied this a lot, said to us last week, "Make no mistake about it: this is a voucher system." In fact, I gather the way this works is that if you submit a \$7,000 bill showing that's what you've paid for tuition, you get a \$3,500 cheque back from the government, even if you paid no provincial income tax. It's a refundable credit. It's just like a voucher. You submit the \$7,000 bill and the government turns around and sends you a cheque for \$3,500.

Mr Hardeman earlier indicated that public education has not suffered. I just say to the public—and each member can make their own mind up; Mr Marchese has been active in public education—I don't think, frankly, that I've ever seen our school system where the morale in the profession is as low as it is today. I always say—and I think Mr Marchese said it this morning—education is pretty straightforward. It is a motivated, well-trained,

quality teacher in front of a group of students. We've undermined that.

In terms of financial support, I can accept at face value the committee's research staff, who have pointed out to us that on a per-pupil-expenditure basis we have not even come close to keeping pace with inflation. According to the numbers they produced, we're actually going to spend \$75 million less this year, the year we're in, than we did last year. The government says, "Yes, but we had some special one-time funding last year. You can't include that." A big part of that was special funding for fuel costs. Anybody here who believes that our system is going to face substantially lower fuel costs in the next 12 months than they did in the last 12 months is kidding themselves. They had special funding for textbooks, which has been cut out or dramatically reduced.

I believe strongly that this is a huge step down the road. I understand fully the depth of feeling of those who support it, but to me it will fundamentally change public education in Ontario. I also happen to think that once you start down this road there will be enormous pressure for full funding, because that's the basic argument many people used with us, that in fairness they believe there should be full funding.

For all of those reasons, and the ones we've debated over the last few days, I have significant difficulty with this.

Mr Hardeman: On a point of order, Mr Chair: I just wanted to point out that I have a letter here—and Mr Phillips has been talking to it quite regularly—from the Fraser Institute that I will file with the clerk, and it reads:

"To whom it may concern:

"The education tax credit proposed by the Ontario government for private school tuition is not a voucher. It is rather superior to a voucher because it keeps education funding in the parents' hands, where it belongs."

I will file that with the clerk so all members of the committee can have that. I think it clarifies the position that was made by the Fraser Institute in their presentation.

Mr Phillips: I'm sorry, Mr Chair. Did she misspeak herself when she was here?

The Chair: I'm sorry, I'm going to go to Mr Hastings.

Mr Hastings: I'm very enthusiastic and eager to speak on this particular proposition, because we have heard so many bizarre things from across the way.

First off, about the only thing Mr Phillips and I would agree on is that it is an enormously significant policy step because it is a significantly enormously positive policy step. Many people throughout the so-called debate and even prior to the introduction of this concept in the budget bill, Bill 45—there is a history in Ontario of requests being made and studies actually being carried out by various governments. If you go back to the Robarts years, there was a study in 1969 about the role of financing independent schools within the public education system in this province. There was the Shapiro report of 1985, which made some specific recommendations regarding this issue. It's not as if this issue,

as the Liberals are so wont to frame it, is a sudden policy reversal that hasn't got any research. All you've got to do is go to the legislative library and you'll find some. Perhaps he hasn't found his answers to the issue at hand in this specific document, the budget, but I'll leave that as it may.

1610

I was absolutely not surprised by the Gliberal education critic's remark this morning, with the usual mantra we hear from him, the sloppy thinking, as he doesn't want to appear to be negative, which he often is in his attacks on people, whether they are proponents of this education tax credit or not. It has been portrayed as a sop to the wealthy. Well, let's put on the record a few comments to the contrary about that.

The first thing I want to put on the record regarding the tax credit is from Terry and Glenda DeVries. It's a letter we received this morning, and I am now quoting:

"I am writing you this note because I feel that the voice of those of us who struggle with the payments of private Christian education is small and unheard. I am not rich and neither are my kids, but to serve God in the education process of my children is important to us as a family. We have supported through our education taxes the implementation of public education for 15 years, and have never asked for a penny in return.... We, my wife and I, support a system that those of lower income"—and that's the key point I think she would want us to look at in this letter—"who wish to have a private education which lines up with their convictions, would receive a tax break of some sort. I hope that this would be the outcome."

That is a sentiment I have seen in other correspondence, in other submissions and from people I have discussed this issue with at my constituency office. So we automatically reject the framing of this issue as if it were support for wealthy parents only. In fact, it is a support for low-income people who have chosen, many through their own sacrifice, many through their own endurance. I see another letter here where the mother of two children works at two part-time jobs to ensure that she has some choice in the way her children are educated.

What is so wrong with that? Why is it that in this environment today in Ontario everything has to be undertaken under a monolithic enterprise, that there is no diversity outside the public education system? We heard recently one of our submissions, I believe it was last Thursday, which in point of fact related that there is an acceptance, if not a tolerance, for this kind of financing of education in Sweden. My goodness, it's absolutely shocking to think that in Europe, where the Europeans and the continentalists consider themselves highly sophisticated and highly tolerant, you would have that kind of acceptance in the political forum for an initiative. It may not necessarily be exactly the same as proposed in this budget.

If you come back to Canada, you find a similar historic acceptance, differently financed, in the western provinces and in Quebec. If you look at the research of

the existence of these particular schools, these independent private schools—there is research. It was shown and submitted by the representative from the esteemed Fraser Institute that when you have some competition in the system, when you have some comparative benchmarks, one of the inevitable but not surprising outcomes is that you get better performance within public schools in other jurisdictions. Why would Ontario be any different, on the basis of that research?

We come to the central argument made by the critics of this proposal—and I think this was what one of the other proponents related as a myth in his submission—that there is a social divisiveness about this situation. If that were true, then you already have it, actually, because from their fundamental premise, you cannot have any kind of an alternative in education. It has to all be within the public system, because even without the financing of parents choosing to send their children to independent schools, you already have social divisiveness, according to the way the folks across the way weigh in on values.

They use terms like "fragment" and "balkanize." It's like the word "download" we hear so often from the folks across the way, when in fact it was realignment, if you want. To quote the submitter of this proposal in support of the tax credit last Thursday, "balkanize" is an interesting and ironic choice of wording. He went on to point out that Yugoslavia is one system which, under Communist governments for five decades, had such a system, yet it fostered in the end a tremendous ethnic hatred, worse than ever.

I think the argument is over-dramatized, if you want to get into the real debate over the virtue or the negativity of this proposal. I simply wanted to make sure that those particular contentions were dealt with. Now that we have the Gliberal Party so solidly and firmly on terra earth dealing with this proposal that they will decommission it, they will be truly committed to public education in Ontario, it would have been interesting to understand what kind of substantial angst must have gone through the minds and hearts of those who didn't necessarily line up as they were supposed to, like those in the old Soviet command economy, behind their leader's position on this.

I'm just wondering if we will end up with them "solidly supportive of public education," much like the Liberal leader has done in the past regarding photo radar, which he said at one time was a key plank in his own platform during the 1999 election. We had back then quite a history of change of mind regarding where the Gliberals stood on this particular public policy issue. First off, they were strongly opposed to it when the NDP proposed photo radar and had it implemented for a while in the mid-1990s. They said it was cash grab. Then a little later, we had certain members who are now present in the Liberal caucus voting against it, I guess on that basis. OK, fine. We can accept that. But then when you look at the evolution of this particular proposal, what happened next? The Gliberal leader decided that photo radar should be brought back, so they switched their

position. There's nothing new about that, because that's their history. Then shortly after that—my time frame may be off, but probably within six to nine months, during the election—Mr McGuinty said that he had “no intention” of putting it forward again. So they were opposed. That's a third change of mind. They were opposed then. OK, we'll accept that for what it is. Then later on, just about a year later, it becomes a priority again. So they support it.

1620

Now I know people will say, “You're trivializing this particular proposal.” Not so, I don't think. It's pretty clear that within the Grit party there are minor pockets of support for this bold idea. They may not agree with all the details of it, but in general, in principle, they support it.

My contrast to the photo radar change of mind twice is that people, when they go shopping in the next provincial election, had better be pretty careful what they're buying at the political shop of whatever riding they're in regarding the tax credit proposal. They'd better be very careful.

Right now we have the Gliberal leader being strongly opposed to it but, remember, the history on photo radar switched twice. So why isn't there a possibility that they could switch again, or switch for a year and then reshape our budget proposal to something more in kilter with the ideology or lack of ideology across the way on this particular proposal? I think people need to beware.

One could ask, “Where was the research done on the change of mind twice on photo radar?” I don't see any supporting documentation. I'm sure you can find in the literature advocacy on both sides. We have seen through these submissions in the eight days on this particular proposal both those who are in favour of it and those who are opposed to it, and probably some who have changed their minds both ways because of experience over time. So I think it's important to make sure that people know where political parties stand on issues. Circumstances do change; people do change their minds.

Mr Marchese: How often?

Mr Hastings: How often? It's not very difficult when you look at—it's interesting to hear the member of the old socialists speaking up so fervently, or the New Debtors Party. It's interesting to hear where their research was on the reversal on Sunday shopping, as one, or their research and no hearings on the social contract of 1994-95. I just wanted to put those particular items on the agenda.

I used to teach school and one of the things that's interesting to hear from the critics in this so-called debate, very seldom—and I've read through some of the presentations, both for and against, and the folks across the way who spoke on this. They do not associate, or seem to leave out, whatever the intention is, the idea of results, the idea of academic outcomes from the testing that we've undertaken since 1995. Where do we see in the debate—and it links up I think, very much so, to the motivation for parental choice in this whole area of choosing where parents want to have their children go to

school. Where do we see the linkage in the debate over results and outcomes from the tests? It's very seldom mentioned.

We hear from the official opposition the voicing of their deep concern regarding the \$50-million expenditure for tests. They say that there are probably too many or they're too complicated or they're too demanding. We've heard those criticisms, not all from the official opposition but certainly from the various parent groups that tend to not support this particular proposal. But then when you look back at the motivation of why parents decide to take their children out of public schools or never put them into the public schools, this has been going on for a long time.

The 100,000 children who are not attending a public school across this province didn't start in the last few years. It started many years ago, probably 15 or 20, because that's what parents chose. Whether they be religious reasons, values reasons, academic results reasons, they did so. There has been a steady evolution of the number of dissatisfied parents who took their children out of public schools after having them in. We've also seen in this mixture parents who had children in independent schools put them back into the public schools because their economic circumstances required them to do so. They were probably reluctant to do so, but they did.

So you have a cross-culture here of people acting in their own particular interests, in the interests of their children. Somehow or other in this culture there seems to be the outlook or the attitude or the philosophy that you can't tolerate the existence of a parallel system of independent schools, private schools, whatever you choose. You often hear that the tax credit money is not going to the parents, it's going to the institution. That, we know, is factually incorrect but it is often sloppily restated over and over and then it gets people confused as to where the money is going. It's not going to the institution; it's going to the parents.

The Chair: You have one minute to wrap up, Mr Hastings.

Mr Hastings: I simply want to put those things on the record.

The final thing that I want to put on the record is that we have heard from various critics, including the Liberal education critic, that this is not a good idea, that it is an attack—that's the word from the old socialists—on the public schools. But in point of fact, the previous leader of the New Democrats, 20 years ago, had his children going to an independent school. We've had people who are supposedly strongly opposed to this concept, including Mr Kennedy, who is a member with an independent school education; nothing wrong with that. So you have people coming from different backgrounds. But unfortunately there seems to be a deep intolerance, a deep, ingrained attitude that you can't allow different choices to be made in society today; everybody has to be put in the same monolithic approach, and I reject that.

The Chair: With that, I have to bring it to an end. I see our next speaker has just stepped out, so, Mr Marchese, you are next on the list.

Mr Marchese: I think he was trying to slow this committee down.

The Chair: No, you're next.

Mr Marchese: I'm ready.

It was a curious thing to have received this letter from Claudia Hepburn. I quoted her this morning. Do you know what I think? She's watching. I think she's watching this channel; she is. I asked Susan Sourial, the clerk, before she went to get a photocopy, what was the date of this document. She didn't obviously look at it. But I raised it as a way of suggesting that she obviously did that today, and it's dated June 20. That's why I say she's watching this program. She must have heard my comments—she's a very lively character, I could tell—and she decided that she couldn't accept what I had said, that her comments at the committee hearing were that the tax credit functions like a voucher. That's what she said. She couldn't help herself, after seeing this—or one of your staff probably told her that I said whatever I said about her—so she sent you this fine letter saying, “The education tax credit proposed by the Ontario government for private school tuition is not a voucher.” She wanted to clarify that. And then she said, “It is rather superior to a voucher...” Like it wasn't enough to say—last week when she came to the functions, she had to clarify and say, “It's far superior to the voucher.” She's too much. She's a very impressive young woman. I like her. Anyway, it was a very curious thing that she sent it today, but I wanted to put that on the record.

1630

John, I'm just going to be brief in response to you because I didn't want to say much. So I'll take just a couple of minutes, unless provoked again by other members, and then I might have more to say. We'll see. But otherwise I'll be very brief.

Just in response to the member from Etobicoke North, enrolment in private schools has increased 30% since 1995. That's a huge increase, Joe. Yes, of course people were in private schools, but a 30% increase since you guys came in speaks to our *je ne sais pas quoi*, non? Right? It speaks to something. What it says is that the system is obviously eroded to the extent that people are saying, “It's time to get out. The public system is no good any longer and it's time to get out and go to a private school.” They're anticipating the dissolution of the public system. Because of the serious underfunding, people are saying, “It's time to go.”

So I say to John, the biggest increase to private school enrolment has happened in your term, and there's a reason for it, which I have already articulated. I probably don't have to repeat it, but you never know, I may have to, because you never know how discussions go here. I wanted to clarify that one.

John Hastings says he's incensed when people say that this is a sop to the wealthy, and then he gives an explanation of that, about how many poor people are sending their kids to private schools. I've got to say to John, for clarification purposes, that the majority of people who will be helped are those who send their kids

to the non-denominational schools. Some 70% of the funding that you people are going to give will go to those non-denominational schools. They're not exactly poor, those people. In fact, John, those people who send their children to non-denominational schools are, yes, middle class, but the majority are upper middle class; I don't mean by education necessarily, but by income. These people are wealthy, John—extremely wealthy—and you're going to give them public dollars even though they don't want our money.

You see, the reason they send them to private school, as I said earlier, is because it's a private club. They don't want you in, John. Even though you're a Tory, they probably don't want you in. And they don't want me in because I don't fit in. We're not part of the club. You understand that. We're not.

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): What about the Liberals?

Mr Marchese: I don't know about Monte and Gerry. I can't speak for them. They might have some friends there, I don't know. I suspect they might not take John, or Monte either, but I could be wrong. It's a club. It's a wealthy club of people and I certainly don't want to give my money to them.

But on the record, John, I did say that many of the people who send their kids to the denominational schools, the private ones, are making tremendous sacrifices. I said that in committee. I did do that. They work very hard in their schools and they're not wealthy people. I did say that on a number of occasions. That's why I'm clarifying. I say that the people who are wealthy don't need our support, and that's where the bulk of our money is going.

John, it's a fact. You talk about other people being sloppy in terms of their thinking, but it's a fact. You see, the private schools have the largest enrolment. The denominational ones, the private ones, have fewer students in their schools. I'm saying to you, John, that the majority of people in these private schools go to these non-denominational ones, as a result of which they will get the biggest chunk of the money. I know you nod your head, but it's a fact. So I wanted to clarify that once again.

With respect to the point John makes about other jurisdictions, I think it's a very difficult thing to talk about in terms of comparisons, because each jurisdiction has its own cultural setting, cultural perspective, cultural history, and each and every program is very different. These programs, wherever they may exist, reflect their own history, and I'm trying to reflect my history here in Ontario as well. I'm saying the comparisons you draw are not the same.

With respect to the competition, John, you argue that competition is going to make things better for the public school. I'm not sure. I've argued in committee that your underfunding is making it harder and harder for your former colleagues—because you were a teacher once. It is making it harder for them. And it's making it

extremely harder for the parents and extremely harder for the students.

Mr Spina: That's an ambiguous statement, "extremely harder."

Mr Marchese: Sorry?

Mr Spina: Your grammar is poor.

Mr Marchese: Thanks, Joe.

John, you understand that every time you take the kind of money you've taken out of the system, it is going to hurt public education. It is hurting them now. We've heard the deputants. You were at some of them. You've heard the level of frustration and anger of some of the parents in terms of what you're doing; anger from teachers and trustees and board representatives in terms of what you're doing with respect to the cuts.

What I want to say to you is that I'm not afraid of the competition. In fact, our public school system does well in spite of the chronic underfunding they face with you. The problem we are facing now, John, with your proposal, is that you're going to give these people money to continue to support the private sector, which will continue to sort out who it will accept in its system and, then, because they're paying the fees they're paying, will continue to have class sizes that are much smaller than our system.

As you know, John, as a former teacher, class size does help. The smaller it is, the easier it is for a teacher, unless of course you're lazy and you don't want to work. If you're a lazy teacher and you don't want to work, whether you've got 15 or 25, the result is likely to be the same. But if we are assuming that the teacher is dedicated and you've got 25 versus 15, the outcome, as you know, John—well, if you were in the school, you would know. If you were teaching the class, you would know that if you've got 15 and you're a good teacher, the product or the result will be better. But if you're a teacher who doesn't care much about the outcome, whether you've got 15 or 25 may not make much difference. But I claim the majority of teachers are good teachers who do a good job for our students.

I say that we do a very good job in spite of the chronic underfunding relative to the private system. I've got no problem with that. Except I'm saying to you, John, that you're going to help the private sector do an even better job in terms of the people it sorts out, in terms of the students it accepts and those it rejects, those it will not take. It will continue to have class sizes far smaller than ours so they'll be able to do OK. Thanks to you, John, Ernie, Joe and Tina, for the good help you're giving all those lovers of private sector education. God bless them. You've done well for them. They're really going to like you. We heard it. Except, as I said, the non-denominational schools, I don't think, sent in their—

Mr Spina: They did.

Mr Marchese: Did they? Who applied, Joe?

Mr Spina: The Montessori schools.

Mr Marchese: OK. Two Montessori schools came. That's good.

Mr Spina: And the associations.

Mr Marchese: I don't see any of the other private schools, the ones that I mentioned, like the Upper Canada College types.

Mr Spina: It doesn't make any difference.

Mr Marchese: Oh, yes, it does. The bulk of the money is going to them, Joe Spina. Anyway, I'm tired of this discussion, so Monsieur Beaubien, merci.

Mr Phillips: I just wanted to comment on Mr Hastings's comments about some of the comments the opposition have raised. I think those members on the committee who were here when I was asking questions will remember that, I think virtually every time, my questions and my comments were framed by the government's brief to the United Nations and the things the government said two years ago when they made this presentation to the United Nations. I always use that language because it's language that I assume the government believed at the time.

1640

I just repeat, Mr Hastings. I've read this comment often, but it says:

"The state party"—the Ontario government—"submits that one of the strengths of a public system of education ... is that it provides a venue where people of all colours, races, national and ethnic origins and religions interact and try to come to terms with one another's differences.... In this way, the public schools build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding.

"Extending public school funding rights to private religious schools will undermine" this ability and may "result in a significant increase in the number and kind of private schools.... This would have an adverse effect on the viability of the public school system, which would become the system serving students not found admissible by any other system.... Such potential fragmentation of the school system is an expensive and debilitating structure for society."

Moreover, "extending public school funding rights to private religious schools could compound the problems of religious coercion and ostracism sometimes faced by minority religious groups in homogeneous rural areas of the province. ...the majority religious group could reintroduce and even make compulsory the practice of school prayer and religious indoctrination. The minority religious groups would have to either conform or attend their own, virtually segregated schools."

To the extent that "...funding of private schools enables such schools to supplant public schools, the government objective of universal access to education will be impaired....funding of private religious schools is likely to lead to increased public school closings and to the reduction of a range of programs and services a public system can afford to offer."

It "would have a detrimental impact on the public schools, and hence the fostering of a tolerant, multi-cultural, non-discriminatory society in the province, thus undermining the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."

Where the word “tolerance” and those other words came from—those are not words that I invented—is the language the government used in its proposal to the United Nations two years ago when they were arguing against it. So I’ve always used that language. I’ve read it. It’s safe, because it’s government language.

The question always has been, what has caused the government to change its mind now from a position it held firmly two years ago? I’ve not seen the evidence. I simply wanted to get that on the record, because it implied that this was language that I believed would lead to intolerance and things like that and I merely wanted to remind that it’s the government language I quoted directly from their document.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Any further questions or comments on section 41? If not, I shall put the question on section 41.

Shall section 41 carry? All those in favour? Opposed? Motion carried.

Mr Marchese: Can we have a recorded vote?

The Chair: Too late. On section 42 are there any questions or—

Mr Marchese: Can I just ask, Mr Chair, did we have a recorded vote on section 41?

The Chair: No, you were too late for that. You have to be in your seat to request it. Now, if you want to request it for section 42, you’re in your seat.

So is there any comment, discussion on section 42? If not, I’ll put the question on section 42.

Shall section 42 carry?

Are you requesting a recorded vote, Mr Marchese?

Mr Marchese: No. It was section 41 that I had requested a recorded vote on before.

The Chair: Well, I’m sorry. I think you know the procedure. You weren’t in your seat.

Mr Marchese: You don’t have to repeat it. I heard you.

The Chair: Shall section 42 carry? Carried.

Since the amendments have all been removed, do you want a vote on each section or can I collapse all the sections?

Mr Kwinter: You can collapse them.

The Chair: Shall sections 43 to 255 carry? Those in favour? Opposed? Carried.

Shall the short title of the bill carry? Carried.

Shall the long title of the bill carry?

All those in favour? Opposed? It carries.

Shall Bill 45 carry?

Mr Marchese: Recorded vote.

Ayes

Hardeman, Hastings, Molinari, Spina.

Nays

Kwinter, Marchese, Phillips.

The Chair: The motion carries.

Shall I report the bill to the House? Agreed.

Unless there’s any other order of business, I will declare this meeting adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1646.

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