



ISSN 1181-6465

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Third Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Troisième session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 2 October 2002

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mercredi 2 octobre 2002

**Standing committee on
estimates**

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Energy

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministère de l'Énergie

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Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 2 October 2002

Mercredi 2 octobre 2002

The committee met at 1535 in room 151.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Vice-Chair (Mr Alvin Curling): Let's resume the hearing of the estimates of education, but let me just deal with some little details before. We have an hour and 27 minutes remaining in the estimates of the Ministry of Education. The third party will be on right away with 20 minutes. Thereafter, it will be followed by the government with 20 minutes. The remaining 47 minutes will be at 15 minutes a round. If you calculate it mathematically, there are two minutes left, which maybe the chairman will take to give you a lecture or something. We'll see what the two minutes do.

Right now we will have Mr Marchese of the third party, to whom we'll give 20 minutes. You're on.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Minister, I wanted to pursue the questions that were being asked of you with respect to what the investigators are doing at the Toronto board around the issue of appraisal of the art work it may have accumulated over the 100 years or so of their history. Do you have any sense of why the investigators are doing that?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): After the question was brought to my attention yesterday, I learned that in April, prior to appointment of the supervisor, the administration of the board did undertake a process to review the board's inventory for various reasons, including ensuring that it was properly protected and secured and that this was for insurance purposes. Beyond that, I don't have any other details on this review and I have no knowledge of the collection of paintings. In fact you probably would be in a better position to know what they may or may not be.

Mr Marchese: No. I'm not sure they have as much art as we do. I don't know what we control here that is valuable or not. I would assume that we are not interested in selling our art work and that we wouldn't want that to happen. I would make the same assumption about the Toronto board not wanting to sell its art work, and I wondered whether the investigators are trying to find ways of raising money to deal with the deficit. That's the worry it projects, right?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I can appreciate your concern. Certainly that is not the information that I've received. I understand that this was a process started in April and it

continues to be ongoing. Maybe this is the first time, and I'm not sure, it might have been done since the amalgamation of the boards.

Mr Marchese: OK. If that's something the administrators were doing—

Hon Mrs Witmer: Before.

Mr Marchese: —before, I'm hoping that the now-supervisors are not spending a lot of our public dollars to do something the board would have done on their own. That would worry me a little bit.

Hon Mrs Witmer: No. As I say, I've been informed that this process started in April of this year.

Mr Marchese: OK. I am glad we got that out of the way. I was also worried about insurance because there are a lot of—I don't want to pursue it too much more except to make another point. Works of art that are donated are legally binding on some of the boards, as we would be with some of the art work that we collect over the years. I would have thought that that is a problem. I get the sense that you are agreeing with me.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I understand there may have been some alumni who made donations to the board and oftentimes there are restrictions.

Mr Marchese: I wanted to pursue the questions that I started with yesterday with respect to the double cohort. The study that has been done by Alan King—the question I was asking, and one of the other administrators had responded to it yesterday. We understand the study says they found that 80% of students had intentions to go on to university, but I was saying yesterday that the Minister of Training, Colleges and University is using a 60% figure and so we have concerns about the disconnect of those two figures. Do the two figures concern you in any way in terms of problems they present?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes. I'm going to ask the deputy to respond to that concern, Mr Marchese.

Ms Suzanne Herbert: Mr Marchese, the first report, of course, was following these children through the first new secondary school program. The question was asked of students what their intentions were. Of course, it's not unexpected that when children are in grades 9 or 10, they think of university as a real possibility for them. Over the period of time of their career, we know from surveys we've done in the past that what students say they're going to do and what they actually do often is somewhat different, so we expect that some of those children may take five years in the program. They may need more time

to accumulate their credits. We also know that some of those students may decide to take a year off before they go to university, or may decide that they are going to enter the working world instead of going to university.

So in looking at that first figure, the 80% figure, that is what students say they are going to do, not what we can actually guarantee they are going to do. We are continuing to, and will continue to, monitor with colleges and universities as the students move through the first cohort.

Mr Marchese: Right. That study I don't think is available. Are you making it available? Is there a problem of making it available?

Ms Herbert: The first year of the study—because this is a study that follows the students through—there was a summary report made available last year that is available. The second year of the study is still in draft and we expect to be able to make that available fairly soon. Dr King has been following these students through.

Mr Marchese: Yes. So “very soon” could be whenever you're ready or whenever—because the report is ready. There is a summary, I'm assuming.

Ms Herbert: No, when we receive the final copy of the report and when we've done our analysis of it—but I hope that it will be available fairly soon.

Mr Marchese: OK.

Ms Herbert: It was about, if I remember correctly last year—and, Grant, you might want to tell me for sure; I think it was November or December before it was—

Mr Grant Clarke: It was January.

Ms Herbert: Oh, it was January. Sorry.

Mr Marchese: To get back to the issue of the double cohort, I've heard a lot of teachers advising students that perhaps they could take the year off. My son is in his final grade. He's in grade 13. He tells me that some teachers are saying to students that they might, if they face a problem getting into university, decide to take the year off.

So we will never know who those students are who choose to take the year off versus the fact that they were squeezed from entering university or college. Therefore you will never know and I will never know. I'm arguing, there's a problem of access. You will argue, “No, whoever wants to go in, can.” I'm saying, how will we ever figure out whether the story that I'm telling you is true, and I believe it is, where a lot of people are advising—not guidance counsellors, because we don't have many left, although you say you probably have an increase in guidance counsellors, correct?

Ms Herbert: Probably we do.

Mr Marchese: Yes, I'm sure. I forgot guidance counsellors yesterday.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We were going to find that for you.

Mr Marchese: Yes, for sure, because I want to spread the news, as I was saying yesterday, about how good you guys are.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I could say good things about you, and vice versa.

Mr Marchese: Yes, to help each other.

So a lot of teachers are saying, “Take the year off if you find you can't get in.” I'm concerned that I believe this is what will happen: many will leave the province if they can't find space here, but you will never know because you don't track that. I'll never know, because I can't track it.

You have, in my mind, two reasons why you won't have a problem in terms of dealing with your access issue, and they are: they'll leave the province or they'll find a job. Some people are probably saying to those students, “It's not such a bad thing.”

I worry, because when people take a year off, they might like to take two, three or four. They might not like to go back. If it's one of my children, I've got to tell you, I'm a bit nervous, although for some students it's not a problem working that extra year because there is some physical and intellectual maturity, and for some it's great to take the year off. But it does worry me, if I am a parent, when that happens, because you never know what's going to happen.

How do we deal with this issue of access, of how we track those leaving the province and those students who are going to be working because they can't get in? What's your answer to that problem?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I know what you're talking about, Mr Marchese. I had a daughter a couple of years ago who was going into university and I can tell you, double cohort or not, it's always a year filled with some anxiety as students apply to post-secondary institutions and hope they'll be accepted and what have you.

This year the government has publicly stated that every qualified student will have access to post-secondary education. We have invested, as you know, considerable amounts of money. There are new buildings that are going up for teaching; there are new residences that are going up. In fact, the information we've tried to communicate with parents and students is that we have created 79,000 new student places. In other words, that's what is going to be ready by 2005-06. We have increased support for enrolment by \$368 million. This amount is \$75 million more than the multi-year commitment announced in last year's budget. So everything possible has been done.

But you're right: at the end of the period we won't know how many students chose to take another course of action this year. I can tell you, however, that I had another child who chose not to go directly to university, who took about three years off and worked, and I, his mother, thought, “He won't go back,” but he said he was going to and he did. Sometimes it is important that some of these young people have the opportunity to experience life and work, get a job. But we'll never know.

I hope, though, that every young person who wants to go to university or college will apply. We have made a commitment that every qualified student will be accepted and we're very confident that we can accommodate those students, but we'll never know.

Mr Marchese: We'll never know. That's the problem. That's the point I make. The government can claim that

every qualified student will have access. That's what your other minister is saying, and she will be able to say that affirmatively because there's no way of getting to the questions I've raised with you. But I'll get back to you with respect to my son because I'm going to need some political influence, of course.

Interjection.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Oh, no, you shouldn't do that.

Mr Marchese: I'm publicly telling you and your deputy that I'm coming for your help.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Are you?

Mr Marchese: Yes. And then I'm calling Dianne Cunningham to say, "Dianne, you'd better have space."

Hon Mrs Witmer: I have no doubt that your son will achieve success.

Mr Marchese: You see, she's boundless with her kindness.

People for Education did a study that shows about 20,000 students are now going to make it in the post-secondary educational systems. I thought it was a fairly good study. Do you have any methodological questions about that to deal with that report?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Do you know what? We have some problems sometimes trying to determine how the numbers were arrived at. But I can go back and tell you one more time that any qualified student will be accommodated at a post-secondary institution in the province of Ontario.

Mr Marchese: That's what I just said. That's what the minister says.

Hon Mrs Witmer: They will be. This is something that is very near and dear to my heart. We need to make sure that all students are confident and have that security of knowing that if they do well, they will be rewarded by a space.

I think all of our kids recognize that sometimes they don't get into the university or college of their first choice, and students end up taking their second or third choice. But that has always happened and that will continue to happen.

Mr Marchese: I just want to tell you that I'm really, really worried for many students; I really am. I believe many are not going to make it, and hopefully they will make it in future years.

I worry because demographically we're getting more and more students into the system than ever before. There is an anticipation of 90,000 more students in the next seven or eight years, which means we have a problem in terms of dealing with that and accommodating that. You will say whatever you'll say. I'm arguing that I have a great deal of anxiety. I don't think a lot of them will make it. I worry for them and I hurt for many of them. That's all. We'll have a difference of opinion, probably, now.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Right. You know, what we all have to do, regardless of what political party we represent, is, in our own way, to make every effort to ensure that those students will be accommodated, Mr Marchese.

1550

Mr Marchese: I know. I just want to get back to the supervisors who have taken over these boards. It has worried many of us, of course, that trustees are powerless, that they have no power whatsoever to do the job they wanted to do. Of course you'll argue that it was a choice they made; they could have balanced their budgets. But does it concern you that those trustees have no power any more, that they're literally powerless; they can't call meetings, they can't of course make any recommendations? They can't have meetings in their own wards, that I'm aware of. I don't know how some people are communicating. Some probably have their own e-mail system set up to communicate with them. But does it concern you a little bit?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Do you know what? I strongly advised and recommended that people do everything they possibly could to continue to be masters of their own boards. Unfortunately, there were some who made the decision that they were not going to balance their budget and, as a result, left us in a position where the law to balance the budget had been disobeyed. So it was necessary to send in a supervisor to balance the budget.

But having said that, the terms of reference for the supervisors still do provide that he would seek the advice of board trustees on any matter that he deems appropriate, including the establishment of board committees. I also understand that many trustees in those three boards are continuing to do the work that they were elected to do, and that is to make sure they deal with the problems of their constituents and they facilitate the resolution of those problems, working with the appropriate board staff. I understand some of the committees continue to be up and running as well.

Mr Marchese: Part of what I was saying yesterday was that the trustees refused to make those cuts because so much of what is being asked of them is going to hurt public education. I have all of Rosen's recommendations in terms of where they could cut.

I look here at planning: Reduce staff by two full-time employees. "Reorganization of work plans will be required, with increased workloads for remaining staff. There will be delays in the completion of some projects, eg, reports to the board on school area and boundary reviews. Timelines will be increased for responses to trustee and public requests for information and production of support materials...."

Word processing: "Reduce staffing by three full-time equivalents; will eliminate the word processing division and therefore the capacity to deliver a wide range of desktop publishing....; will shift the cost and responsibility for these projects to schools and departments."

In the brief description, reduced staff "support for schools to cover emergency and/or crisis situations (by \$15,573), and reduced allocation for school readiness programs...."

"Reduced support for volunteer program and beacon school/hub projects...; will reduce support for ... volunteers in education program which provides volunteer

recruitment, screening, placement and training of volunteers and volunteer coordinators.”

The Vice-Chair: You’ve got two minutes.

Mr Marchese: The list goes on. “Reduce professional development and communications allocation by \$13,860 from \$64,800. Will result in a pro-rated reduction of \$1,155,” and on and on. It’s piles of stuff. Every one of these things—the cutting of educational assistants, vice-principals and the like; there’s a lot of stuff—affects the quality of public schools. That’s what Rosen recommended by way of cuts. That’s where your supervisor is obviously going to have to review in terms of cuts he’s going to have to make. All of it will affect public education. That’s why the trustees refused to do it. What’s your reaction to that?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Part of my reaction to this whole situation is the fact that the Toronto board was given the same period of time as other boards to move toward consolidating their operations. They were given transition funding. They were asked to look at ways in which they could find efficiencies and deliver services in the best way possible.

I think the investigator has provided some suggestions as to how savings can be achieved. It will now be up to the supervisor to take a look at that. But also, Mr Marchese, the supervisor is meeting with parents, meeting with staff, and many of the suggestions that Mr Rosen had were actually suggestions that had been given to him by board staff. We need to keep in mind that there was a balanced budget that had been prepared by the director of education and board staff. So many of these ideas came right from the board.

The Vice-Chair: Mr O’Toole or Mr Miller, you have 20 minutes.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I was interested in listening to Mr Marchese talking about the double-cohort year and I certainly have a real interest in that as well. I have a daughter in grade 12 who is in the double-cohort year and of course I have concerns about what she might be doing. She doesn’t know what she’s going to do yet, but as soon as she makes up her mind as to what program she might want to apply for—I am sure she’s planning on some post-secondary education, and I am certainly keenly interested in all those qualified kids having an opportunity to find a place to go to school.

Recently we’ve been hearing about grade 10 literacy tests. I think it’s wonderful to see the improvements we’ve seen in grade 10 literacy tests. Eighty-seven per cent of academic-stream students passed the test this year, but there are problems with the applied students. They had a big improvement, from 30% passing up to, I believe, 45%. So it’s a pretty significant increase in one year, but obviously 45% passing is not acceptable. Would you please describe the supports you provide for students who are having difficulty with our new high school curriculum, especially those who are taking the applied courses?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes, I can certainly do that, Mr Miller, keeping in mind that we have at the present time

two programs, the applied and the academic, whereas a few short years ago we actually had three programs: the academic, the applied and the basic levels of programs. So I think for the numbers in the applied, when you add that together, those are the students who used to be part of the basic level program as well.

Basically, as a government we have introduced a curriculum that parents were asking for and that people in the province were asking for. They wanted some very clear, consistent, specific standards. They wanted to make sure that students were going to achieve some basic skills, whether they be numeracy or literacy. That’s why we introduced the literacy test. I understand now one other province is going to be introducing a literacy test as well. There is certainly an interest throughout the world in making sure that students do achieve standards.

But having said that, there is always going to be a group of students—and there always has been, as I’m sure when you were in school and I was in school—who obviously are going to be struggling. They’re going to be struggling to achieve some of the basic standards of literacy and numeracy and we are going to have to help these students. What we’re trying to do is identify students early and make sure that those students who need help get the help—the remediation, the programs and support—as early as possible. Obviously, we want to make sure we do everything we can.

So principals are required in each school to establish a process to ensure that teachers can identify the students they know to be at risk of not being able to complete the requirements for the graduation diploma. As well, we’re trying to make sure that students have the opportunity to have workplace experiences. We need to recognize that not all students go on to college and university. Some are going to go directly to the workplace; others are going to go into apprenticeship programs.

1600

I can tell you that the new high school program does allow our schools to be responsive to the needs of the students. It does provide substitutions for compulsory courses where appropriate, and modifications and accommodation to curriculum expectations where necessary. Also, it does provide extra support.

We now have grade 9 and 10 academic and applied courses which prepare our students for destination-related courses in grades 11 and 12, whether they are going to enter the workforce immediately after high school, whether they are going to go into an apprenticeship or training program or whether they are going to continue their education at college or university. Those are really the three areas where the student may go. We have these destination-related courses because this is what parents and educators were looking for. They wanted us to keep the options open for the students in grades 9 and 10, and then they could start to move after that. So the destination-related courses begin in the senior years, grades 11 and 12.

How have we helped our students? Well, we give them money through a learning opportunities grant.

That's for remedial reading; it's for early literacy. As you know, we've got the new program, JK to 3. We have math programs. We have summer school programs. We have a \$168-million language grant for students who are struggling with English, for English as a second language. We have a \$15.8-million grant this year that was provided for the French-language students who need assistance with French as a language of instruction. And we have \$18.4 million for summer school programs for adults and high school students who need additional help. So there has been a considerable amount of money allocated this year on top of what was allocated in previous years to make sure that we provide the maximum level of support.

Having said that, there obviously is more that we could do, and I would just ask Grant Clarke to maybe give us some additional information.

Mr Clarke: Grant Clarke, director of the secondary school policy and programs branch.

In addition to what the minister has outlined, we are working with school boards around the use of locally developed compulsory courses. These are courses school boards may offer that count for compulsory credit. Boards may offer these—they are catch-up courses, in effect, for students who may not yet be ready for grade 9—in English, math and science. It's a way for students to get ready for the grade level expectations in the new provincial curriculum for grades 9 and 10.

In addition to the substitution for compulsory courses that the minister mentioned, there are literacy school courses and learning strategy courses, which can be combined with other subjects to allow students to get additional time to develop the skills they need in order to master the content of the subject areas they are studying.

We have had and are continuing to have many discussions through a series of district steering committees which are out in all regions of the province through our district offices, meeting with representatives of the school boards to go through the planning that can take place at the school level to ensure that schools can problem-solve with us around the kinds of programs they can put in place for students who may need extra support and help.

Mr Miller: Thank you very much. I think my partners here want to ask some questions.

Mr Frank Mazzilli (London-Fanshawe): Minister, we've heard much to-do about different school boards when it comes to special education and some obviously working to identify special-needs kids. Is there an act that governs what school boards are supposed to do? Is there a minimum standard across the province?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes. I'm pleased to tell you that the first year I was a trustee, 1980, is the year that legislation was introduced by Bette Stephenson, who was then the Minister of Education, and of course the Premier at that time was Bill Davis. There was a recognition at that time that we needed to do something to provide for the education of our exceptional students. It was all outlined in a bill that was called Bill 82. I think it was

quite a historic piece of legislation because it finally provided for special education for these students with exceptionalities. It did two things. First of all, it provided universal access. It guaranteed the right of all children, condition notwithstanding, to attend the public schools. What could be done that would be more than that? Second, it made all of the boards in Ontario responsible for providing the programs and services for students within their geographic area. This included providing not just programs but also services to their exceptional students. So this was a very significant piece of legislation.

Today, district school boards are responsible and do provide special education to our students in Ontario in an attempt to meet the needs of these exceptional students.

Mr Bezzina might have more information that he could share.

Mr Mazzilli: It's good to hear that there's an act that allows school boards to do this, but obviously we've worked on identifying students with special needs. There's never a problem until you've identified that there's a problem. Between 1980 and the present time, are you saying we were doing a poor job of identifying special needs? Is that part of the problem here?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I can tell you, based on my own personal experience, what happened until the introduction of the funding formula was that there were probably different levels of services and programs being provided by different boards in Ontario, but I think all of them were working toward the goal of identifying students. Students go through what's called an IPRC process.

I'll let Mr Bezzina speak to this particular issue.

Mr Alex Bezzina: I'm going to talk about the IPRC process, which is a process that is actually available to any parent who has concerns that the difficulties their child might be having at school are related to a disability or an exceptional need of some kind.

The IPRC process is a committee that the board must establish. It's made up of three persons. The parent, as a result of a regulatory change that was introduced in 1998, has a right to attend this meeting. The information that is specific to their son or daughter is presented to this committee: any assessment information that child might have; any materials from previous school years that might help the committee to understand what specifically the child might be struggling with. While the child might be struggling, it may not be easy to figure out specifically what the difficulty is unless you have some of this background information.

Based on this procedure, the IPRC committee will first of all identify the student as exceptional under one of five categories that the ministry has set up: communication difficulties, behavioural difficulties, intellectual difficulties, multiple exceptionalities—so there is a variety of ways that a child can be identified as exceptional. Based also on the information that's presented, it is determined where the child can best have their educational needs met: in a regular classroom or in a special classroom that

is set up for children who have that particular kind of difficulty.

Once the child is identified, the parent has two choices: they can accept the decision of the IPRC or they can appeal it. There is an appeal mechanism at the board level that a parent can go through to have the identification or the placement reversed or rechecked to see whether or not a good decision has been made.

The child goes to the placement where they are to be educated and, based on the information that has arisen from the IPRC, as well as any other information that might be available about that student, the principal must develop an individual education plan for that student and must do so within 30 days of that child being placed in that particular placement, whether it's a regular classroom or a special classroom.

1610

That individual education plan changes year to year because you are obviously wanting to teach children different things as the years go on. So the learning objectives for that child for that particular year are outlined, as well as the strategies that will be used by the teacher to get that child to those learning objectives.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): That's a very comprehensive review of the IPRC. I had the privilege of sitting as a trustee in that period. I agree with the minister that it was a profound initiative brought forward by the then-Conservative government, and strengthened, as you said, the parents' role in the IPRC process in 1998.

I just want to comment generally, because I do have a prepared question here which I'd like to read.

Mr Marchese: I can't hear you, John.

Mr O'Toole: Well, you'll get a copy of Hansard.

Mr Marchese: I'm struggling.

The Vice-Chair: You can depend on the Hansard, he said.

Mr O'Toole: Yes. Get a copy of Hansard. You'll probably want to read it all.

Mr Marchese: OK, John. Thanks a lot.

Mr O'Toole: Mr Marchese mentioned the double cohort. Having been a parent of five children—and a very vigilant parent, I might add—they all require at this time of year—Rosario, you should check with your son or daughter, because right now they're actually going to be applying for their post-secondary. They're allowed to apply to three. Anything more than that, I think they have to pay \$500 or something. There's a whole bunch of conditions: whether or not they have residence and acceptance, acceptance with no residence.

I think of my own children, and the year off is not a bad idea, actually, given the fact that they're really not sure anyway. Sometimes it might be wise to pause and reflect on the world. Actually, I've tracked a lot of them. A lot of them today change. Two of my children changed their majors in the middle of high school—to their credit, because they actually sat down and thought about it. So I think to predict at 17 what you're going to be for the rest of your life is a little onerous. You should probably have a little time with your son to help him figure that through.

If you want to leave it to a guidance counsellor, that's a good idea. They have a lot of manuals they can help them read.

One of the initiatives I would like you or some of your staff, Minister, to respond to is the early identification initiatives which—as a parent, again, I always bring most of the stuff back to the real application. I thank my wife for being such an interventionist and having them very much prepared for school in terms of the early initiatives that are required to be successful in education.

Then, if you look at the social issues and you think of children at risk, I'm really wanting some response on that. It's the fundamental mechanics of learning. Basically, there's reading. If you can't read or somehow interpret some kind of symbolism called language, you're in serious trouble, because most of the stuff you have to plug into your head is in somebody else's book or somebody else's head. So that's a fundamental tool for learning: the visualization—some would call it reading—and also, the mathematics, quantifying the starting and ending points of various things.

Maybe you could spend a couple of minutes reviewing what the early strategies in reading, math and literacy are. The government has made major strides forward, and I commend you for that. You have to get that early, before grade 3, otherwise the slope is starting to turn on you.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think that's something the research continues to demonstrate, the fact that the earlier you can intervene and become involved with children, obviously, the greater their success. I think we need to all be proud of the strategies we have put in place to support young children early on in life.

Our government actually announced, in early May of this year, \$25 million to introduce a new early math strategy. At the same time, we were having great success with the early reading strategy, so we've expanded that to grade 6. Basically, what it does is provide learning resources to children, but it also supports teachers. They need to be able to enhance their classroom skills in order that they can better teach the students the math and literacy skills that are required.

The other thing that it does—we sometimes forget there's another partner, and that is parents. So those strategies do provide guidance and support as to how parents can help their students achieve mastery of basic literacy and math skills.

Mr O'Toole: In the moment or two I have left I'd just like to make one comment. I watched a program on CITY-TV momentarily during the dinner hour, in the recess last night, and they were interviewing a young teacher from the Toronto area. The young teacher was telling me and the rest of Ontario that they had no money for pencils. When they arrived there in September, they had no money for—

The Vice-Chair: Your time is up, Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Where the hell is the money going? Each student gets roughly \$7,000 and there's no—

The Vice-Chair: Thank you.

Mr O'Toole: I think that was incorrect communication. We should get a retraction from that.

Mr Marchese: Don't they get help in getting that, the extra money? I don't get it. What's going on?

Mr O'Toole: Where is it going?

Mr Marchese: I don't know.

The Vice-Chair: I think you should ask the minister afterwards if she has an answer for you.

Mr Kennedy, you have 15 minutes.

Mr O'Toole: Ask the boards.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): We note the puzzlement opposite, but it's been an ongoing condition and there's not much we can do.

Hon Mrs Witmer: How long is this, Mr Curling?

The Vice-Chair: Fifteen minutes.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I'd like to ask you specifically about some of the things that have happened to families under your watch. You've exchanged with the members of your own party a rather glowing idea about what you've done in special education, but there are people present in this room who don't share that glowing view.

I want to introduce you, a little bit indirectly because she's sitting behind you, to Andrea Adams. She's the parent of a son who started JK in September and who only has an EA assigned for a very short time. We spoke very briefly about her yesterday but she's down here today. I want you to make a commitment to her directly—which would seem to be a very easy one for you to make given what you just said about your accomplishment, so described, in special education—that you will not let the supervisor in Toronto cut EAs away from her child. Are you prepared to make that commitment to Ms Adams and other parents and children in that position today? Are you prepared to do that?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think our government has continued to point out that we know there are needs throughout the province. We have been trying very hard to respond to all of those needs. I indicated a little earlier that it was our government that originally had put in place legislation to make education universally accessible.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, with all respect, you've said these things and I wonder if you could answer the question.

Hon Mrs Witmer: If there is a particular situation, our staff would be only too pleased to meet with the parent, listen to the concerns and attempt to address them.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, either you're wilfully and knowingly trying to mislead this committee or you're simply not prepared to answer this question. Because I don't believe the first premise, I'm going to ask you again. You currently have a situation in Toronto—

The Vice-Chair: Order. I would ask you to withdraw the comment about wilfully misleading.

Mr Kennedy: I did not say, and I will withdraw any inference that I did say, that she is. I said there's a possi-

bility and I don't believe that she's wilfully misleading us. So I'm asking the question again.

Interjection.

The Vice-Chair: Mr O'Toole, I'm the Chair. I will be able to manage this. Thank you.

Mr Kennedy: Madam Minister, the question is very straightforward.

Mr O'Toole: On a point of order, Mr Chair: He would not withdraw. The Chair has asked him to withdraw. I asked him to—

Mr Kennedy: You're not chairing this committee, Mr O'Toole, and I hope this isn't coming out of my time.

Mr O'Toole: He won't obey the rules and I think he's in disrespect of this committee.

Mr Kennedy: It's a slightly desperate government that doesn't allow someone to speak. Mr O'Toole, you've had your time.

Mr O'Toole: Have a little respect, Mr Kennedy, if you expect to get a response.

The Vice-Chair: Mr O'Toole, you're making my job a little bit more difficult. Could both of you just quiet down a bit.

Mr O'Toole: I'm not going to sit here and have him badger and insult the minister. That's unacceptable to me, Mr Chair. Treat people respectfully and you will be treated respectfully in return.

The Vice-Chair: Mr Kennedy, you may proceed.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, because it is an important question, I'd like to make sure that you have every opportunity. Here is Ms Adams. You have sent in a supervisor. We found out yesterday that you have very little control over that supervisor, but you have made undertakings and they are implicit in what you said before about special education.

Ms Adams's son, James, started JK in September. He has Down's syndrome. He needs an EA with him. They are only assigned EAs, at least in this case, and I know a number of others, on a temporary basis. A very serious concern she has is that she could lose that EA for her son if you permit cuts to be made by the supervisor. So it is really just an assurance we're looking for here. She's obviously qualified. Her son is qualified for this special assistance and will do well with assistance. Will you assure her here today that you won't let the supervisor cut that EA or others? Because this is in the recommendations of your investigator, to make cuts to education assistants and special-ed teachers. I'm wondering if you would be prepared to make that assurance today, and I'd like to give you the opportunity again to make that if you are.

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Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just again put on the record the fact that we are spending \$1.37 billion on special education this year. There has been no reduction in funding of special education to the Toronto school board. We would be happy to meet with this particular person in order to address her concerns, but let me emphasize again that there have been absolutely no

reductions in special education funding for the Toronto school board.

Mr Kennedy: You know absolutely that the Toronto board, like every other board, is spending more money than you give them for special education because children like James Adams need it. Therefore, that's not good enough. You're cutting the Toronto school board by \$30 million, and that's got to come out of somewhere. In fact, you've endorsed a cut of \$90 million. So, Minister, it is regrettable that you wouldn't provide that assurance.

There's another parent I'd like to—

Hon Mrs Witmer: Well, do you know what?

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I'm asking the questions. I've given you two opportunities to answer.

Sonia Kurmey has three sons. Two of them are in public education, and a third was. Minister, today we learned that there is a possible enrolment drop of 3,000 in the Toronto public school board. There was, under your government's watch, a 54% increase in enrolment in private schools. Sonia Kurmey's is one of a number of families who have decided they can't get special education help in the public system. This is right here in the public education system in Toronto that you say is fully funded. Sonia Kurmey's son Jeffrey has been placed in private school as of this September because he has not been able to get special education assistance. That private school costs the Kurmey family \$25,000.

Minister, I think the Kurmey family and the Adams family deserve from you some form of commitment that not only would you not cut funds and support and resources to these kids in Toronto, but that you would work to improve them. Obviously, if the Kurmey family is taking their 10-year-old, who's got developmental delay, out of the system, if they are sacrificing \$25,000, they are saying to you as clearly as they possibly can that things are not working.

Minister, again, the Kurmey family and the Adams family have real-life experiences that are quite different. One is a great degree of uncertainty, this short-term education assistant; the other is a lack of success, a lack of support, and finally a decision to leave to go to the private school system. Minister, do you agree it's all right for the Kurmeys to have to take their child out of public education in order to get the support they need? Is that all right with you?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Our staff would be happy to meet with either one of these families. We recognize how important special education is to the individual families, their desire to make sure that the needs of their children are addressed, and we would be more than pleased. Again, I would just remind everyone here that we have continued to increase special education funding. In fact, our government protects special education funding, which was not the case before we introduced the new funding model, and I can tell you we will continue each year to provide more money for special education. The needs are there and we wish to respond.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, I asked you to make very specific commitments here and you've made neither of

them. Frankly, on behalf of the parents, you're filling the air with rhetorical stuff that doesn't meet their daily needs. These are real children. One is now having to rely completely on his parents' sacrifice, and another is in difficulty, just like the student yesterday from Ottawa, not getting any language treatment.

Minister, rather than deal with it as you should, as the minister, by looking at the systemic problems that these are evidence of, you're not willing to be accountable. That frankly is very disturbing because you are, in the case of the Toronto and Ottawa boards, the only accountable person, the only one at the end of the decision chain who is supposed to be accountable, and that's what this committee is supposed to do. Yet you refuse to acknowledge that there are real issues affecting these parents.

Minister, I want to ask you, can you tell us today how many boards in this province are paying out of other envelopes for special education services for kids? How many are you aware of?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just say again that Mr Bezzina and Ms Semenyk are quite happy to meet with these parents. We take their concerns very seriously and we would be more than pleased to see if we can help either one of them. I can see if the deputy has the information you're looking for to your question—

Mr Kennedy: Minister, we had a parent meet with your staff yesterday and it got her nothing. It got her the assurance that she wouldn't be hung up on, as in the last 10 times she called your ministry. So that doesn't get us very far. But could you answer the question directly? How many school boards are spending above their allocation on special education?

Hon Mrs Witmer: We're going to ask Mr Gooch to come up and respond to that particular—

Ms Herbert: Sorry, Minister—

Hon Mrs Witmer: He's not here?

Ms Herbert: Peter just indicated that he doesn't have that information.

Mr Kennedy: Is there anyone else who has that information? Minister, we've heard from you saying that every board has all the money they need for special needs. The fact is, your board was told in 1997 when they took over special education funding that you were cutting the total amount of money. You had a report from the superintendents—and I have a copy of it here if you haven't seen it—and they rarely speak out. They said at that time that \$150 million was being spent by school boards on top of what you were providing them. In other words, the funding you're bragging about here, which I frankly find offensive to families who are getting no services for their kids, is actually less money than the old system provided. Now, is there anybody among your many staff here who can put some facts on the table?

Hon Mrs Witmer: Again, I would just remind you that we feel the issue of special education funding is so important that it is one of the issues we have asked Dr Rozanski to address: are we providing funding to special education in the best way possible or is there another way

that we can better address the needs of these students? So I will tell you that is happening.

Mr Kennedy: Minister, unless you and your predecessors have been sitting in an ivory tower, not listening to any of these families or any of the organizations—you have known for quite a long time, and I can guarantee you your predecessor was here during estimates when other families came down. This systemic problem is just getting worse, but the same unfortunate characteristic apparently accompanies this office under this government: the denial of need rather than the addressing and providing of solutions.

Now Minister—

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Chair—

Mr Kennedy: Excuse me, Minister, I haven't asked a question. Community living Toronto says this about the way you're processing special needs. It says that the ISA funding problem, which for the benefit of the committee and others out there is the intensive support amount, is currently based on a difficult, time-consuming, demoralizing identification of ability and that better accountability would happen if this system was done away with. This advice, this constant information flow, has been coming in to your ministry for quite a long time. Instead, not only are you underfunding special education, but you're putting a huge drain on scarce resources, away from the classroom, away from these kids. You say you think it's so important that the Rozanski commission gets assigned it, but I say to you, Minister, that you have a responsibility every day you go to work. That responsibility should be to improve this system, but instead, these kids find themselves in a deficit.

I would ask you again, are you prepared, in advance of Rozanski, to look at the systemic problems that are facing kids like the Adams family, the Kurmey family and other families like the Mookerjea family who were here yesterday? They are special-needs families and they're going to continue to come down here to this Legislature to seek your attention. They don't want to have useless meetings with your staff; they want to hear the minister say, "There could be a problem. I'm interested in solving this problem."

Minister, will you tell us what you're prepared to do on your own, as Minister of Education, to make sure that special-needs kids get assistance in class? Is there some undertaking you're prepared to make to them at all?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would again indicate that Mr Bezzina and Ms Semenyk are quite happy, quite pleased, to meet with the parents who are here. Again, I would just reiterate the fact that our government takes very seriously the needs of students in this province with special needs and we have been moving forward to make sure we can respond in the best way possible.

Mr Kennedy: Ms Mookerjea came here yesterday because 30 days ago your decision took language training away from her young child. She has no language training today. She met with your staff. There's been no consequence of that. Twenty-nine other children don't have language training. Twenty-nine out of the 32 have

nothing being done for them—nothing at all. Minister, are you going to take some responsibility, or do you think you can simply sit there and wash your hands of it? Those are 29 kids registered in a helpful program to address their language needs. It has been cancelled. The parent came all the way from Ottawa, met with your staff, after being hung up on 10 times by your staff, and you sit here not willing to respond to those needs.

1630

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Chair, it's unfortunate, but it would be inappropriate for me to publicly discuss the results of any conversation that would relate to any personal information involving any family. But I can certainly assure you that our ministry takes very seriously all of these special-needs issues and are certainly doing everything that we possibly can to support these families.

Mr Kennedy: That's pathetic.

The Vice-Chair: Time is up. Mr Marchese, 15 minutes.

Mr Marchese: Just to pursue this, Minister: the whole issue of split classes concerns me. We hear from a lot of teachers in both the public and Catholic systems, "This is a serious problem." We have a lot of—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Sorry, John?

Mr O'Toole: Split classes were introduced in 1980. They're all on individual plans, basically, now. Each child is different.

Mr Marchese: OK. Thank you, minister O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Split classes: any kids who haven't been in them haven't been in school, which is prehistoric.

Mr Marchese: Thank you again.

So it's a big concern of many teachers these days, and worse, because in the old system they argued that they could accommodate the curriculum and there was enough flexibility to be able to teach a grade 2/3, a grade 1/2, a grade 4/5. But now, because of the new curriculum, many are saying it's very rigid, very complicated for the teachers to now teach under the new curriculum with split classes. They're finding it very stressful at a personal level, but they feel a lot of children are being hurt by it.

I raised this the last time we talked about it: have you done some serious work about that problem as a result of your new curriculum and what you're going to do to help them, teachers and students alike?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I'm going to ask one of our staff, Marie-Lison Fougère, to share with you some of the information we have, Mr Marchese, on the issue of split classes.

Interjection.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Is she here?

Ms Herbert: I'm getting hand signals here. You'll excuse me, Mr Chair.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Maybe you're getting somebody else.

Mr Marchese: Avrum, please don't fret.

The Vice-Chair: Looks like you're getting more than what you bargained for.

Hon Mrs Witmer: You're right.

Ms Herbert: We're sorting this out. Sorry, Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: That's all right.

Hon Mrs Witmer: We're going to have Kit Rankin do this.

Mr Marchese: State your name for the purposes of Hansard.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you so much, Mr Marchese.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Everybody wants to help you today, Alvin.

The Vice-Chair: Mr O'Toole takes your role; you take my role.

Mr Marchese: And you can ask questions.

The Vice-Chair: Please state your name.

Ms Kit Rankin: I'm Kit Rankin of the curriculum and assessment policy branch of the Ministry of Education.

The Ontario curriculum is a very specific curriculum in response to requests from parents for very clear explanations of what students were expected to know and be able to do at each grade level. Consequently, our elementary curriculum was designed in a way to map that out very clearly so that parents, teachers and students would know exactly what they were expected to learn in each subject.

Teachers have talked from time to time about the challenges they do find in teaching a combined-grade class. Especially at the beginning of the implementation of the curriculum we did hear, through the curriculum implementation partnership and the ad hoc advisory committee on curriculum implementation, that teachers were wanting to have some assistance. One of the things done through the Ministry of Education to provide support for teachers was, first of all, the curriculum implementation partnership asked that a study group be formed that had classroom teachers and administrators. That committee met over a long period of time and talked about their needs. One of the things they thought would be very useful was examples of what teachers might be able to offer as specific examples of how to teach a specific curriculum unit for a split-grade or a combined-grade class.

Consequently, one of the things the Ministry of Education has been doing in the last couple of years is developing sample units of study. Those sample units of study have been developed for both regular single-grade classes and for combined-grade classes in a number of different subject areas. Those grade-by-grade units and combined-grade units show teachers how some very capable teacher colleagues in school boards—

Mr Marchese: Ms Rankin, I can tell that you could go on for hours—and the minister doesn't mind, of course. And I don't mind either because it's important to learn.

So a whole lot of things are coming out of this study group. You're sharing this with the federations, of course, and teachers are getting it. They're getting it in their hands as fast as you're telling me?

Ms Rankin: I'm not certain that I can relate the speed at which I'm telling you with the speed at which teachers are receiving it.

Mr Marchese: But they're getting it?

Ms Rankin: Yes. Last fall they did receive some sample units of study.

Mr Marchese: "They" meaning who? Teachers?

Ms Rankin: Classroom teachers, yes. It went out to school boards, both on CD-ROM—

Mr Marchese: So if they're still complaining about the problems of this rigid curriculum that doesn't give them the flexibility to do what they could do, and they don't get to the students as they would like to—you probably recognize it's a problem, I'm assuming.

Ms Rankin: We were told by stakeholders—

Mr Marchese: That it's a problem.

Ms Rankin: —that they felt it was a problem.

Mr Marchese: Were you a teacher?

Ms Rankin: Yes, I was.

Mr Marchese: High school or elementary?

Ms Rankin: I was a high school teacher.

Mr Marchese: Oh. OK. That's good; I used to be too.

Ms Rankin: I didn't teach combined grades in high school, though, so I can appreciate this.

Mr Marchese: But you've heard that it's a problem and you're trying to dealing with it. You are dealing with it, because the study group has come up with some suggestions. So you're getting a lot of feedback saying, "This is really good" from teachers—

Ms Rankin: Well, we wanted to know, after we offered the first round of units, whether our key stakeholders thought it was useful and whether it was something we should continue to do for other subject areas. So we went on after the first stage and are now in the process of developing a second stage of additional units. We also had a resource document that we put out with the units the first year. It has specific pointers on how to do this.

Mr Marchese: Ms Rankin, I would like to get hold of those documents. Do you think I can get them?

Ms Rankin: It's open—absolutely.

Mr Marchese: Public documents, of course. But do you think you can send me a copy of those things?

Ms Rankin: I'm sure our deputy can make sure that gets to you.

Mr Marchese: I didn't think that would be a problem.

We have a policy of integration of students, so that special-education students are now being integrated. In a split class, where you have some behavioural problems, communications problems, intellectual problems—so you've got split grades and you have an additional amount of problems of students who have difficulties—do you think that presents problems to teachers?

Ms Rankin: Teachers have always indicated that sometimes they face special challenges. They go to their principal and ask for advice and assistance. They might call on other colleagues in the school to advise them. Sometimes there are special challenges.

Mr Marchese: There are, much of the time. It's not just sometimes, and you would know that. At the elementary level it could be just as bad as at the high school level, but at the elementary level I suspect it would be much more stressful.

1640

I'm indicating, secondly, that the new curriculum has imposed a great burden on teachers and, as a result, stresses on students as well generally, but in particular in split classes. So when you now have the additional element of an integration policy that says students will be integrated in the regular classroom, the stress on the teacher and students generally is much, much higher. It presents educational learning problems that we have to address. In your role, in the minister's role, in the deputy minister's role and the assistant deputy and all the other people behind you, it presents a serious problem, right?

Ms Rankin: In the work that we've been doing to support teachers of combined grades and of single-grade classes, we do try to find ways to offer advice about special education. So we are providing supports through the curriculum process as well.

Mr Marchese: Through curriculum, I'm not quite sure. But since you're here, I don't mind—Deputy Minister, yes, please participate.

Ms Herbert: I'm just going to add, Mr Marchese, that we have been tracking split-grade classes for about the last five or six years. I don't have the numbers on the top of my head, other than to say that we know the numbers of split-grade classes are reducing across the province. Partly that's just demographics and opportunities that schools have as they build new schools to sort out their accommodation issues. Partly it is because the administrators of school boards understand that if there are options to have single-grade classes, that is—

Mr Marchese: A better option.

Ms Herbert: A better option. Certainly I know that the teachers' unions have been working closely with the administrators to try to sort this issue out.

Mr Marchese: Of course.

Ms Herbert: As I say, I don't have the numbers right off the top of my head.

Mr Marchese: But maybe you can send that information with the other documents.

Ms Herbert: We'll send it in, yes.

Mr Marchese: Quite apart from the split grades, regular classroom teachers, of course, are very concerned about this. The fear of losing the educational assistants—which really was the question that in part he was asking. Quite apart from the specifics—you don't need to worry about specifics; let's talk generally so you can be a little more free to talk—it presents a problem, because if you've got a regular classroom with an integration policy where you have a lot of special-education needs children in it, it does put a lot of stress on the teachers. So you all of a sudden have got a classroom with however many students there are, which is usually a high number, and then you put into that classroom a lot of students who have special needs.

By the way, I do support an integration policy. I do, because politically and philosophically I think it's the better way to go. I don't support, generally speaking, a segregationist kind of policy, where you put special-education kids in their own classes and schools, because the fear I have is that if you put them in those classes, they'll stay there forever. They will stay there forever, of course going at their own level, but usually at lower levels, versus the integration policies, where they get the mix of students, the socialization with other students, and not just with one single group. So as a whole I support that. But if you don't put in the resources, then I'm absolutely frightened of that, because then we're not helping those students who have special needs. We're not helping the regular students. We're not helping the teacher. Then we've got a whole new problem to worry about.

The Vice-Chair: Two minutes.

Mr Marchese: My goodness, how time flies.

So here's my theory: to press with the issue of what Rosen was recommending—that fine accountant with a special eye for special needs—he was recommending we cut educational assistants as one of many things, including cutting from the budget of supplies and textbooks, by the way, in case you missed that. He's saying we should cut textbooks and supplies; that's the accountant's advice on what we should do. But cutting educational assistants would be a serious problem to me, you see? Those families that have special-education needs children are profoundly nervous and worried. I'm worried for them, worried for the teacher, worried for the students. Do you think for one moment that somehow this Mr Christie fellow would recommend that we cut educational assistants? What would you say if he did?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think that's one of the other reasons we're looking at the funding formula. I will agree with you, Mr Marchese, that there are some unique needs that our students have. I think you've also raised the issue today of the challenges that our teachers face in the classroom and the need to make sure that they're well supported. I think that there's been a lot of input into the Rozanski task force about some of these issues that you're bringing to our attention today, and I hope some of the recommendations will address some of these very unique issues.

Mr Marchese: I'm sure they will.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I want to put on the record that I really appreciate your sincere commitment to the students you serve in your community. I think the questions you've asked in the last few days certainly demonstrate your desire to improve the educational system.

The Vice-Chair: What an endorsement for the NDP there from the minister.

We have 15 more minutes of time left.

Hon Mrs Witmer: And then two?

The Vice-Chair: And then that famous two.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Where you get to speak.

The Vice-Chair: Yes.

Mr Mazzilli: Minister, my question is around recruiting and maintaining teachers in Ontario. Obviously with the unemployment rate we have right now, it has to be difficult. Once you get down to 4% provincially, it gets difficult in all professions. I hear from the Metro police department that they can't fill 300 or 400 jobs, jobs that in the past would have been filled quite easily. The fire department, if you can imagine, has difficulties in today's environment. I certainly wish I had picked that path. But it has to be difficult and it has to be challenging for the boards.

There have to be many people who are educated as teachers who are in other professions. I know if you recruit them back, you're taking them from policing or fire departments or whatever, but do we have any idea how many people in Ontario are educated as teachers but are currently not teaching?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I don't have those data. I don't know if anybody within the ministry does have the data as to how many people are teachers and could be teaching but are not. It's probably quite similar to what I saw when I was Minister of Health. We have nurses who are simply not practising in their profession. Some of them might even have chosen other careers. So I'm sorry. We can try to get that information if we don't have it.

Mr Mazzilli: I don't think that information is really relevant. I think what's relevant is that school boards and your ministry are competing to keep people in the teaching profession.

Hon Mrs Witmer: For sure.

Mr Mazzilli: And others are competing to take teachers away from their profession; for example, police departments, fire departments, whoever. What strategy do you have right now to keep and maybe lure back some teachers?

Hon Mrs Witmer: If I take a look at the point you've just made, I think young people today have more opportunities available than ever before. You've talked about some of the areas of need, and there are exciting opportunities in the science and computer fields. There is a lot of opportunity.

We certainly are committed to making sure that we have the best-trained and most capable teachers to teach our young people in the province today. What we have done is set up a teacher recruitment working group. We're actually working with the Ontario Teachers' Federation and the Ontario College of Teachers in order that we can develop an action plan which will enable us to recruit the very best people in this province. I have to tell you that recently I've been very encouraged. I've spoken to some young people recently who are going into teaching and I think they're going to serve our students well.

I also want you to know that we have more student spaces for people who want to be teachers than in the past. We're now funding about 6,500 spaces, and that's up 30% from 1998-99. So again, recognizing that we need more teachers, we've done a couple of things:

we've got the working group and we've got more spaces to train teachers.

Mr Mazzilli: That's certainly a good strategy, and I wish you luck because I know it's going to be difficult in this current environment.

I'll pass it off to one of my colleagues.

Hon Mrs Witmer: One of the other things you might be interested in, because you did mention people who might not be in the profession, is that we have now made changes to what retired teachers can and cannot do. We have what's called the 95-day rule, which allows retired teachers to work up to 95 days each year as a substitute teacher. So you get a very well qualified person back into the classroom.

Mr Mazzilli: That was a problem for all people under OMERS, where they were penalized if they worked for a month.

Hon Mrs Witmer: That's right.

Mr Mazzilli: So it's a step in the right direction.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Oh, this is fantastic.

1650

Mr O'Toole: Actually, it's quite interesting, because there are hardly 200 teaching days—193. Anyway, there have been some really good issues.

I just wanted it clarified it before I asked a question. I think when I was referring to the split grade, I was probably not reacting, but I was interested in the response there because it was a huge issue and it continues to be a huge issue in our area, and not just because of the new curriculum. In many ways, in smaller rural schools it's the only way they can function.

With the new school footprint, the number of students has made it easier to get enough bulk that you can fill out grades. But then when I listen to the teachers, which two of the members of my family are, they are all split grades, basically; every kid is on a different learning curve. So they're on IEPs; they are fully integrated; they are special-needs. It's very complex, much more complex than when I was a trustee, and getting more so, because some of them are at different points in the same curriculum. The teacher modifies the program but they will achieve the goals of the program. Now they have these fancy terms, "age-appropriate" and such. It's code language for, "Don't fail anyone." It's a lot of bunk, really. I'm not sure if it serves the child well. If they're age-appropriate and they're socially—getting beat up intellectually every day, I'm not sure how good that is for them, really. But those are my own thoughts, for what that's worth, which is not much, actually.

Hon Mrs Witmer: You answer your own questions, Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: The only thing is, I'm old enough to have both the questions and the answers. Being almost 60, I figure I've seen this thing go around the track a few times.

I think the government has introduced new initiatives to ensure that schools in the province are safe. But I'm going to pass it over to Mr Miller, because he has a much more profound question to ask.

Mr Miller: No, you had a question.

Mr O'Toole: No, no. You dropped your pen, which was my code language for, "You can stop now."

The Vice-Chair: You could pass it over to me and we can end it.

Mr Miller: I guess first of all, Mr Marchese was talking about split grades. Certainly in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, split grades in some cases are necessary. I know last year I had a small primary school that I think was about 85 students that faced the possibility of closing in the community of Magnetawan. Certainly I didn't want to see the school close and I'm happy that in the end it didn't close, but really, that school could only stay open with split grades. They have about 80 or 85 kids, and it's really necessary.

It's also interesting to hear your response to the need for teachers. That's something that my daughter Renée, who is in grade 12—and I'm sure she would be an excellent teacher—is considering. So I hope she considers that.

I am interested in the percentage of students in independent schools in Ontario versus other parts of Canada. We've heard Mr Kennedy, who was rhyming off lots of facts and figures, many of which I'm not sure are—I would follow that carefully. But he was talking about a big increase in kids in Ontario independent schools. What sort of percentage of students are there in independent schools versus public schools in Ontario, and how does that compare with some of the other provinces?

Hon Mrs Witmer: You want a comparison on the rest of Canada?

Mr Miller: Certainly, yes.

Hon Mrs Witmer: It's interesting to even raise that issue, because I can remember when I was a trustee, and maybe Mr O'Toole and Mr Marchese do, that we were starting to see an increasing number of students even then, between 1980 and 1990, looking at private schools and looking at home schooling. That was becoming increasingly popular, so I think probably some of the statistics are going to show that there has been some movement across Canada on this particular issue.

Ms Herbert: I'm just looking at our data here.

Mr Miller: Mr Kennedy is making it sound like we have a far higher percentage of kids in independent schools. How do we compare to the average across Canada? Are there places with more kids?

Hon Mrs Witmer: And keep in mind that some people have chosen to go to the faith-based schools. That has been very important for them.

I think the deputy maybe has some data.

Ms Herbert: I've got some comparisons with other provinces. Here we go. We found the right piece of paper. In British Columbia, 8% of the student population is in independent schools; in Alberta, 4.5% of the school population; in Manitoba, there's just a very small percentage; and in Quebec, approximately 9%; which compares, I think, with ours—the latest figures were about 5%.

Hon Mrs Witmer: So I think you can see that our numbers are probably less than what we're seeing in some of the other provinces.

Mr Marchese: That's not bad. We're keeping it down. They have choice.

Mr O'Toole: I think if you mention choice—personally, I think it's absolutely empowering for parents and in many cases children to have choice. I think some of the excellent schools—the A.Y. Jackson school—there are several excellent schools in Toronto where they have excellent programs for drama, theatre, art, computers. So parent choice is very empowering for both the parent and the child to—

Interjection.

Mr O'Toole: Yes—and they support choice, I believe. There are five independent schools in my riding, and it's growing.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Yes, and as I say, there has been a move in the number of faith-based schools in the province.

Mr O'Toole: They're excellent schools. A lot of them are regular licensed and qualified teachers—all are qualified. I think they offer a program—they are now going to participate, it's my understanding, in the testing for outcomes to make sure that they meet standards etc; parents want that. I'm impressed.

Mr Marchese: Those who are nonqualified teachers too?

Mr O'Toole: I don't like to think, at the end of the day, that Earl Manners should run the school system. I think even professional teachers are looking for a choice, to get out from under Phyllis and the rest of them.

The Vice-Chair: Two minutes. Are you going to be able to take the time?

Hon Mrs Witmer: We're going to let—

Mr Mazzilli: Can we waive our time?

The Vice-Chair: Are you waiving your time? Thank you very much for waiving your time.

Madam Minister, before we take the vote, I just want to say that I find this extremely interesting. As a matter of fact, the interchange has been so exciting that maybe some time we may—as a Chair, I feel quite—

Mr Marchese: Empowered.

The Vice-Chair: —impotent. I would have liked to have participated. Maybe we may change the standing orders and I can then participate and make my contribution.

However, I really want to thank you and thank those—I can see from the interchange that even your own government side wanted to continue long beyond the time.

Let me just go to the votes then. That's my two minutes. I decided to press at that aspect of it. It is then the Ministry of Education votes which we'll take.

Shall the vote of 1001 carry? Carried.

Shall the vote of 1002 carry? Carried.

Mr Marchese: These are just numbers: 1001, 1002?

The Vice-Chair: I know you were all paying attention on what votes you were debating on all along through the hours.

Shall the estimates of the Ministry of Education carry?
Carried.

Shall I report the estimates then to the House? Carried.

Thank you very much, Madam Minister. I know you enjoyed this. I want to thank all your staff and the deputy. You have an excellent deputy. As you went along praising Mr Marchese, we praise this deputy and the support staff who do an excellent job.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Certainly I want to express my appreciation to the committee members, but I want to express special appreciation to all of the staff at the Ministry of Education for the hard work that they have undertaken. I think this is always a lot of work, and I certainly appreciate the contribution that they have made.

The Vice-Chair: I can understand that. They're excellent civil servants.

We're going to recess for 15 minutes for the Ministry of Energy. They can regroup themselves. We'll have a new group of civil servants. At 5:15, reassemble.

The committee recessed from 1659 to 1720.

MINISTRY OF ENERGY

The Vice-Chair: We are here today for the consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Energy.

I'll just lay it out: the vote is 1101, item 1, and we will begin with a 15-minute statement from the minister, followed by 15 minutes for the official opposition, then 15 minutes for the third party when they arrive, and then another 15 minutes for the government or for the minister to use as a right of reply. The remaining time of two hours and 45 minutes will be apportioned equally among the three parties thereafter.

So welcome, Mr Minister. You may lead with your 15 minutes.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, minister responsible for francophone affairs): Thank you, Mr Chair. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the standing committee to talk about the initiatives and activities of the Ministry of Energy.

If I could at the outset just introduce two people, to my left is Judy Hubert, who is the assistant deputy minister of energy, and to my right is Dr Bryne Purchase, who is the deputy minister. I should say that I think I have had the opportunity at various times in my short career to work in about 10 or 11 departments or ministries, and they are two of the most exceptional people that I've had the chance to work with. That's no small accomplishment, so I want to say that on the record and publicly. I know they look forward to participating in this process every bit as much as I do.

Over the next 15 minutes, I'd like to talk about the Ontario government's vision for Ontario's electricity sector and highlight some of the key areas where the ministry and its precursors, the Ministry of Environment and Energy and the Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology, have been active over the past 12 months. I was both honoured and enthusiastic when the Premier asked me to be the Minister of Energy about 40 or 50

days ago. It's an important and challenging portfolio, and I think the Premier's decision to make it a stand-alone ministry recognizes the huge amount of public priority that he and the people of Ontario are putting on these important issues.

Simply put, the mission of the Ministry of Energy is to help ensure strong economic growth, a high standard of living and improved quality of life for all the people in the province of Ontario by promoting the development of an energy sector that offers consumer choice, competitive prices and a safe, reliable and environmentally sustainable supply. As with all important endeavours, success in fulfilling this mission—and when I say that, I think it's important to underline lasting and long-term success—in my judgment, has three ingredients: first, a clear and compelling vision; second, the strength to stick to your plan; and third, the creativity to respond to challenges and adapt to change.

These three principles have guided all facets of our government's agenda, including restructuring Ontario's electricity market, since 1998. In the energy sector, our government's vision is of an electricity system that is an enabler of economic growth and development, not one that holds us back. Yet it wasn't always that way. As recently as the last decade, we saw proof that the old Ontario Hydro electricity monopoly was not working and was pulling the rest of the province down. Part of the problem stemmed from unrealistic prices, a poor performance and, regrettably, a legacy of debt. So we set out to fix it, and I believe we are well on our way to realizing our vision.

Achievement of any vision requires following through with a realistic plan, which leads to my second point: the necessity of having a good plan. The elements of our plan for electricity are straightforward: first, to continue to build a competitive generation market; second, to give consumers choice—choice among retailers and choice among generators; and third, to ensure that the wires monopoly is disciplined and efficient.

1730

As you know, on May 1 of this year, Ontario's electricity market opened to competition. I believe it was a major milestone for the ministry, which had worked hard since 1997 to achieve this important goal. In opening the competitive market, the government was following through on a commitment to restructure the electricity system for the benefit of all people in Ontario. It was not a step that was taken lightly. In the lead-up to the market opening, the minister I think is recognized for having consulted widely. We examined how other jurisdictions had restructured their electricity markets, learning from both successes and failures. And at every step, we asked the question, "Is this in the best interests of Ontario consumers?" and we made sure the answer was an unequivocal yes before proceeding.

As part of the market design, we had in place a number of measures to protect consumers. One example is the market power mitigation agreement. This has been discussed on a good number of occasions in the Legislature

recently, and I won't go on. But the rebate is an obligation contained in Ontario Power Generation's generation licence and applies for the first four years following market opening. It serves I suppose two principal reasons: one, as a sort of check on the power that Ontario Power Generation has on the market, holding a substantial share of the generation capacity in the province; and hopefully, secondly, it serves as a strong encouragement for them to pursue decontrol. That's of course reducing its share of the market, which is something I know has been an issue, an important priority, going back to the days of Bill 35, when we had province-wide hearings when I served as parliamentary assistant for finance and as a member of that committee, as well as a number of other members around the table. That was an important issue then and I think it remains an important issue.

We also strengthened the regulatory and enforcement capabilities of the Ontario Energy Board, and shortly after market opening the government introduced the Reliable Energy and Consumer Protection Act, which passed in the Ontario Legislature this past June. The act helps protect consumers by strengthening the OEB's already formidable enforcement powers, and by enacting a new energy consumers' bill of rights.

This legislation gives the OEB the authority to order compliance or to levy penalties of up to \$10,000 a day if it discovers unfair marketing or retailing practices. It also gives the board the power to revoke licences. The bill of rights prohibits false advertising and gives the government the authority to require that key information in gas or electricity contracts be presented clearly and factually.

As I said earlier, the electricity market opened to competition on May 1 of this year, and it was certainly recognized to have been a successful launch. The system is working. All 94 local distribution companies are market-ready. As you can appreciate, this past summer was the ultimate test for the province. According to Environment Canada, it was the hottest summer in nearly 50 years, and the weather continues through September and even into early October to be unseasonably hot. We do notice that the changing of the leaves is a little bit later this year, as another example of that reality.

We set all-time electricity consumption records on July 17 and August 13, and peak demand also exceeded 20,000 megawatts 36% of the time in July. There's no question it stretched our system to the max, yet it delivered for the people of Ontario. I should underline that our employees did a great job in keeping the lights on and the air conditioners running.

Despite the heat wave, the average wholesale price since market opening from May 1 through September 29 has been 5.7 cents per kilowatt hour, compared with 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour before the market opening.

We fully expected that the price would fluctuate, with higher prices during the extreme heat of the summer. However, you can't take record-breaking months like July and August in isolation. They can't be held up as benchmarks for the price of electricity in Ontario. Over

the course of the year, the temperature will go down and demand will go down, and I believe price will go down. I believe that in the long term, because we now have a competitive electricity market, consumers are going to enjoy prices considerably lower than they would otherwise have been. For example, York University professor Fred Lazar has estimated that prices over the next decade will be \$3 billion to \$6 billion less than they would have been under the old monopoly.

Let me turn now to the vision I spoke of a few minutes ago. We intend to forge an electricity system that fosters, not hinders, economic growth. That means we absolutely must have a competitively priced, safe and reliable supply of electricity, and an environmentally sustainable energy industry in the province.

As you know, the Independent Electricity Market Operator, the IMO, released its latest 18-month forecast on September 24. I have a copy here. The next 18-month outlook does caution when we talk about reserves. In the report, under the section on page eight of 31, the overall adequacy of energy production capability, it reads:

"The energy production capability is generally expected to be well above energy demand levels in each month of the outlook period under both the reference resource scenario and the delayed resource scenario. No additional energy is expected to be needed to meet the Ontario forecast energy demand."

I don't present the IMO to be the Holy Grail in this area, but they are the independent operator of the market that is able to make independent determinations, and they are certainly a good guidepost in this regard.

Now, of course, the logical question would be, what if we have another summer like this past summer, the hottest in 50 years? Won't that force us to import power to meet demand? In fact, we've been importing and exporting power in the province of Ontario for many years. It's certainly not something new, and it can work to our advantage. It gives us a safety net during sharp spikes in demand.

I realize the IMO has raised some concerns about our reserves, and I want to say very directly to the committee, to the entire Legislature and the people of Ontario that as minister I take those concerns very seriously. That's why our government is promoting the development of new sources of generation, including green power.

To date, we have seen \$180.9 million in new investment in the waterpower industry. In fact, nine waterpower projects are currently being built or are on the drawing board here in Ontario. In December of last year, a 660-kilowatt privately owned wind turbine began operating in Huron county, and construction has begun on a 750-kilowatt wind turbine at the CNE here in the city of Toronto. Those are small steps, but every long journey begins with a few small steps.

TransAlta has begun construction on a 490-megawatt natural gas-fired plant in Sarnia, which is expected to come on stream in 2003. ATCO and OPG are partners in another natural gas-fired plant in Windsor, which, when

completed in 2004, will produce 580 megawatts. I notice the funding was just put in place for that yesterday, which was positive news.

The bottom line is that the IMO does not expect electricity shortages in the province at any time during the 18-month period from October through March 2004, or beyond.

As you know, OPG is working hard to bring several of our nuclear units back on line, including those at Pickering A and those being refurbished at Bruce.

On my first full day on the job, I took the opportunity to visit Pickering A and to get a briefing on the important work that's being done there. Obviously, the government—and I in my capacity as minister—is disappointed that the return of the Pickering A nuclear units is taking longer than expected. I would be dishonest if I didn't say that. But I think it's important that we not compromise safety in the completion of that important work. Our government's and OPG's overriding priority is the health and safety of the public and its employees, and OPG is taking appropriate steps to comply with all the nuclear safety standards.

The Vice-Chair: Two minutes, Minister.

Hon Mr Baird: I'll move to consumer education. I'd like to point out that throughout the entire restructuring process, the ministry has been extremely active in informing and educating Ontario's electricity consumers about changes. In the past year alone, the ministry distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of its information brochure, placed ads in newspapers, ran a TV ad for several months and, in collaboration with a number of other organizations, placed an information supplement in the *Globe and Mail* this past March.

As well, last fall and winter, ministry staff undertook a gruelling schedule of town hall meetings to explain the new market to people in Thunder Bay, Timmins, Sault Ste Marie, and a large number of other towns and cities across the province. We will be continuing these and similar activities as long as the need exists.

Finally, let me say that I am more than pleased with the progress we've made so far. Much work remains to be done. I think that the market opening on May 1 was both a conclusion of work that had started with the MacDonald commission and through Bill 35 and through the work of the market design committee and through the efforts of the ministry and the OEB and countless others, including staff at OPG and Hydro One, but it's very much a beginning. We don't have a competitive marketplace in Ontario. I think we need to seek additional investment and generation and we must make progress on decontrol. I believe that's absolutely essential if we're to have an open market. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss these issues with you, Mr Chair, and with members of the committee.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Minister. Mr Conway, 15 minutes.

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Thank you very much, Mr Chairman and colleagues. Minister, I certainly want to agree with you in your com-

ments about the quality of your staff. I know some of them, and they're, particularly the ones flanking you at the moment, very bright and hard-working, competent public servants. I just want to say some things today because I probably will not be here for some of the remaining parts of these estimates. I want to quickly cover a number of items, some of which you've talked about.

But I am reminded: I think, I say to my friend O'Toole, it was in this room that we did Bill 35, and as I remember, the debate four years ago around Bill 35 was essentially this. I was one of the ones who I thought in a fairly bi-partisan and ecumenical way said there's a real problem here. There's a very serious problem of a greater intractability than any of us wants to admit to, and there are no easy solutions. At any rate, the deal was, "Pass this Bill 35 and we are going to reduce rates and improve service." Well, a bit like Ronald Reagan in 1984, I'm inclined to say today to the farmer in Norfolk county I spoke to a few moments ago, to the small business person, to the residential consumer: is your hydro bill lower and is your hydro service better today than it was 12 or 24 months ago?

I think I know the answer to that. Far too many people, far too many Ontarians, residentially, industrially and commercially, are getting bills that are a real jolt. Yes, Minister, you are right: we have an open market and it is true that we had an uncommonly hot, dry July and August, and the commodity price in an open market shot up dramatically. But I remind you that only 45% of your bill is the commodity charge. In the last three or four years, as a result of Bill 35, we the government of Ontario have larded on to the electricity bill hundreds of millions, billions of dollars of new taxes and special charges. Hydro One alone has paid I think nearly \$2 billion worth of new charges in the last four years: corporate taxes they didn't pay before; full property taxes; dividends, to name but three of the new charges. They're not small potatoes.

Yes, I agree, Minister, that in the September-October-November-December period—I suspect that the commodity price is going to come down. In fact, I would make a small wager that it will and that it will come down significantly. We happen to have had a particularly wet, cool May and June. The first four months of this open market have been bizarre because May and June were really cool and wet. July and August were just the reverse. So you've got two polarities there that are atypical. But the fact of the matter remains that we have 50% or more of the bill that has nothing to do with the commodity cost. We, the government of Ontario, the Legislature of Ontario, have imposed substantial new taxes, special charges and other costs on to the hydro bill that people are noticing, and those bills are not going to go away just because you've established a competitive market. And I don't believe we have a competitive market in generation, actually; we have it notionally but we certainly don't have it, by any stretch of the imagination, to date.

I remember—and I think it was Bagehot in his famous piece about the British Constitution; I feel like Bagehot's description of the British monarchy 100 years ago. The Queen or the King, he says, really has two functions: you can be advised and you can warn. That's really all I feel I've got a capacity to do. I look at this situation and say to myself, "What was the problem we set out to fix?" The problem was in generation. We have one hell of a problem on the supply side that is going to admit to no easy solutions.

What the hell did our company, Hydro One, go out and spend: \$600 million or \$700 million or \$800 million worth of borrowed money to buy 90 utilities, large and small, and pay a premium of 30% to do it? How was the policy that was announced four years ago aided and abetted by spending a quarter of a billion dollars' worth of borrowed money to buy Brampton Hydro and 85 or 90 like it? We let that happen.

1740

One of the things I can say, as I take my leave from this place after nearly three decades, and it didn't seem to matter who was in government, is the government announced one hydro policy, and Hydro pursued a rather different policy, sometimes 180 degrees at odds with the announced government policy, sometimes 150 degrees, sometimes absolutely, abjectly antithetical. I look at that Hydro One fiasco of the last two or three years and say to myself, "What has changed?" I've got some sad news for you. You are going to be out shedding some of that stuff in the next two or three years because rate pressure and public pressure around terrible service are going to force us to do it. You're going to be selling at a substantial discount from what it is you paid. But what was that all about? How did that happen?

I don't want to even get into the mess that occurred this spring around the executive suites, particularly at Hydro One. We know less about the Hydro successor companies today than we knew about the old Hydro five years ago, and we didn't know a hell of a lot about it until many years after the fact. I was astonished to find out that there was a reactor at Bruce that was down for the entire summer. By the way, as far as I can tell—and I've been looking at the Bruce Power Web page—there seems to be a lot of confusion in the Legislature and in the public press as to what happened. I'd like somebody to give me an answer.

According to the Web page at Bruce Power, that reactor was taken down for regular maintenance in March. I expect, although I don't know, that reactor was probably expected to come back into service for the peak demand season of June, July and August. But it didn't because they had an accident of some kind on or around June 11. What did we read the other day—and the fact that we lost 800 megawatts of domestic capacity as we headed into the kind of summer that the minister rightly described was a very material event. We had to go and find replacement power for that. The uplift charges for paying those bills, when they arrive, on residential and industrial bills, are going to be interesting. I don't exactly

know when they're going to arrive. I guess some of them have already arrived. But we didn't seem to know much about that. You didn't, Minister. Your predecessor didn't know. As I say, even the press reports are rather confusing.

My first question was, was this an effort to game the market? I don't think it was. But I'll tell you, when you've got such a tight supply-demand situation and you all of a sudden start to lose capacity at timely points like peak demand, one of the first questions you ask yourself in this kind of a market is, is somebody trying to game the market? My instinct is that that was not the case here. I don't know. I'd like to know.

I see on the front page of the New York Times the other day El Paso was convicted by some kind of a federal administrative court of the United States of gaming the gas market in California. El Paso is a big player. You've got to be on the lookout for gaming. We know now two things about Bruce Power—and it's no secret I've supported in principle what the government has tried to do there, not because it was a first or second choice, but because I thought, quite frankly, it was the only realistic choice we had, and I think my friend from Durham will probably agree upon recalling the evidence we had here four or five years ago on that select committee.

But what do I know now that I didn't know a couple of months ago? I know two things. We were heading into a market that was going to be very tight. We hit record demand this summer, more than once over 25,000 megawatts and I gather, Deputy, that there were days and periods when we had to import up to 4,000 megawatts of electricity to keep the lights and air conditioners of Ontario on. That's a dramatic development. It's too bad my friend Hampton's not here, because the giant sucking sound was not the Americans sucking the juice out of Ontario; we were sucking the juice out of the Ohio valley. That was the story this summer.

But I know two things. Now I know that in the late spring of this year, British Energy was in hemorrhage, a very serious financial hemorrhage with the parent company of Bruce Power. Secondly, there is a serious problem with domestic capacity at Bruce for, apparently, a good and honest reason: there was an accident on June 11 or thereabouts. I've got to tell you, I'm from Missouri and I'd say to myself, I want to know and the electricity consumer of Ontario needs to know much more quickly and completely what's going on, because you have to be concerned that there might be some gaming going on. As I say, I am astonished at how little we seem to know about this market. It gives me no comfort when I hear responsible ministers of the crown saying, "I found out about it when I read it in the Star the other day," which is, I think, what Stockwell was telling us. That's a serious issue, a very serious issue, and we're going to have to find ways to deal with that.

I know my time is going to quickly run out, but there are a couple of other things I want to talk about. Minister, you're from Ottawa. I presume you saw the Ottawa

Citizen. You were questioned about this yesterday, and I don't expect that you are going to tell me everything I want to know at this point. The three-page feature article in the Ottawa Citizen on Saturday by Messrs Dimmock and Greenberg is a deeply troubling story. Two of my constituents were killed at High Falls near Calabogie on Sunday afternoon or Sunday morning of June 23 in a truly unbelievable accident. As tragic as that was, we were very lucky that there weren't many, many more fatalities on that day at that place. These two Citizen reporters have gone in and done some detailed work. The leader of the third party asked you some questions yesterday. I guess I want to know two or three things. One, when is that OPP police investigation about what happened at High Falls on June 23 going to be completed?

Hon Mr Baird: Would you like me to answer?

Mr Conway: Yes.

Hon Mr Baird: To address your question, I can't as a minister, as a political participant in our governmental process, know when the police, who act at arm's length from the government, are about to complete an investigation. I think they make that determination, properly, as the appropriate authority, on how long they need to undertake an investigation. I'm uncomfortable even with the notion of inquiring. Certainly, as the minister who reports to the Legislature on behalf of OPG, which itself could very well be under investigation, I think is—

Mr Conway: Well, all right. I appreciate that. I'm just going to say that any fair-minded person who reads this—a beautiful woman and her 7-year-old child were killed in circumstances that are horrifying. They were out on a sunny afternoon in a place where, for decades, people have enjoyed the recreational opportunities there. They were hit with a tsunami that you couldn't have imagined possible. A lot of my constituents, many of whom have worked at Hydro for decades, have told me they have no memory of anything remotely like this ever happening. I read in this story reports based on some pretty interesting and apparently reliable insider information at OPG that there was some kind of new computer system, whereby even if there was somebody at that generating station that afternoon, they would not have been able to have overridden the new computer system that effectively, according to this story, led very directly to the deaths of those two people and the potential death of scores more.

I don't want to be over the top on this, although I'll tell you my constituents in the Calabogie area are really upset and very concerned. I have been around this debate longer than you have, Min

ister, and I thought I had heard it all. But I had never heard anything about the possibility of a new open

market, which I support and I also support the utilization of as much hydroelectric power as we can possibly develop and manage in Ontario, for all of the economic and environmental reasons. But nobody but nobody had ever said to me in the months and years that I've been around this debate, "You know, if you open the market, you run the risk of generators, of owners and operators of these hydroelectric stations totally changing the way in which these river systems are managed." That is certainly what appears to have happened on that day on the lower Madawaska in late June.

I read in the Sault Ste Marie Star of a similar situation in the Algoma district, where at another generator, the water fluctuations are wildly out of anything they've experienced in the past 30 or 40 or 50 years. An open market, yes; but it's got to be done safely. And I want to say as I conclude that I don't think the government of Ontario has done a very good job of informing the consuming public of Ontario what is actually going to happen, what is actually their entitlement, what is actually their responsibility. We unleashed a bunch of unscrupulous marketers—they weren't all bad, but there were far too many of them who were bad—who went out in places like Prescott-Russell and most other places in the province and harassed the hell out of people, particularly senior citizens, signed up tens of thousands of them to boondoggle contracts, and months after it all happened, we come along with some information in the Globe and Mail and in handouts. Not good enough.

Finally, before this is all over, I say to you and everybody in the Ontario government that what was done at Calabogie I think is a serious dereliction of duty. I want not only a police investigation, but I want to see that police investigation concluded as quickly as possible.

I've got to tell you, I fully expect that a coroner's and perhaps a more general inquiry ought to be held. I hear from people who are well-intentioned, many of them very close to Hydro, and others, that what happened at High Falls that day should never have happened, and the public interest was not well served nor public safety well protected by those who are in positions of responsibility to do so.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Conway.

As you can see, that is the time for the NDP, with their 15 minutes. We can do one of two things: we can move to the Conservatives, which is only a matter of about six minutes, or we can adjourn until next Tuesday, immediately after routine proceedings.

Mr Mazzilli: I move to adjourn.

The Vice-Chair: You move to adjourn. We stand adjourned until Tuesday.

The committee adjourned at 1751.

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