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of Ontario**

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 26 May 2003

Lundi 26 mai 2003

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 May 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 mai 2003

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SUDBURY REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): Today I plead with the Harris-Eves government to please fund our stalled hospital construction project. It has been too long now since the government abdicated its responsibilities to fund this project.

What is more devastating to our community is that this project is now starting to hurt the economy of Sudbury. The government's inaction is hurting our doctor recruitment program. The government's inaction is undermining our hope about a northern Ontario medical school starting on time. And it's not me saying this; it's people in Sudbury. It's the Greater Sudbury Development Corp who is saying that it's hurting the economy. Doctor retention and recruitment is paramount in importance to our community, and it continues to be hurt by this government's inaction.

Today, on behalf of all the people in Sudbury who have signed the "Ernie Pay Up" postcard campaign—these are the postcards I received on Friday from my office. Literally thousands of people have signed the postcards, sent letters, signed petitions. They want this government to begin living up to its responsibilities and fund the Sudbury Regional Hospital construction project.

KITCHENER RANGERS

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): The Kitchener Rangers are the Memorial Cup champions. The Kitchener Rangers are an integral part of our community, and it gives me great pleasure to stand here in the Ontario Legislature to recognize this team for their triumphant effort and achievements this season. It is a great pleasure for us all to witness these young leaders in their sport and community, working diligently to achieve success. The amount of heart and determination they showed is profound.

These young men work tirelessly to accomplish their goals, to ultimately be drafted by the National Hockey League. Yet while they strive for excellence, they do an incredible service for their community. When these young men reach their goals, they will continue to

support the people and the city that believed in them and helped them fulfill their dreams.

Because the Kitchener Rangers were so successful in the OHL season and playoffs, an incredible energy can be felt throughout all of Kitchener. It instills pride within our city, accompanied by a fellowship among hockey fans. Yet this does not exclude the rest of Kitchener's residents, because when an important part of our city is successful, the entire community benefits. The Kitchener Rangers going all the way is not only great for the team and for our city; it also shows the rest of the hockey world that Kitchener produces champions and leaders.

The Kitchener Rangers set a fine example of what my community strives to be, and I am proud to recognize them here today: captain and Memorial Cup MVP Derek Roy; Eminger, Richards, Halkidis, Benoit, Campbell, Dickie, Eason, Kanko, O'Nabigon, DiRienzo, Smith, Grennier, Keefe, Boucher, Clarkson, McGrath and Martynowski; general manager and coach Peter De Boer; assistant coach Steve Spott; and announcers Don Cameron and Gary Doyle.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Just while we're on sports themes, as the member will know, I won a Memorial Cup—that's what this ring is—and was most valuable goaltender in the Memorial Cup.

Interjection.

The Speaker: The member for Sudbury should know. We beat Sudbury in an eight-game series, though.

Just very quickly, I did want to introduce a couple of people in the Speaker's gallery along that theme. With us today is Mr Bob Tindall, who was the scout for the Boston Bruins and who decided to draft me. Bob, surprisingly enough, kept his job with the Bruins for many years even after drafting me. He's joined by Mr Greg Harrison, who does the masks for all the goaltenders. Without him, I would have no teeth today.

Please welcome our honoured guests.

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of the Environment, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: We all congratulate the Kitchener Rangers, and we know that when you were playing hockey back in the 1960s, it was tougher then too.

The Speaker: We also know I wasn't that good; that's why I'm here. But enough of the fun.

RENDERING INDUSTRY

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I rise today to once again bring attention to the very serious crisis in the dead-stock removal and rendering industry. My colleague from Chatham-Kent Essex brought this to the minister's attention last week, yet the chaos continues and worsens. Twelve thousand metric tonnes of dead animal stock, remnants from slaughter and restaurant grease per week are produced in this province, and 40% to 60% of that is exported to the U.S., yet the border is closed.

A local producer from my riding called Oxford Dead Stock to have a dead sow removed. This is the message that was on the answering machine: "Due to the outbreak of BSE, we have lost our dead animal byproducts market. The plant is closed and there will be no service pickups. We are asking the producers to call the Ontario Ministry of Agricultural and Food, your MP and your commodity groups, because they did not listen to us. The more voices that are heard, the better. Hopefully they can resolve this and we can get back to service as soon as possible."

This has the potential to become a public health crisis. These animals must be picked up. Thousands of carcasses cannot be left on our farms to rot. If they are not picked up, you have to do something with them. Methods of illegal disposal have serious implications to our environment and our water. The agriculture minister must show leadership now and deal with this in a very public manner, including a viable option and action plan for our livestock producers. I call on the minister to let everyone in the industry know what exactly you are going to do about this and when you are going to do something about this.

PHARMACISTS

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Ontario pharmacists are highly educated health professionals. They are the drug experts. However, pharmacists are not recognized and utilized to their fullest capabilities.

The Ontario drug benefits program is the fastest-growing expense in the health care budget, increasing an alarming 11% last year. Pharmacists have the unique ability to help manage rising drug costs by making sure patients are on appropriate drugs and using them accurately. After all, the number one reason for seniors to be admitted to hospital in this province is because of an adverse reaction to a doctor-prescribed drug.

Health experts like Romanow and Kirby have recognized the need to invest in pharmacists as a tool to improve health care. Other provinces recognize that pharmacists provide cognitive services, but unfortunately Ontario pharmacists are still waiting. Our government has excluded the Ontario Pharmacists' Association from its review of drug utilization. For the past several years, drug manufacturers have been raising their prices beyond what is legislatively permitted. Therefore, pharmacists

have seen their cost recovery erode, leaving them less time to spend with their patients. Pharmacists have not seen a fee increase in this province for 13 years, and currently they are paid \$6.47 to dispense drugs in the ODB. Yet a study shows that their real costs are \$10.68.

Quality health care depends on acknowledging the work of these vital health care professionals, and begins with treating pharmacists with respect.

1340

ENGLISH CLASSES

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I'm still receiving many of these cards requesting stable funding for English as a second language.

English instruction has two categories for newcomers: (1) the regular students attending day school classes, and (2) adult learners, mainly parents, who attend day or evening school.

There have been cuts to these programs since 1991, and especially in the year 2001-02. In fact, there has been a reduction of over \$3 million. The effect of this reduction is going to be tremendous. It will have grave consequences for thousands of these newcomers. This will affect their adaptation, integration and job readiness. How will these students be able to get jobs in this province if they don't adequately learn how to speak the language of the country?

Secondly, what about those adult learners, mainly parents, who have come to this country trying to get jobs as well? How will they get jobs if they don't speak the language?

We know they will not be able to get even a caretaker's job, when they're trained to be doctors, lawyers and accountants. They will not even be able to speak the language properly.

What we're asking today is for the Minister of Citizenship to talk to the Minister of Education to increase the funding for these classes.

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This morning, I, along with my NDP colleagues, joined hundreds of teachers who have been locked out of their classrooms in Toronto. That means 69,000 students have been locked out, too. Let me be clear: these teachers are not on strike. They want to go back to their classrooms and continue with the negotiations. They are bitterly disappointed that the Tories are using them and our children as pre-election pawns to bolster their election platform.

The NDP has a solution that could unlock those doors tomorrow. It's a simple process that has worked very effectively in two recent strikes. The first step is the appointment of a mediator-arbitrator to facilitate a new contract. Choosing a mediator-arbitrator from a list of three names acceptable to both the board and the Ontario Elementary Catholic Teachers' Association is the

best way to proceed. It has been used successfully before, at the advice of the NDP, in Simcoe-Muskoka and in the city of Toronto workers' strike. You'll all remember that.

Secondly, the Conservatives must delete the contentious second part of this back-to-work legislation, which is the first step toward their strike-ban platform promise. The NDP cannot and will not support legislation that attacks teachers and continues this war in our schools that started way back with John Snobelen.

NDP House leader Peter Kormos tabled an amendment today to the Conservative back-to-work legislation. Support this amendment and get these kids back in the classroom.

SECRETS OF RADAR MUSEUM

Mr Bob Wood (London West): I rise today to tell the Legislature about a new museum, called the Radar Museum, which had its grand opening and ribbon-cutting in London on Saturday, May 24, 2003.

The Clinton area was used as a training station for British radar technicians during the World War II. The British needed a lot of technicians and asked Canada to train some of its own young men. Thirteen of our Canadian universities agreed to do so, and 6,000 young Canadians were trained as radar mechanics. The grads were either shipped off to work on aircraft in England or kept on for further training at Clinton.

One of the driving forces behind the Radar Museum in London, Fred Bates, was one of nine from a group of 500 who were commissioned. After helping to install four out of eight radar advance systems in Canada, Mr. Bates was finally shipped to England, where he became involved with the Royal Air Force.

Radar technicians were sworn to secrecy during the war, and this oath was not lifted by the British government until 1990. This meant that radar technicians could then share with the world the history of radar.

Displays of their equipment were sent from England and toured Canada, and finally ended up in the Radome Museum in Clinton, Ontario. About three years ago, the Clinton museum closed and all the display material was put in storage. Mr Bates, with the aid of about 50 volunteers, found a spot to house the displays in the former Huron pavilion situated on the Parkwood Hospital grounds in London, and with a lot of hard work put the displays back together again to form the Secrets of Radar Museum.

I know that all members of this House will join with me in congratulating Mr Bates and his group of hard-working volunteers on the opening of their museum and thank them for bringing back a colourful and important part of Canadian history for all to see and enjoy.

LIBERAL EXPENDITURE PROJECTIONS

Mr Dwight Duncan (Windsor-St Clair): Last week my leader, Dalton McGuinty, did something no other party in Ontario history has done. He put every single

one of our promises before a forensic auditor and two senior economists to ensure that they were affordable and realistic. A forensic auditor, Jack Marmer, spent 70 hours combing through our spending commitments. Two senior economists, Warren Jestin of Scotiabank and David Hall of Vista, reviewed our expenditure and revenue projections. They agree that our plan is prudent and fiscally responsible.

On Thursday, we put forward the results of our financial plan for Ontario. It shows that, unlike the Tories or NDP, we're committed to balancing our budgets and making promises we can keep. Dalton McGuinty's plan improves health care and education while balancing the budget and holding the line on taxes.

We challenge the other parties to put their platforms through the same kind of scrutiny. Independent analysts say Ernie Eves is running a deficit. The DBRS says the Eves Magna budget shows a deficit of \$1.9 billion. The TD Bank found the Tory budget is hiding a real deficit of \$2 billion this year. Standard and Poor's says that they have inflated asset sales numbers and are inconsistent with the stated objectives to take the necessary steps to balance the budget.

Only Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals offer real change. Choose change. Choose responsible government you can trust for a change.

ST JOSEPH'S AT FLEMING

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): A very unique and innovative facility is under construction in my riding of Peterborough. St Joseph's at Fleming is a 200-bed, state-of-the-art long-term-care facility containing the Institute for Healthy Aging. It is being built on the campus of Sir Sandford Fleming College. This long-term-care facility is the first of its kind in Canada to be built on the campus of a learning institution. It will set the standard for compassionate care and innovation.

The building was designed to exceed many Ministry of Health standards and will have the look and feel not of an institution, but of a living accommodation. Each of the eight resident home areas will accommodate 25 residents to encourage smaller, less alarming social groups.

St Joseph's at Fleming will provide special communal spaces, including living rooms, multipurpose activity rooms, a chapel and auditorium, a 50-seat classroom, as well as a greenhouse and fully contained courtyard gardens that will provide residents with access to nature while remaining secure. The Fleming child care centre and healthy aging research lab will also be housed in the facility.

This is indeed an amazing project that will not only provide four-generation interaction, but also a rich learning environment for students from Fleming. Students participating in over 20 different programs, from nursing, massage therapy and early childhood education to culinary arts, recreation and information systems, will have the opportunity to gain valuable, hands-on practical experience at this new facility.

VISITORS

Mr David Caplan (Don Valley East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I know all members will want to join with me in welcoming students from Dallington Public School who have joined us here in the gallery today.

NOTICE OF REASONED AMENDMENT

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 69(c), the House leader of the third party, the member for Niagara Centre, has filed a notice of reasoned amendment to the motion for second reading of Bill 28, An Act to resolve a labour dispute between the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Toronto Catholic District School Board and to amend the Education Act and the Provincial Schools Negotiations Act.

The order for second reading may therefore not be called today.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I beg leave to present the first report, 2003, of the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr Marchese: It's not necessary, Speaker. Thank you.

VISITOR

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I'd like to welcome Mr Satnam Singh Kainth, in the members' gallery, former leader of the opposition, Punjab legislative assembly, and former member of Parliament, India.

1350

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker: Just before we continue, I would ask all members to join me in welcoming our group of pages.

With us today we have Ryan Baulke from Simcoe-Grey; Tyler Goettl from London-Fanshawe; Caitlyn Hanley from Brant; Roisin Hartnett from Oakville, and she's joined by her dog, Penny; Spencer Henderson from Northumberland; Kelan Jylha from York North; Kaitlynn-Rae Landry from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot; Timothy Lewis from Don Valley East; Joshua Man from Whitby-Ajax; Lucas Mol from Oxford; Sabrina Nanji from Brampton Centre; Mario Nucci from Thunder Bay-Atikokan; Robyn Perritt from Peterborough; Bridget Schrempf from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound; Nicolas Seguin from Windsor West;

Brittany Shaw from Kitchener Centre; Jenna Sheppard from Oshawa; Kristian Sistilli Mandarano from St Paul's; Bryant Smith from Leeds-Grenville; Sarah Splinter from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington; and Aja Sutton from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant.

Please join me in welcoming our new set of pages.

VISITORS

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Minister of Culture): I'd like to welcome two guests of mine today, two bright young men from Markham, my hometown: Simon Plashkes, who just graduated from IT at Ryerson, and Mark Cotterill, who is a future filmmaker.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
AMENDMENT ACT
(WORKPLACE VIOLENCE), 2003
LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SANTÉ ET LA SÉCURITÉ
AU TRAVAIL (VIOLENCE AU TRAVAIL)

Mr Bartolucci moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 51, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act with respect to acts of workplace violence / Projet de loi 51, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail en matière d'actes de violence au travail.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): This bill amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to impose duties on employers, supervisors and workers with respect to acts of workplace violence which are defined to be acts of physical or psychological violence that persons commit in the workplace.

LABOUR RELATIONS
AMENDMENT ACT, 2003LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES RELATIONS DE TRAVAIL

Mr Kormos moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 52, An Act to amend the Labour Relations Act, 1995 / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1995 sur les relations de travail.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

The member for a short statement?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The purpose of this bill is to restore the provisions that were incorporated into the Labour Relations Act by the Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act, 1992, and subsequently repealed by the Labour Relations Act, 1995. The purpose of the provisions being restored is to prevent an employer from replacing striking or locked-out employees with replacement workers, scabs, a term that is defined in the bill. The bill allows replacement workers or scabs to be used only in emergencies. This restores anti-scab legislation to this province, restoring labour peace.

THE RIGHT CHOICES FOR
EQUITY IN EDUCATION ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2003

LOI DE 2003
SUR LES BONS CHOIX POUR L'ÉQUITÉ
EN MATIÈRE D'ÉDUCATION
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

Mrs Ecker moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 53, An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit / Projet de loi 53, Loi concernant le crédit d'impôt pour l'équité en matière d'éducation.

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

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1356 to 1401.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Gill, Raminder	Newman, Dan
Beaubien, Marcel	Hardeman, Ernie	O'Toole, John
Chudleigh, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Clark, Brad	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Clement, Tony	Johns, Helen	Sampson, Rob
Coburn, Brian	Johnson, Bert	Sterling, Norman W.
Cunningham, Dianne	Kells, Morley	Stewart, R. Gary
DeFaria, Carl	Klees, Frank	Stockwell, Chris
Dunlop, Garfield	Martiniuk, Gerry	Tascona, Joseph N.
Ecker, Janet	Maves, Bart	Tsubouchi, David H.
Elliott, Brenda	Mazzilli, Frank	Turnbull, David
Eves, Ernie	McDonald, AL	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Flaherty, Jim	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Galt, Doug	Molinari, Tina R.	Wood, Bob
Gilchrist, Steve	Mushinski, Marilyn	Young, David

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Di Cocco, Caroline	McMeekin, Ted
Bartolucci, Rick	Dombrowsky, Leona	Parsons, Ernie
Bisson, Gilles	Duncan, Dwight	Patten, Richard
Bountrogiani, Marie	Gravelle, Michael	Peters, Steve
Boyer, Claudette	Hampton, Howard	Phillips, Gerry
Bradley, James J.	Hoy, Pat	Prue, Michael

Brown, Michael A.	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Bryant, Michael	Kormos, Peter	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Kwinter, Monte	Ruprecht, Tony
Churley, Marilyn	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario
Conway, Sean G.	Levac, David	Smitherman, George
Cordiano, Joseph	Marchese, Rosario	Sorbara, Greg
Curling, Alvin	Martel, Shelley	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 45; the nays are 38.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The minister for a short statement?

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): No.

The Speaker: Thank you.

CANTERBURY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE ACT, 2003

Ms Pupatello moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr16, An Act respecting Canterbury University College.

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

MINISTRY OF CITIZENSHIP
AND CULTURE AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES
CIVIQUES ET CULTURELLES

Mr Beaubien moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 54, An Act to amend the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture Act / Projet de loi 54, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère des Affaires civiles et culturelles.

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

The member for a short statement?

Mr Marcel Beaubien (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): The bill amends the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture Act to require the ministry to establish a program to provide information upon request to a municipality or a charitable institution about constructing a memorial to honour persons who are or were residents of Ontario and who served in the armed services of Canada in any wars outside Canada during the 20th century. If a body constructs such a memorial, the ministry is required to remit the scroll of recognition to those persons whom the memorial honours and whom the ministry considers to come within the description of persons who may properly be honoured.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
AMENDMENT ACT
(SEXUAL HARASSMENT), 2003
LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA SANTÉ ET LA SÉCURITÉ
AU TRAVAIL (HARCÈLEMENT SEXUEL)

Mr Hoy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 55, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect workers from sexual harassment in the workplace / Projet de loi 55, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail pour protéger les travailleurs contre le harcèlement sexuel dans le lieu de travail.

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

The member for a short statement?

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I introduce this bill in memory of Theresa Vince. This bill would amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act to require employers to protect workers from workplace-related sexual harassment, to give workers the right to refuse to work in certain circumstances after a sexual harassment has occurred, to require an investigation of allegations of workplace-related sexual harassment, and to require employers to take steps to prevent further occurrences of workplace-related sexual harassment.

TOMMY DOUGLAS ACT
(PATIENTS' BILL OF RIGHTS), 2003
LOI TOMMY DOUGLAS DE 2003
SUR LA DÉCLARATION
DES DROITS DES PATIENTS

Ms Martel moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to promote patients' rights and to increase accountability in Ontario's health care system / Projet de loi 56, Loi visant à promouvoir les droits des patients et à accroître l'obligation de rendre des comptes dans le système de soins de santé de l'Ontario.

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

The member for a short statement?

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): The bill codifies the rights of residents of Ontario to receive health care services in the form of a patients' bill of rights. The bill provides for the appointment of a health care standards commissioner, an officer of the Legislature, who will perform functions such as participating in the setting of health care standards and the development of complaints procedures, monitoring health care standards and making recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and to the Legislature.

The bill establishes whistle-blower protection for the employees of providers of health care services, and the bill requires conspicuous posting of copies of the patients' bill of rights and the whistle-blower protection provisions.

1410

RURAL RED TAPE
REDUCTION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 VISANT À RÉDUIRE
LES FORMALITÉS ADMINISTRATIVES
RELATIVES AUX AFFAIRES RURALES

Mr Hardeman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to reduce red tape with respect to rural and other matters / Projet de loi 57, Loi visant à réduire les formalités administratives relatives aux affaires rurales et à d'autres questions.

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

The minister for a short statement?

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): No. Ministers' statements, Speaker.

SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL
ACCOUNTANTS OF ONTARIO ACT, 2003

Mr Gill moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr6, An Act respecting the Society of Professional Accountants of Ontario.

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

The member for a short statement?

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): No, thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: It's a private bill.

VISITORS

Hon Jerry J. Ouellette (Minister of Natural Resources): On a point of order, Speaker: I ask all members to join me in welcoming a class of students, Mr Gainy and Madam Pat from Monsignor Pereyma from my riding of Oshawa.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): Earlier today, I introduced The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act. It is legislation that supports parents' educational choices through the equity in education tax credit. The Premier announced on March 20 our intention to restore the original schedule for the delivery of the equity in education tax credit, and today's legislation, if passed, would do so.

In 2002, the tax credit reimbursed 10% of the first \$7,000 of tuition fees, for a maximum tax credit of \$700 per child. We are proposing to accelerate the tax credit to a maximum of 20% of tuition for each child in 2003, 30% in 2004, 40% for 2005, and 50% for 2006 and beyond. This credit will assist those parents who choose an education for their child that may better reflect their religious or cultural heritage or that may respond better to their child's special needs.

There were more than 580 independent schools that qualified for the equity in education tax credit in 2002. They include Montessori schools, faith-based schools, Waldorf schools, innovative teaching schools and those that provide specific instruction for students with certain disabilities.

With this additional support came requirements for additional accountability to parents. To qualify for the tax credit, independent schools already must do a criminal reference check upon hiring all employees who come into contact with children and provide full disclosure about the contents of their academic program and the achievements expected at the end of each program. Those offering Ontario secondary school diplomas must adhere to Ontario's secondary school curriculum standards.

We will also pass regulations to require independent schools to assess student achievement in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics and to share that assessment with parents. Many schools already do this, but this additional requirement will ensure that all parents have the information they require to judge the performance of their child's school.

We will also require that each school verify the status of instructors who are or have been registered with the Ontario College of Teachers and share that information with parents as well.

Independent schools will also be required to tell parents and guardians where to obtain important consumer protection information.

I believe that one of the most important tasks of any government is to provide a strong public education system for our children, and our government has done this under the leadership of former Premier Harris and now Premier Eves. We have set higher standards through more rigorous curriculum, and we have implemented standardized testing so we can ensure our children are learning what they need to achieve their potential to succeed. We've created report cards that parents can understand. We've established standards for the professional development and performance appraisal of teachers in the classroom.

As he promised in his leadership campaign, Premier Eves has also increased resources for textbooks and has expanded programs like early reading and early math.

We have also substantially increased our investments in public education since we came into office. In 1995, education spending was \$12.9 billion. With our budget this spring, we have increased our investments in our schools to \$15.3 billion for this coming school year.

What's more, we've provided school boards with multi-year funding commitments to support better planning and more accountability to taxpayers and parents and to support long-term collective agreements for teachers.

That commitment to higher standards in public education and increased investments is not diminished by the government's recognition and willingness to support those parents who wish to choose another educational path for their child.

I know the Leader of the Opposition does not accept that parents should have a right to choose, and that he will take away the support for families who may wish to educate their children according to their religious or cultural beliefs.

On this side of the House, we do not believe that the government knows best when it comes to making educational choices for one's child. That is the responsibility of parents. Our job, as government, is to continue to build a strong public education system that provides our students with the tools they need to succeed and to support parents in the choices they make for their children.

I welcome the support from the members opposite.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I'm pleased this afternoon to introduce the Rural Red Tape Reduction Act, 2003. As the members may recall, this bill was originally introduced last December 11. In March of this year, the session was prorogued before the bill had an opportunity to move through the legislative process. It is my honour and privilege to reintroduce it in the House today.

Government red tape is a drag on the economy. International and national economic development organizations say that it is a key factor limiting competitiveness, investment and job creation. Our government has long recognized this fact, and we have consistently recognized that removing red tape is an effective way of promoting economic development.

The Rural Red Tape Reduction Act, 2003, if passed, would encourage economic growth, improve the environment for investment, reduce red tape and remove barriers to job growth in rural Ontario.

This bill amends a number of pieces of legislation. The amendments respond to issues and problems identified by rural businesses during consultation over the past four years. For example, the Rural Red Tape Reduction Act, 2003, includes measures to enhance self-governance for veterinarians. It includes measures to remove burdens placed on farm implement dealers, distributors and manufacturers and the farm communities they serve. It also includes amendments to the Co-operative Corporations Act that, if passed, would help improve the administration of cooperatives.

1420

This government recognizes the regional diversity of Ontario's communities and their important contributions

to the province's prosperity. Our government's commitment to economic development in Ontario's rural communities is well documented. We've earmarked \$400 million for rural Ontario infrastructure to the Ontario small town and rural development initiative, or OSTAR. To date, we've invested in 82 projects under the rural economic development, OSTAR RED, program, which are generating \$427 million in new rural economic activity.

We've been piloting resource jump teams to help communities address locally identified challenges. We've developed the business retention and expansion tool kit to help communities retain local jobs.

We've set up a Web-based tool to help communities get the information they need to plan their economic futures. It's called rural economic development data and intelligence, or REDDI. Recently, we launched COBRA, or Connect Ontario: Broadband Regional Access, which will bring high-speed telecommunications to businesses in northern and rural communities.

In the April 30 throne speech, we committed to unveiling a comprehensive rural strategy aimed at addressing the concerns raised by people living in rural communities. In that throne speech, we also pledged more than \$1.6 billion to help build the infrastructure rural communities need to support a growing economy.

The Rural Red Tape Reduction Act is part of a red tape reduction plan that will also address Ontario regulations, programs and policies that affect the people of rural Ontario. The Rural Red Tape Reduction Act, 2003, is a demonstration of our commitment to building sustainable businesses and stronger rural communities. Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for allowing me a few moments to explain it to you.

GRAPE AND WINE INDUSTRY

Hon Tim Hudak (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I am pleased that the Ernie Eves government is introducing proposed legislation as part of the Rural Red Tape Reduction Act that would amend the Liquor Control Act and make our domestic wine industry even more competitive.

This government is committed to strengthening the competitiveness of our domestic wine industry, creating jobs and further developing Ontario's growing reputation for our premium wines. This proposed amendment will cut red tape and give VQA wineries the ability to partner together to promote VQA wines. As you know, VQA wine is made from 100% Ontario grapes and meets the highest possible standards.

I'm very proud of the work the Ernie Eves government has done to this date in promoting Ontario's VQA wines. I'm happy to say that through the efforts of this government, the LCBO and the grape and wine industry have been able to grow the VQA wine category. In fact, VQA wine sales have grown by more than 20% since last year through the LCBO and we are confident the proposed amendment will further grow our grape and wine

industry, which means more jobs in agriculture, more investment in agri-tourism and agribusiness in rural Ontario.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I want to respond to the Minister of Finance's comments on the funding for private schools and to say that indeed my leader and our party are against it, and the reason is spelled out by the minister herself in a letter to the United Nations, where she outlined the government's own major concerns about proceeding down this road of funding private schools.

Here's what she said, among other things: "Extending funding to private schools would result in fragmentation of the education system in Ontario and undermine the goal of universal access to education." That's what Minister Ecker said less than three years ago in response to the very proposal she's bringing forward.

The then Premier wrote a very strongly worded letter. Among other things, he said, "Proceeding with this plan would remove from our existing public education system at least \$300 million per year, with some estimates as high as \$700 million."

Then-Premier Harris said this: "Obviously such an action would run directly counter to Ontario's long-standing commitment to public education." Premier Harris, in a letter dated January 18, 2000, called this plan that the minister introduced today "a crusade to fragment and weaken our public education system in Ontario." Then-Premier Harris called it a crusade to fragment and weaken our public education system. That's what he said less than three years ago. The then Minister of Education spelled out clearly her strong, strong objections to proceeding with the very bill that she introduced today.

So I say to the public of Ontario, this is what the campaign will be all about, among other things. We will quote the then Minister of Education specifically spelling out grave concerns about proceeding down this route. The then Premier called it a crusade to fragment and weaken the public education system, and you have the nerve today, on the eve of an election, to bring this in for purely political reasons and against the public education system.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): It's nice to see this bill in front of us again. Certainly there are aspects to this piece of legislation that are most important and most welcome in the rural community in Ontario, but the delay that this government continues to impose—I look at the Farm Implements Act changes that are being made. The member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant had a private member's bill in December 2001, and yet here we are a year and a half later, and farm implement dealers all across this province are waiting for this legislation. It's dilly-dallying. You've talked about a

commitment to rural Ontario, but you put rural Ontario on the backburner in dealing with this private member's bill.

You talk about the Nutrient Management Act changes. The loopholes that this government left in place were oversight at best. Now this government is doing its best to try and undertake damage control to fix the Nutrient Management Act. We supported section 60 of the Nutrient Management Act, which called for province-wide standards to end the patchwork of municipal bylaws. Yet when the legislation was passed, you left that loophole in place. Hopefully, with this legislation, if it does pass and the House doesn't prorogue because of an election, it can get through and this loophole can be closed.

Hopefully the Minister of Agriculture can explain to the agricultural community, with the phase-in not taking place until 2008, what is going to prevent municipalities from putting the screws to those farmers on category 1 to 3 farms. How is she going to ensure that municipalities aren't going to try and skirt the Nutrient Management Act and the Planning Act to try and hamper individual farmers who want to make improvements to their agricultural operations, even though things are going to be put back until the year 2008? You have to look at, for example, the cattle industry in this province. Less than 1% of the farms in the cattle industry are currently protected by the proposed changes to the Nutrient Management Act. What is the minister going to do to ensure that municipalities aren't getting in the way of farmers who want to make new investments?

GRAPE AND WINE INDUSTRY

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): We'll talk about the LCBO for a second. Remember what the last part of LCBO is: it is Ontario. Yet LCBO has consistently delisted international-award-winning VQA wines, wines delisted over and over again. We should be putting Ontario first and not allowing the LCBO to leave Ontario grape growers and wineries in the lurch.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): First I want to respond to the Conservatives' announcement yet again today that they want to spend more money to entice parents to take their children out of public schools and send them to private schools. That's really what was announced here today.

I want everyone to note that the private school tax credit will now, as envisioned, cover tuition fees of up to \$7,000 a year. I wonder how many working parents across this province could ever afford \$7,000 per child in tuition fees. This clearly isn't aimed at the majority of people in Ontario. This is clearly aimed at people who already have sizable incomes and who want other people to pay to send their children to a private school. That is the long and the short of it. This is all about continuing to

underfund the public school in my neighbourhood, the public schools in our neighbourhoods, while the Conservatives say to people, "Oh, if you don't like the public school anymore because we've underfunded it, here's some money. Send your child to a private school."

1430

I want people across Ontario to know what New Democrats think about that. New Democrats believe that if someone wants to send their child to a private school, that is a private decision. You pay for it yourself. Don't ask the public to fund your private school.

On this occasion, I think it's worthwhile noting some other quotations about this issue. I've been puzzled by the fact that I've found all these references to the Liberal position. For example, Michael Bryant, Liberal energy critic, says on this issue of public funds for private schools, the private school tax credit, "I can't suck and blow on this. I've got to support it. It's a step in the direction of equity. So I support that."

Or Monte Kwinter, the Liberal critic for enterprise and opportunity: "I've always supported full funding for faith-based schools. There should be some recognition in the provincial tax regime. I'm personally delighted that that's happened. I don't think anyone accepts the argument that Catholic schools should be funded and others not."

Dalton McGuinty: "I have said in the past that there is a fairness issue here regarding the funding of independent schools, and that is something we recognize."

I understand where the Conservatives are on this. You want public funds for private schools. I'm hard-pressed to figure out where the Liberals are. They seem to be in two positions at the same time.

RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I note that the government has also introduced another rural red tape bill. I just want to remind people across Ontario: remember when the Conservatives cut the Ministry of the Environment? They cut all the water inspectors from the Ministry of the Environment. Go back and check the record. They said that was doing away with red tape. Remember when the Conservatives downloaded responsibility for protecting water systems on to municipalities? They said that was cutting red tape. Remember when the Conservatives basically opened the door to the factory farms, which created such a problem in terms of water quality in rural Ontario? The Conservatives said that was cutting red tape.

I think people better look very carefully when the Conservatives talk about cutting red tape. What we've experienced so far is that that means cutting health protection, it means cutting environmental protection and it means downloading more costs and more responsibilities on to local municipalities.

I think what this bill is really all about is that the Conservatives don't want anyone to notice their record in rural Ontario. They don't want people to notice that more

and more communities in rural Ontario can't get a family doctor and have chronic shortages of nurses. They don't want people to notice that this government has closed school after school after school in rural Ontario. They don't want people to notice that this is a government that closed agricultural office after agricultural office in rural Ontario. They don't want people to notice that land ambulances were downloaded on to rural municipalities that don't have the funding to cover land ambulances, and yet the province says, "You're on your own."

This is about covering up your record, and it won't work.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of the Environment, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I move that notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following changes be made to the ballot list for private members' public business: Mr Cordiano and Mr Bradley exchange places in order of precedence, such that Mr Cordiano assumes ballot item 16 and Mr Bradley moves up and assumes ballot item 13.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

ORAL QUESTIONS

SARS

Ms Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, it has been more than two months since SARS hit Ontario. In that time, it wasn't until hundreds of part-time nurses could not safely report to work because of the outbreak that you finally realized we had a problem with nurses working part-time and not enough nurses working full-time. You said that one of the things we need to do in the "new normal" of health care is to have more full-time nurses. Everyone recalls the statement: "I'm surprised by how many part-time nurses we have."

Minister, can you tell us—this House, the people of Ontario and specifically the nurses—what you have done in this last month to ensure that we have more full time-nurses working in Ontario today?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I hope the honourable member is not suggesting that we have nothing to learn from infection control procedures and the impact of those on the health care system. If the honourable member has all of the answers, perhaps she would like to share some of them with the rest of the House.

In the meantime, we feel that we do have things to learn and we feel that it is important to listen to our excellent nurses in the field, our wonderful physicians, our epidemiologists, our public health officials. We are doing so through the expert panel which was announced, I believe, about 10 days ago, because that will be an important means by which we understand exactly what went right and what can be improved upon as a result of the SARS outbreak.

From my perspective, this is an ongoing process. There are things we can learn and there are things we can do.

Ms Pupatello: What we need is not just talk but action.

What you said after SARS hit Ontario was that you were surprised at how many nurses are working part-time. You said you didn't realize how many were working part-time. What we realize, because of the outbreak and our ability to respond to it, is that we have to have more full-time nurses, which nurses have been telling you for eight years. After eight years of watching \$400 million being spent to fire nurses; watching them travel to the United States to work, especially in border communities; watching nurses work two and three part-time jobs just to make a living, we realize we have a problem.

Our greatest fear today is that we are going to become complacent, that we will just have words and no action. Unfortunately, the new normal is becoming the status quo, so don't suggest today that you are going to wait for some long review before we actually get moving on hiring full-time nurses.

Minister, we need an answer. In this last month, what have you specifically done to make sure we are hiring full-time nurses, not part-time?

Hon Mr Clement: The honourable member might be aware that in the last month we have had a debate about the budget in this Legislature, a budget which continues our previous commitments for new nurses in the province of Ontario. To date, we've invested \$800 million of public money for new nursing positions. We expect to graduate over 8,000 nurses in the province over the next three years. We will create 750 new nurse practitioner positions by 2005, and 117 of those will begin practising this spring. We are the first province to create a chief nursing officer and the nursing secretariat. The honourable member was around when I announced to the RNAO and the RPNAO that we have a new-hire in that position, which was taken very, very positively by the nursing profession. If the honourable member wants action, on this side of House we have excelled in action.

Ms Pupatello: Minister, here is the problem with your words. You've been saying the same thing for eight years, and what we have today, because of all the talk over the last eight years, is too many part-time nurses and not enough full-time nurses. Every time you attend a nurses' function, they tell you the same thing: we have too many part-time and not enough full-time. SARS gave us the reality check. In the new normal that is now, we

understand, becoming the status quo, part-time nurses just can't take care of these issues as well. We need to move them to full-time.

1440

We have a plan to hire 8,000 nurses, and we are telling the people how we are paying for that. You have yet to do it. You have made the same announcements for the last eight years, and today in Ontario we have part-time nursing. Even the nurses told you they needed full-time nurses. After eight years of telling you, you said, "I'm surprised how many part-time nurses we have."

Minister, we don't want talk. We want action. It's going to take a Dalton McGuinty government, an Ontario Liberal government, to bring full-time nurses to Ontario.

Hon Mr Clement: There are so many ways that I could reply to that. It's clear that a Dalton McGuinty government would raise taxes by \$5 billion. It's clear that a Dalton McGuinty government would refuse to allow new public-private partnership hospitals to be built, which would increase accessibility and allow us to hire more nurses in those institutions. It's quite apparent that Dalton McGuinty doesn't want more access to diagnostic services. All of that is clear.

All I can tell the honourable member is that in the last five to seven years we have acted. That is why there are more than 12,000 new nursing positions in the province of Ontario, funded directly by the province to ensure that our nursing profession gets the support it needs from the government. We are proud of that record.

So our talk is more than talk. It's actually action, and it's action we're most proud of.

EDUCATION LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I have a question for the Premier. I want to speak to you about your responsibility as leader of this province toward the children in the Catholic school board in Toronto. Seven days ago you took 69,000 children in that school board hostage to your political agenda. You appeared personally in expensive TV ads promoting your policy on the same day that the board did a phony lockout of those students.

Since that time, Premier, did you pick up the phone and try and solve that strike? No. Instead you brought a bill into this House that you knew would keep this stunt going; a bill that would poison relations in those schools, that would let those kids down.

We have three arbitrators who are agreeable to all sides. We have been working through the weekend to get both sides to talk to each other. We asked your representative, Mr Giorno, whether he would work this weekend or whether anyone from your office would, and nothing happened.

You know your bill will poison the atmosphere for students. How do you explain this to the parents and the people of Toronto, Mr Premier? Why don't you want a peaceful solution?

Hon Ernie Eves (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): We have always said that the best way of resolving these disputes is through negotiations and both parties being at the bargaining table. We have indicated that to both parties. But ultimately, at the end of the day, the responsibility lies with them.

For our part, we are putting students first. There is a piece of legislation before this House that your friends over here are using procedural motions to try and delay and that you have voted against. There is nothing in that legislation that doesn't put students first.

Mr Kennedy: A few years ago, there was an Ernie Eves who took 35 hours to keep the people in his riding talking when there was a dispute, an Ernie Eves [failure of sound system]—you have to have a right to strike. Now we have you making these 69,000 kids hostage to your political agenda.

Why don't you instead admit that your agenda is about turmoil? The Premier has not provided any constructive assistance to end the lockout of the students that's taking place in Toronto. Instead, we have a government prepared to play games with these students' education.

So I'm going to ask you again, Mr Premier: are you prepared to pick up the phone, roll up your sleeves and do something constructive to end this lockout and not make them wait till next week, potentially, to have that happen?

Hon Mr Eves: Mr Speaker, through you to the honourable member: (a) we've already done that; (b) there's nothing in the bill before the House that talks about taking away anything. What we're talking about is putting students first in this province.

The honourable member will know that the bill that's before the House calls for a mediator and an arbitrator to resolve this dispute. It says that the person must have knowledge of educational matters. It says that they must have knowledge of arbitration and mediation proceedings.

Which one of the five things does the honourable member disagree with? Do you not agree that teachers should be fully completing report cards with comments and grades? Do you not believe that teachers should be administering tests? Do you not believe that teachers should be meeting with parents at parent-teacher meetings? Do you not agree with maintaining co-operative education placements as part of a teacher's duties? Do you not agree that teachers should be participating in graduation events? Which one of those do you not agree with?

Mr Kennedy: I guess we don't have the Ernie Eves who worked for 35 hours to try and get his people together. That was a long time ago, apparently. We don't have a Premier prepared to put the 69,000 kids in the Toronto board ahead of his political interests. We have a very simple and easy test for you.

Mr Premier, if you're prepared to do your job on behalf of those 69,000 kids, then agree right now that the three House leaders can meet and hammer out a deal that will protect the interests of both sides and put those

69,000 kids back to school tomorrow. End the lockout. If the Premier doesn't do that, your actions will speak for you.

Hon Mr Eves: The honourable members on that side of the House can solve this problem and put those 69,000 kids first by voting for the bill. We'd be happy to move the bill.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. This morning, people who were trying to find out how serious the latest SARS outbreak is couldn't get answers because the public health units involved didn't have enough people to answer the phones. The reason they don't have enough people to answer the phones is because—here's their dilemma: Do they fight SARS? Do they fight West Nile? Do they look after tuberculosis? Do they do food inspections? That's the situation they're in. In fact, health units are being forced to cannibalize one program today to fight another crisis out there that they weren't ready for. Dr Sheela Basrur has put it this way: "We would try to beg, borrow and steal staff from other health units. It's like ripping the bandage off one wound to stop the bleeding of another."

Premier, is this what you call properly protecting the public health of the citizens of Ontario?

Hon Ernie Eves (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Health will respond very directly to the concern.

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I can certainly assure the honourable member that, as the Premier said over the weekend, we are here as a government to help our public health officials, to help our doctors, nurses and other medical professionals to ensure that we fight the latest flare-up and that we get to a better place as soon as possible.

I can tell the honourable member that it was an Ernie Eves government that announced we were going to have SWAT teams of dedicated public health officials available in any situation where, if there was a surge of phone calls or a surge of investigations that have to take place in a short period of time, they have the necessary resources. This is a commitment that the Ontario government has fulfilled, and we will continue to do so.

Mr Hampton: Oh, please. You make another announcement. The reality is they didn't have enough staff to answer the phones. The reality is that when you talk to public health units out there, they will tell you that you haven't yet covered the money they spent to fight SARS in the initial outbreak. They have no idea if they're going to get it. You made an announcement about West Nile; you tried to pretend that you were going to cover 100% of the costs of fighting West Nile. You read the fine print: yes, you covered the cost of the larvicide, but the municipalities and the health units have to go out there and cover the cost for the staff to apply it. They have to do all the expensive stuff. That's what you're forcing them to do. You're forcing them, day in and day

out, to take staff from SARS to fight West Nile, to take staff from West Nile to fight SARS, to ignore things like food inspection or tuberculosis.

I ask you again, is that your definition of properly protecting the public health of the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr Clement: Mr Speaker, please allow me the opportunity to correct the record on several fronts here. First of all, it's our government that made a comprehensive, unprecedented commitment of \$33 million this year to fight the West Nile virus, 100% of the costs of covering the larviciding. So we are living up to the commitment for the public health of Ontario.

I've been very clear: we have had an unprecedented situation. The Premier has made it crystal clear that our government stands side by side with public health officials, side by side with hospitals and other aspects of the health care system, with our health care workers, to ensure that the resources are there, that our funding is there and, of course, our expertise, as you know we have because we have some of the best experts in the world. That is the commitment of the Premier, that is the commitment of this government and we are following through.

1450

Mr Hampton: Minister, here's the record with respect to SARS: health units out there that have literally stretched themselves to the point of exhaustion still don't know if they're going to get the money from you to cover that incredible expenditure. Here's your record on West Nile: last year, 17 people died and over 1,000 people became very sick. Why? First of all, you cancelled the lab that would have helped to diagnose the problem with West Nile; you laid off the scientists; the labs you had available became backlogged; and then you didn't get the samples to Winnipeg until January, February or March. That is your record. So I ask you again, Minister: when health units are overstretched, when they don't even have enough people to answer the phone, is this your idea of properly protecting the public health of the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr Clement: The commitment of this government has been unprecedented. Last year, we were there in terms of the funding formula for the West Nile virus. This year we've topped it up. We've made an absolute commitment for a made-in-Ontario solution to get the laboratory testing up to our standards so we don't have to rely on Winnipeg when nine other provinces do.

Certainly our commitment is there. If the honourable member would take time to understand the dollars and cents and the commitment we've made historically, the fact is that this has been an unprecedented year, but our support has been unprecedented as well. I don't know how more crystal clear the Premier of Ontario could be but to say we are going to be there. We're going to be there financially, we're going to be there morally, we're going to be there in terms of our resources, we're going to be there in terms of our expertise. We have made that commitment. The Premier has been crystal clear and we are proud of him.

PENSION PLAN

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier again: the minister says you'll be there, and you don't even have enough people to answer the phones.

Last week, I brought to your attention the tragic story of the members of the Participating Co-operatives of Ontario trustee pension plan. Their plan has been fatally damaged by a complete breakdown in the regulation of pensions in this province. Also last week, the federal superintendent of financial institutions stated that 60 of the 370 defined benefit pension plans that Ottawa regulates were on a watch list and were suffering from very serious underfunding problems.

Premier, your government is directly responsible for the regulation of 2,800 defined benefit pension plans and it is common knowledge that those plans are being rocked by a three-year slide in the stock markets and your failure to regulate them properly. How many of the 2,800 defined pension plans that you are responsible for are in trouble, and when are you going to tell the public that they're in trouble?

Hon Ernie Eves (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Finance will be happy to respond.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): The honourable member should be aware that protection of pension plans in this province is regulated and that there are requirements for pension plans to file reports as to their financial status with the regulator. If there are problems, the regulator works with them to solve those problems. Again, there are requirements for how much is required to be put into the fund to make sure it stays a viable financial entity. FSCO is doing its job.

Mr Hampton: It seems we have a Premier who wants to make the announcements but doesn't want to answer the questions.

Pension plans are under siege and you're doing nothing, just as you did nothing with the co-operatives of Ontario pension plan. Last Friday, three leading pension consulting firms came to the very disturbing conclusion that private pension plans face a shortfall of \$225 billion. That's roughly 20% of the national gross domestic product. One of the authors of that report concluded, "Plans will be terminated. That's going to make the press. There's going to be a loss of confidence. Regulators are in a very tough spot."

Premier, people need reassurance that you have learned a lesson from the collapse of the Participating Co-operatives of Ontario trustee pension plan. They need to know that you are taking aggressive action to safeguard their hard-earned retirement savings.

You're responsible for ensuring the health of the vast majority of Ontario's employment pension plans. I ask you again, how many of Ontario's defined benefit pension plans are in trouble because of serious underfunding and your government's failure to regulate them properly?

Hon Mrs Ecker: I don't think that scaremongering here is going to help the situation at all. There are requirements for pension plans to file reports and to file the financial stability and status of that plan. Those are being adhered to. The regulator is working with pension plans. If there need to be adjustments, there are requirements to do that. I think it also underlines the importance for employers and employees, when they are negotiating particular collective agreements, to be sensitive to the ups and downs of pension fund financing.

To be very, very clear, the regulator adheres to the requirements in the legislation, there are reporting requirements, and they are required to top up when that is required. We are watching that situation, monitoring and working with the pension plans to ensure that workers' pensions are protected.

FRAUD INVESTIGATION

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Public Safety and Security. On May 16, the Ontario Provincial Police charged a senior official in your ministry with fraud. The charges were laid after a company that was bidding on a project in your ministry gave that employee a \$110,000 personal mortgage. Neither you nor the OPP have revealed the name of the company involved. What company provided that mortgage, and what project were they bidding on?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Public Safety and Security): As the member opposite knows, there were charges laid and there is an investigation underway. I don't think it would be appropriate to get into the details or the naming of individuals or perhaps even companies, but I will take the question as notice and determine with the officials within the ministry if it is indeed appropriate to release the name of the company involved.

Mr Levac: Minister, the person charged by the OPP is responsible for the adult infrastructure renewal project in your ministry. In that role, he would have overseen the construction and repairs of all of the province's jails and prisons.

I think it is incumbent upon you to release the name of the company that provided that mortgage, because you need to tell us whether or not they have been disqualified from bidding on government work pending this investigation, whether or not they have any other government contracts, and whether or not those contracts themselves are being reviewed. Would you do that for us, Minister?

Hon Mr Runciman: As I hope members would know, I have no reluctance with respect to making available whatever information is appropriate to be made available, not just to this House but to the public at large. Once I have determined, with respect to the advice from the legal branch within the ministry and the Ministry of the Attorney General, what is indeed appropriate in terms of the OPP as well, we will make whatever information is deemed to be appropriate public. There is no question about that.

1500

SARS

Mr R. Gary Stewart (Peterborough): My question is for the Minister of Tourism, the Honourable Brian Coburn, MPP for Ottawa-Orléans. Last week you took part in Molson Canada's \$100,000 Happy Hour, intended to assist hospitality workers who have suffered financial loss as a result of SARS. It was a series of events held in Toronto in an attempt to revitalize the city and get people out in the wake of recent challenges we have all faced. Minister, can you tell me what our government is doing to aid businesses and the people of Toronto post SARS?

Hon Brian Coburn (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): I thank the hard-working member for Peterborough. I had, along with my parliamentary assistant, Wayne Wetzlauffer, who is—

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): He's a good man.

Hon Mr Coburn: Yes, he is a hard-working member as well.

We've been very active on this issue right from the outset. We're meeting with our tourism partners and stakeholders right across the industry and hearing their advice and getting suggestions from them on how to combat this issue from a tourism perspective.

I co-hosted a federal-provincial meeting a little over a week ago here in Toronto where I met with my federal and provincial colleagues to discuss some of the challenges we're facing right across the country as a result of SARS and how we can work together to combat these challenges.

As well, we were happy to see Premier Eves announce the \$128-million aid initiative which passed through this Legislature unanimously a few weeks ago. This package is aimed at rehabilitating Toronto and Ontario and our image in the eyes of the world. Furthermore, Minister Flaherty and I will be going out and meeting some of our counterparts in the nearby states to share the message to come to Toronto, that—

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

Mr Stewart: I'm pleased to hear how quickly our government responded to the needs of the city, as well as the rest of Ontario. I'm very interested, as well, in the rest of Ontario.

It's also great to see how so many people are rallying around Toronto to give a hand and get this great city back on its feet, whether that be the partners at Molson, the Mirvish family or the Blue Jays. I know we can all get through this if we continue to work together.

Minister, can you tell me more specifically how Premier Eves's \$128-million announcement will be spent to assist Ontarians?

Hon Mr Coburn: Again, I thank the member for the question. The \$128-million announcement is part of a two-year recovery plan to rebuild global confidence in Toronto and Ontario as world-class travel destinations.

Some \$66.8 million will be identified and used in a multimedia approach to reassure residents and potential visitors to both Toronto and Ontario that they are safe travel destinations and to convince travellers to come and experience Ontario this summer.

A long-term recovery campaign targeting Ontario residents, US border states and overseas markets will also be undertaken to rebuild Toronto as the primary destination of choice for events, conventions and leisure travel. An intensive public relations campaign, including the mounting of several major events in the greater Toronto area to gain an international profile and special marketing support for events such as the Molson Indy, which we announced this morning, Caribana, the Toronto International Film Festival and events right across the province, will be part of that intensive marketing campaign for the summer season.

PICKERING NUCLEAR
GENERATING STATION

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): My question is to the Minister of Energy. Minister, you and the Premier committed in November of last year to hold an inquiry—"investigation" was the word you used—into the delays at Pickering and you promised you were going to start that within days. That was over half a year ago. It is now clear that the government is not so much dragging its feet on the Pickering investigation but burying its head in the sand, unable to handle the truth as to the government's mismanagement on Pickering. Will the government admit that it has absolutely no intentions of holding this Pickering investigation and that in fact, at least until the next election is called, we are not going to see an investigation of Pickering at all.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): The member opposite attributes words to me that simply aren't the case. At no time have we ever used the word "inquiry," at no time have we ever used the word "investigation." What we have said is that a review is in order and that we'll appoint a review. The answers to his two questions are no and no.

Mr Bryant: I know the government doesn't like to hold to its press releases but in your press release of November 11 it said "investigation."

The point is that we need to get to the bottom of what happened in Pickering and people just don't believe you when you say you can't find somebody to head up the inquiry. Everybody knows that the Provincial Auditor has said that he would do it. He looked into the success story at Bruce. He can surely look into the failure at Pickering. Everybody knows there are people available who could head up this inquiry, investigation, review, whatever you want to call it. It doesn't take a nuclear physicist to look into this. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to ask people why it is that something that was supposed to happen three years and \$2.5 billion ago hasn't happened and continues not to happen to date.

I say it is clear the government decided that it didn't want to answer any more questions about what was going on in Pickering in November and so you set up this charade to shield you from further questions by saying that an investigation-inquiry-review was coming, and you continue to split hairs.

Why will you just not admit that the government never had any intention of holding an investigation-review-inquiry into what happened at Pickering because the government simply does not want to have any bad news about the way it mismanaged the Pickering disaster before or during or after the next election?

Hon Mr Baird: I take exception to the characterization the member opposite has used. There indeed have been some major problems, some major concerns, both with respect to the timeline and with respect to costs at the Pickering nuclear station. We take those issues tremendously seriously and we will be coming forward in short order to announce a review process. We think that's important, not just for the taxpayers, but also for future supply and what we can learn for reactors 1, 2 and 3.

I would take issue with another thing the member opposite said. He said that you don't need a nuclear physicist. I think we do need someone with a capacity to look at nuclear technology and its application at the Pickering station. I think that would be wise and appropriate.

DECRIMINALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): My question is to the Attorney General. Over the past few months, we've heard reports stating that the federal government is set to introduce a bill that would lead to the decriminalization of marijuana. Let's make no mistake: this decision to decriminalize marijuana has far-reaching consequences, and serious discussion must occur between Ottawa and the provinces over this proposed legislation.

In my riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, many of my constituents are very concerned over Ottawa's proposal and have not yet been appeased by the federal government's assurances to keep this dangerous drug out of the hands of children.

Even Anne McLellan, the federal health minister, has stated that marijuana "can lead to addiction, it can lead to all sorts of situations." She even admits that there is a strong possibility that the usage of marijuana will increase if it's decriminalized.

Could you please explain some of the reasons that Ontario has strong hesitations over Ottawa's plan to decriminalize marijuana?

Hon Norman W. Sterling (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs): First of all, I find the federal Liberals' actions surrounding their plans to decriminalize marijuana very disconcerting. While federal Justice Minister Cauchon has briefed US Attorney General John Ashcroft about Ottawa's plans, Ontario has yet to be consulted properly, nor have we received

any kind of indication of what the legislation is going to be about. As over \$1 billion is traded between the US and Canada every day, Ontario has the most to lose if the Americans decide to tighten their border due to their concerns over marijuana being smuggled into their country.

The US ambassador to Canada, Paul Cellucci, and John Walters, the director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, have even stated that tighter border measures could occur. This could lead to a devastating effect on our economy.

I think the federal Liberals should focus on real issues important to Canadians about toughening our criminal laws, like our Youth Criminal Justice Act, and improving our DNA—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The Attorney General's time is up. Supplementary?

Mr Gill: I agree with the Attorney General that the decriminalization of marijuana could lead to tighter border controls. As many of my constituents work at the DaimlerChrysler plant in Bramalea, there's a strong potential for job losses. I know none of the people in this House would wish that to happen. Speaking with my constituents, they are more concerned about keeping our community safe and would prefer to see Ottawa crack down on crime against our children and have the federal Liberals implement a national sex offender registry. Could you please explain the dangers if the federal Liberals decriminalize marijuana?

1510

Hon Mr Sterling: There's a great deal of concern by our American friends with regard to the importing or the smuggling of marijuana across the Canadian border.

People must be aware that today's marijuana, due to the technological advances in growing and cultivating including indoor hydroponics, is much more potent than it was a couple of decades ago. THC, the psychotropic and addictive ingredient that makes the user high, is today 30 times more potent than it was during the 1980s. This can lead to devastating effects, including increased addiction and other damaging health effects. In fact, marijuana is so addictive that the US drug czar John Walters stated on Canada AM on May 16 of this year that teenagers in the United States seeking treatment for marijuana—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Sorry, Attorney General, the time is up.

PICKERING NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): After that, I have to ask another question of the Premier. Last week we learned once again that your government is wrong when you say that the Pickering nuclear station would be producing power by the end of June. I think you knew this all along. That's why you're bringing dirty diesel generators to people's neighbourhoods this spring. But on November 11, you said that you would hold an inquiry to find out why the Pickering nuclear station is

three years late and \$1.6 billion over budget. Erik Peters, the Provincial Auditor—you know him; he did the review of the Bruce nuclear station—says he would relish the chance to lead the investigation. All you have to do, he says, is pick up the phone and ask.

Premier, why haven't you picked up the phone and asked the Provincial Auditor to do the review of Pickering nuclear that you promised on November 11?

Hon Ernie Eves (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Energy has already responded to this question, but perhaps the leader of the third party wasn't paying attention. There will be a review of Pickering. There will be some people on the review who actually have knowledge of nuclear operations and facilities and their workings.

Mr Hampton: Premier, on November 11 you indicated that this was going to be part of the action plan with respect to hydroelectricity. That's over 11 months ago. You're almost starting to sound like the Liberals on this issue.

I note on the Liberal Web site that the Liberals say, "Hydro's nuclear plants' performance and safety records have been dismal." But then the Liberal leader is quoted as saying, after touring the Pickering nuclear station, that the nuclear record in Ontario has been by and large a very successful and solid record. Then he says he won't rule out more expensive nuclear plants.

Premier, having two positions, like the Liberals, isn't going to save you here. Erik Peters's telephone number is 416-327-1325. He is the Provincial Auditor. He already did the review of the Bruce nuclear facility. Why haven't you called him up already and asked him to do the review of the Pickering nuclear facility?

Hon Mr Eves: The leader of the third party seems to have the innate ability to offend almost every member of the House with one comment, except for the eight around him, of course.

Having said that, we are going to have people on this review that have some knowledge of nuclear facilities and how they operate. This is not strictly a bookkeeping or auditing review. It's a review with knowledge of the nuclear industry, and I would happen to agree that we do have, by and large, a great nuclear industry in the province of Ontario, and it does generate a substantial part of hydroelectric power in this province.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): My question is for the Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services. Minister, you know the Child and Family Services Act guarantees certain rights to children in care. A child has the right to be informed of their rights, such as internal complaints procedure, the existence of the child advocate and rules for residential care. I have received two letters, including one from the former child advocate, indicating that your government is not providing this essential rights information to children in care. Tragically, six children

have died in residential care in the past six years, under your watch. Most recently, the inquest into the death of Stephanie Jobin heard Judy Finlay, the current child advocate, testify that she had been unable to provide rights materials for the past three years. She indicated the materials were being withheld and could not explain why. While your government is spending millions of dollars on partisan advertising, can you explain why you are not providing essential rights information—

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

Hon Brenda Elliott (Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services): As you know, our government has taken a number of steps to make sure children who are in a difficult situation receive the care they need, particularly through the children's aid society. We've worked hard to change the legislation so that not only would help be provided for those children in the case of abuse but also in the case of neglect. It certainly would be our intention that every piece of information that appropriately should be provided to the child would be given. If my colleague across the way wishes to speak to me specifically on this, I'd be pleased to do so.

Mrs Dombrowsky: Minister, six children have died and you've done nothing. You have legislated rights and you are ignoring them. You have been informed and you have prevented the child advocate from doing her job.

Children in care need a government to protect them. They are entitled to posters, pamphlets and other printed materials that inform them of their rights, and they're not getting them. I've spoken to the child advocate and she is the one who told me that she has, on three separate occasions, in three annual reports, indicated this fact to you. The office of the children's advocate does not even have a Web site. She's not provided with this essential printed material to pass along to the children.

Minister, you are breaking your own law and children are not getting the rights information they are entitled to. Protect our children. Tell the people of Ontario you will allow the children's advocate to do her job. Stand here today and tell her that she can provide rights information, establish a Web site and publish an annual report, which you've prevented her from doing the last three years.

Hon Mrs Elliott: To my colleague across the way I say that it was our government that in 1999 introduced the fast-tracked information system. This is an information system that allows children's aid societies to work together, to talk to each other about families who may have been involved with a family situation in another part of the province. Over 1,900 new child protection workers have been hired under our government, an 86% increase since 1995. As of December 31, 2002, 7,700 children's aid society staff have been trained under the Ontario child protection training program.

LABOUR RELATIONS

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): My question is for the Minister of Labour. Minister, I've

been reading a lot of media reports lately suggesting that there are a number of teachers' collective bargaining concerns which are leading to a lot of classroom disruptions across Ontario. I'm wondering if you could bring us up to date on this current situation.

Hon Brad Clark (Minister of Labour): There is a lot of erroneous information being circulated around the province. One of my ministry's primary objectives is to promote harmonious labour relations. In 2002, that meant 96% of all labour disputes in Ontario were settled through mutual agreement, settled through collective bargaining, and that's with the expert help of my conciliation mediators. What I can tell you right now is that we've had tremendous success in school boards across the province. Right now, 109 of 124 collective agreements in the education sector are in good standing. We have 15 schools that have yet to reach mutually agreeable settlements and 11 are working to rule. That means 450,000 kids are not receiving the services they deserve, and one has been locked out, with 69,000. We believe it's always best for the two parties to settle their differences amicably at the bargaining table. Bill 28, the bill that we introduced in this House, will actually do that. If the member opposite read the bill he would notice that it will allow them to settle the agreement mutually between themselves. It will stop the lockout and it will prevent work-to-rule campaigns. It puts 69,000 kids first. I ask the opposition to stop stalling this bill and put the kids back in school, where they deserve to be.

1520

Ms Mushinski: Thank you for that response, Minister. I'm sure you're aware that the children of the Toronto Catholic District School Board, including those in my great riding of Scarborough Centre, have been unable to attend school for more than a week now. Can you please tell me what our government has done to get our kids back to school?

Hon Mr Clark: We introduced a bill in the House called the Back to School (Toronto Catholic Elementary) and Education and Provincial Schools Negotiations Amendment Act. The opposition voted against the bill. This bill would put 69,000 students back in school; it would stop the lockout; it would prevent work-to-rule from happening in that school board. It would allow the school board and the union to work together to solve their differences, and it gives them ample opportunity to do that; it does that. A lost day of instruction is a lost opportunity for success. I'm calling on the opposition, specifically the third party, to stop stalling this bill. They should be calling the member for Toronto-Danforth at 416-325-3250. Her fax number is 416-325-3252. Tell them to stop stalling the bill. Let's get the kids back in school now.

LAYOFFS

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. On Friday, 280 workers at the Domtar softwood lumber mill

in White River were told that they would be laid off for a period of at least six months and possibly a year. This is the primary employer in a community of only 1,000 people. They'll be joining approximately 100 workers that were laid off on Thursday by Weyerhaeuser in Chapleau. They will be joining the 150 workers at Dubreuilville who are presently laid off, together with the workers at Tembec operations in Kirkland Lake and Cochrane. We'll have over 500 workers laid off in the constituency. The primary cause of the layoffs are the softening market conditions, the increasing Canadian dollar and the softwood lumber dispute. Minister, we have people at risk and we have communities at risk. What are you doing about it?

Hon Jerry J. Ouellette (Minister of Natural Resources): The softwood lumber issue is a very serious one. I've met with the players, both with the major players you've mentioned but also with a lot of the minor players within the industry. What we're trying to do is—hold fast is what I'm asked to do by all these industries. They want to make sure that the 27% countervailing duties do not continue. One of the difficulties is that other jurisdictions, such as BC, appear to be breaking from that trend. Although the federal government has the lead in negotiations, we are still trying to stand fast in support of all those industries. Those workers in the province of Ontario are very important to us and we want to keep those mills operating. We've been making sure that the wood flows and all the fibre flows through all those mills continue on to keep as many people working as possible.

Mr Brown: Well, that's cold comfort. I understand that the forest industry, Ontario and Canada, are on the same page on this issue. However, the workers in the communities cannot be cannon fodder in this battle over a trade dispute. We have people in communities all across northern Ontario who will be impacted by these specific closures. Whether they be pulp and paper mills or the local grocery store, they are going to feel significant impacts. I ask you on behalf of all the people of northern Ontario to come to the table with your colleague the Minister of Northern Development and Mines to see that significant measures are taken to protect these communities and workers from a dispute that I'm sure will be solved in the long term, but in the short term is causing huge difficulties to my constituents.

Hon Mr Ouellette: I know there is a lot of impact on the other players in the industry as well. For those who don't understand, with a softwood lumber mill, the residual fibre that's remaining will go to a pulp and paper one or to the other companies that produce goods in the fibre industry. What we've been able to do is ensure that those fibre flows to the other mills are continuing on. This is a very serious issue. We have to look at the long term with this. We've been working with the industries and we've been making sure that the other mills, such as the pulp and paper mills, continue to operate to keep those workers working in northern Ontario.

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr AL McDonald (Nipissing): My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, I'd like to talk about Lake Nipissing. Lake Nipissing, as you know, is a billion-dollar asset for the north and is enjoyed by thousands. Five per cent of all fishing in Ontario takes place in Lake Nipissing. That's why proper census information is crucial to assessing the health and management of fish populations in the lake.

I was concerned earlier this month when a request was made by a local group of resource-based stakeholders for \$30,000 to conduct a spring creel survey and the full amount was not initially granted. Your ministry did offer a third of the cost of the project. I asked your ministry to find a solution, and I'm pleased to say today that additional funds have been allocated to the project. Minister, could you reconfirm this to the people of Nipissing and let them know about the future years?

Hon Jerry J. Ouellette (Minister of Natural Resources): I'd like to thank the hard-working member for Nipissing for the question. Lake Nipissing is very important to us. As mentioned, it represents 5% of the recreational fishing industry in the province of Ontario. As well, it provides thousands upon thousands of hours of recreational activity both in boating and of course fishing, as mentioned. This is very important to us. That's why I'm happy to inform the member and the House that the full \$30,000 will go to Lake Nipissing Partners in Conservation for the spring fish survey.

Mr McDonald: The people of Ontario, and especially the north, do realize how great a job the MNR does for our fisheries.

It's my understanding that the funding is one of many that your ministry has provided for Ontario recently. Could you please inform us today what other projects your ministry is involved in to protect and enhance the fisheries in Ontario?

Hon Mr Ouellette: I was very happy to announce last month that the province, through Ontario's Living Legacy program, is spending more than \$1 million for 78 projects to protect and enhance wildlife and fish opportunities across the province, including, of course, Lake Nipissing.

Our goal is to protect and enhance while at the same time improving our recreational opportunities. We want to give everyone the chance to enjoy the great natural resources we have here in Ontario. As a matter of fact, over the past four years, Ontario's Living Legacy has contributed some \$16 million to more than 800 fish and wildlife projects all across the province, for now and future generations to enjoy.

COST OF ELECTRICAL POWER

COÛT DE L'ÉLECTRICITÉ

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Ma question est pour le ministre de l'Énergie. Ministre, on sait que depuis que vous avez ouvert le marché à l'hydro

dans la province de l'Ontario, on a vu les primes de l'électricité monter d'une manière exorbitante. Vous avez essayé de nombreuses fois d'expier le problème, mais il semble que le problème persiste encore.

J'ai M. Joseph Bergeron, une personne âgée qui demeure à Kapuskasing qui, en commun avec beaucoup de monde à travers le nord de l'Ontario, a reçu sa facture de l'électricité cette année. J'ai pris le temps de comparer cette facture avec celle de l'année passée. Pour le mois de janvier l'année passée, ce M. Bergeron et sa femme, qui sont chauffés électriquement, ont payé 552,13 \$ pour l'électricité. Cette année, avec l'augmentation, on est rendu à un total de 968,28 \$. C'est 300 \$ de plus qu'ils ont payé l'année passée. Ce monde-là ne peuvent pas payer leur facture. L'électricité pourrait être fermée. Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire pour expier le problème?

L'hon John R. Baird (ministre de l'Énergie et ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones): On a fait un plan d'action le 11 novembre dernier pour assister les gens avec les taux d'électricité qui sont très hauts. On a retourné les prix de l'électricité à ceux au début de l'ouverture du marché, le 1^{er} mai dans ce cas-là.

Je veux dire aussi que ce janvier était le plus froid janvier dans l'histoire de la province. On a utilisé plus d'énergie dans cette province dans le mois de janvier qu'en aucun mois dans l'histoire de la province, parce qu'il faisait très froid. Il y a eu un grand taux dans le prix du gaz naturel qui a bien sûr affecté aussi les consommateurs dans la province.

1530

Mr Bisson: Back to the minister. It doesn't cut it when you look at the utilization of electricity for consumption. In Mr Bergeron's case, it's virtually the same as it was last year; just a little bit higher, about 10%. It doesn't add up to the over \$300 that he got.

I have another example—I've got a number of these from small businesses across the riding—and this one here is from a small grocery store. In December 2001, they paid \$1,600 for electricity; in January 2002, \$1,677; in February 2002, \$1,500. Hold on to your socks, Minister: in February of this year, \$3,816. They can't afford to keep the doors open at these type of rate increases. This, despite your cap. Clearly, the cap is not working.

Minister, the question is simple: what are you going to do to help seniors and small businesses across this province, which are being whacked by your deregulation?

Hon Mr Baird: We did take some very unprecedented measures to return the price of electricity back to what it was the day before the market opening. I wish the member opposite had had an equal concern with the effect of charges on ratepayers when he was in government, when we saw unprecedented tax increases on small businesses, unprecedented tax increases on seniors. I wish the member opposite had taken just as much interest in the rising costs on small businesses and seniors at that point.

We were pleased to bring forward legislation in Bill 210 to deal with this in a fundamental way. I would

remind the member opposite that he and his party said no. They said no to protecting small business; they said no to protecting seniors, and when we've come forward with a plan to reduce the property taxes of seniors, what did this member say again? No: no tax relief for seniors who worked hard their entire life and contributed enough. He and his party said no to a tax cut for seniors. Maybe he should go back to the drawing board and look again.

PEMBROKE JAIL

Mr Sean G. Conway (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is to the Minister of Public Safety and Security, Mr Runciman. You will know, and do know very well, the concern in the upper Ottawa Valley about the future of the provincial jail at Pembroke, which was announced for closure some years ago. People in my constituency have noted that in recent weeks correctional facilities at Niagara, Brantford, Chatham, Owen Sound and Fort Frances have been given a reprieve for the foreseeable future.

Minister, could you please tell me and, more importantly, the staff, the bar and the people of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke what your plans are for providing a very high level of correctional service to the people of the upper Ottawa Valley, and specifically the immediate and intermediate future plans for the Pembroke Jail?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Public Safety and Security): I appreciate the member's interest in this subject. He and I have spoken to this issue on a number of occasions and I have received delegations from the riding who have a clear interest with respect to retaining a facility within the riding. That's quite understandable. We've worked with the mayor of the municipality, who, I'm assuming, with the staff developed a proposal which was reviewed. The costs at that point with the initial submission indicated that there were no cost savings to be achieved.

At that point I asked people, including the member opposite, to work with the county to see if there was a way of drawing the country into a joint submission including the city and the county that would in some way enable us to see this project go forward.

Mr Conway: Many of those discussions have been ongoing, and you're right to point to them. But since we last chatted, a couple of things have become clear. The reprieve that I mentioned was in fact granted to five other provincial jails slated to close: in Niagara, Brantford, Chatham, Owen Sound and Fort Frances. So the people in Pembroke are saying, "If it's good enough for those five locations, what can we expect?"

Moreover, in recent months it's becoming very clear that there are serious overcrowding issues at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre which was, under the original plan, the primary location for the Renfrew county folks who would require correctional services.

Again, my question is, particularly on behalf of the many men and women who work at the Pembroke Jail, their families, all of the inmates, the municipal leadership

and the business community, all of whom have a vital public and economic interest in this issue, what can you specifically tell those people about your government's plans over the next couple of years for the Pembroke Jail? Will it continue indefinitely into the future until there is an alternate scheme, or are you in fact now going to indicate that the original plan was a bad plan and the people of the upper Ottawa Valley are entitled to provincially owned and operated correctional facilities in Pembroke?

Hon Mr Runciman: I recognize the importance of that facility in the community and the importance to the employees who are currently working there and the economic impact it has on the community as well. I have publicly indicated, and I've indicated to the member opposite on a number of occasions, that if we can do something for the community in order to retain this facility, I want to make it happen. I come from a small community, as does the member opposite, and I know how important this kind of institution can be. I don't want to scoop myself, but there are plans in the works for an announcement which will give, I think, some degree of comfort, and we're hoping to be able to make that announcement within the next week.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wish to advise you of my dissatisfaction with the response I received from the Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services and I would request a late show with that minister.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I would ask the member if she would make sure the table gets advisement of that as well.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas long-term-care facilities in this province are understaffed, underfunded and ignored by the current government;

"Whereas many residents of St Catharines and of other communities in Ontario are unable to find a family doctor as a result of the growing doctor shortage we have experienced during the tenure of the Harris-Eves government;

"Whereas cancer patients in Ontario requiring radiation treatment face unacceptable delays and are often forced to travel to other jurisdictions to receive medical attention;

"Whereas many prescription drugs which would help patients with a variety of medical conditions such as

macular degeneration, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, diabetes and heart failure are inadequately covered by OHIP;

“Whereas long waiting lists for diagnostic tests such as MRIs, CT scans and ultrasounds are jeopardizing the health of many individuals already facing serious illness;

“Whereas the Harris-Eves government has now spent well over \$250 million on blatantly partisan government advertising in the form of glossy brochures and television and radio ads;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the Conservative government of Ernie Eves to immediately end their abuse of public office and terminate any further expenditure on political advertising and to invest this money into health and long-term care in the province.”

I affix my signature. I'm in complete agreement, as I suspect you are.

MEDICAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Joanne Duchesne and Linda Pilkington have provided me with petitions addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the OHIP schedule of benefits is often unclear about its definitions of good medical practice, causing problems for patients and their physicians;

“The medical review committee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons has been aggressively clawing back payments to hard-working, conscientious doctors and thereby exacerbating physician shortages in the province;

“We, the undersigned, request the Minister of Health to suspend further reviews by the medical review committee pending a negotiated agreement of an unambiguous schedule of benefits with representatives of affected practising physicians.”

That's signed by Lorraine Brown of Welland, Phyllis Repar of Fonthill and hundreds, indeed thousands, of others.

HIGHWAY 69

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): After another tragic weekend on Highway 69, I sadly have to read this petition into the record. This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines for the north; and

“Whereas the stretch of Highway 69 from Sudbury south to Parry Sound is a treacherous road with a trail of death and destruction; and

“Whereas the Harris-Eves government has shown gross irresponsibility in not four-laning the stretch of Highway 69 between Sudbury and Parry Sound; and

“Whereas immediate action is needed to prevent more needless loss of life; and

“Whereas it is the responsibility of” any “government to provide safe roads for its citizens, and the Harris-Eves government has failed to do so;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to urge the” Harris-Eves “government to begin construction immediately and four-lane Highway 69 between Sudbury and Parry Sound so that the carnage on Death Road North will cease.”

Of course, I affix my signature to this petition.

1540

ADOPTION DISCLOSURE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This petition has been read many times. I have more signatures.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in Ontario, adopted adults are denied a right available to non-adoptees, that is, the unrestricted right to identifying information concerning their family of origin;

“Whereas Canada has ratified standards of civil and human rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;

“Whereas these rights are denied to persons affected by the secrecy provisions in the adoption sections of the Child and Family Services Act and other acts of the province of Ontario;

“Whereas research in other jurisdictions has demonstrated that disclosure does not cause harm, that access to such information is beneficial to adult adoptees, adoptive parents and birth parents, and that birth parents rarely requested or were promised anonymity;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to enact revision of the Child and Family Services Act and other acts to permit adult adoptees unrestricted access to full personal identifying birth information; permit birth parents, grandparents and siblings access to the adopted person's amended birth certificate when the adopted person reaches age 18; permit adoptive parents unrestricted access to identifying birth information of their minor children; allow adopted persons and birth relatives to file a contact veto restricting contact by the searching party; replace mandatory reunion counselling with optional counselling.”

I affix my signature to this petition because, of course, I fully support it.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has designated certain routes for a proposed mid-peninsula highway, and the major proposed route would cut a swath through the Niagara Escarpment, a UN-designated biosphere reserve;

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

"That the Legislative Assembly shall use its powers to ensure that there are no new cuts through the Niagara Escarpment to create a new highway and that the Niagara Escarpment will be protected, as envisioned in the Niagara Escarpment plan, for both current and future generations."

I have affixed my signature to that.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have here about 1,000 signature collected by a woman in my riding who went door to door to get this particular petition signed. It reads as follows:

"To the Ontario provincial Legislature:

"Because the minimum wage has been frozen at \$6.85 since 1995 despite increases in the cost of living; and

"Because a full-time worker earning the current minimum wage in a large city is \$5,904 below the poverty line, and to reach the poverty line they would need" to have at least an increase of \$10 an hour;

"Because the minimum wage should provide people with an adequate standard of living;

"We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the minimum wage to at least the poverty line...."

I sign the petition, as I'm fully in support of it.

GOLF COURSE ASSESSMENT

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I continue to receive names on petitions entitled "Help Keep Greens Fees at a Reasonable Price." These signatures come from Stark's Golf Course, Woodside Greens, Greens at Renton, Pine Valley, Burford, Norwich, Sundgren, Sandust, Delhi Golf and Country Club, and Lynn Meadows.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, MPAC, has chosen an assessment process for golf courses not relative to the property assessment that increases golf course property taxes unfairly;

"We, the undersigned, request the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to hold assessment values at last year's levels until a fairer method of assessment can be developed and implemented or a reclassification of golf course properties can be made."

I fully support this petition and affix my signature.

HOME CARE

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

"Whereas well-managed and adequately funded home care is a growing need in our community; and

"Whereas the provincial government has frozen community care access centre budgets, which has meant dramatic cuts to service agency funding and services to vulnerable citizens, as well as shortened visits by front-line workers; and

"Whereas these dramatic cuts, combined with the increased complexity of care for those who do qualify for home care, has led to an impossible cost burden to home care agencies; and

"Whereas the wages and benefits received by home care workers employed by home care agencies are well below the wages and benefits of workers doing comparable jobs in institutional settings; and

"Whereas front-line staff are also required to subsidize the home care program in our community by being responsible for paying their own gas and for vehicle maintenance; and

"Whereas other CCACs and CCAC-funded agencies across the province compensate their staff between 29 cents and 42.7 cents per kilometre; and

"Whereas CCAC-funded agency staff in our own community are paid 26 cents a kilometre...;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario ... to act now to increase funding to the CCAC of Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington in order for it to adequately fund service agencies so they can fairly compensate front-line workers."

I am in full agreement and will happily sign my signature to this petition.

GARDE D'ENFANTS

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): J'ai encore une pétition ici qui est soussignée par des citoyens de la ville de Timmins et qui lit comme suit:

« Appuyons des garderies à 10 \$ par jour: pétition à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario:

« Attendu que 70% des femmes de l'Ontario ayant des enfants de moins de 12 ans sont sur le marché du travail;

« Attendu que, elles et leurs familles ont absolument besoin de services de garde de qualité, sûrs et abordables;

« Attendu que l'étude sur la petite enfance réalisée pour le gouvernement conservateur par le D^r Fraser Mustard et l'honorable Margaret McCain a conclu que les services de garde de qualité favorisent un développement harmonieux des enfants; et

« Attendu que le gouvernement a réduit le financement pour les garderies réglementées plutôt que d'appuyer les familles ontariennes en investissant dans l'apprentissage et les soins offerts aux jeunes enfants;

« Pour ces motifs nous, soussignés, demandons que le gouvernement de l'Ontario adopte le plan du NPD pour des espaces de garderie à 10 \$ par jour, et qu'il commence par réduire la totalité des frais de garde pour les enfants de deux ans à cinq ans actuellement inscrits dans des garderies réglementées; que le gouvernement alloue des capitaux permanents pour agrandir les garderies existantes et pour en construire de nouvelles; que le

gouvernement finance l'équité salariale pour le personnel, et qu'il crée de nouveaux espaces de garderies à 10 \$ par jour dans cette province. »

Je soussigne cette pétition.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas some motorists are recklessly endangering the lives of children by not obeying the highway traffic law requiring them to stop for school buses with their warning lights activated;

"Whereas the current law has no teeth to protect the children who ride the school buses of Ontario, and who are at risk and their safety is in jeopardy;

"Whereas the current school bus law is difficult to enforce, since not only is the licence plate number required but positive identification of the driver and vehicle as well, which makes it extremely difficult to obtain a conviction;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the measures contained in private member's Bill 112, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to protect children while on school buses, presented by Pat Hoy, MPP, Chatham-Kent Essex, be immediately enacted..." The bill received unanimous consent of all parties in the past.

"We ask for the support of all members of the Legislature."

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have yet again, in this case, about 3,000 or 4,000 signatures collected by Shirley Crispin of the city of Timmins, who has actually gone door to door to have these petitions signed. My hat is off to her. Democracy in action is always a good thing. It reads as follows:

"To the Ontario provincial Legislature:

"Because the minimum wage has been frozen at \$6.85 since 1995 despite increases in the cost of living; and

"Because a full-time worker earning the current minimum wage in a large city is \$5,904 below the poverty line, and to reach the poverty line they would need an hourly wage of at least \$10;

"Because the minimum wage should provide people with an adequate standard of living;

"We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the minimum wage to at least the poverty line—that means \$10 an hour—and index it to the cost of living."

I sign that petition.

1550

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): We have a major campaign to try to get advance warning lights on the Thunder Bay Expressway.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Thunder Bay Expressway has been the scene of serious accidents in recent years; and

"Whereas as a result of strong lobbying by the community, including the OPP and Thunder Bay city council, a permanent advance warning light has been installed at Balsam Street; and

"Whereas since the installation of this warning light there has been a major improvement to the safety of that intersection; and

"Whereas to further increase safety on the expressway, more warning lights are needed farther down the system; and

"Whereas the chief of the Thunder Bay city police and nine municipalities fully support the extension of advance warning lights across the entire Thunder Bay Expressway system;

"Therefore, we the undersigned, in the interest of driving safety, petition the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Transportation and the government of Ontario to immediately support the installation of a full set of advance warning lights across the entire route of the Thunder Bay Expressway."

I happily sign this. I'm very happy to pass it off to Mario Nucci, our new page from Thunder Bay. He comes from a great family in Thunder Bay. He spoke brilliantly at his grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary. Welcome, Mario. It's good to have you here.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): It's Shirley Crispin day. She was out signing more petitions over the last while, this time I'd say about 3,000 to 4,000 signatures. This is a different petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows.

"Because social assistance rates were slashed at 21.6% in 1995; and with the increases to the cost of living that cut is worth about 34.4% today; and

"Because current social assistance rates do not allow recipients to meet their cost of living; and

"Because the people of Ontario deserve an adequate standard of living and are guaranteed such by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and

"Because the jury at the inquest into the death of Kimberly Rogers recommended that the social assistance rates be reviewed so that they reflect actual costs of living;

"We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the shelter portion of Ontario Works and Ontario disability support program benefits to the aver-

age Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp rent levels and index social assistance to the cost of living.”

I sign that petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2003 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 22, 2003, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to the budget that has finally been tabled, the budget bill. Before I start into the actual budget bill, I want to reiterate one more time that I still find it disheartening to know that the motion that said the budget should be read in the Legislature first was defeated by the Conservative members. I say that because, in my understanding that the people's money and how it is spent is first presented to the representatives of the people, it is still my opinion that it is the foundation for why we are here and the foundation of integrity in public spending. That is the scrutiny this House provides as a way to ensure that those dollars are being allocated as prioritized and in ways that are certainly to benefit the people of Ontario. I suggest that the budget is all about trust. Our budget is probably the most important document that is tabled here in the House because it deals with how the people's money is being spent.

Last year I was going through the budget books, and I noted that the revenue that came in from corporate tax went down significantly from 2000-01 to 2001-02. I asked, “Well, how did it go down from \$9.2 billion to \$6.6 billion?” It was interesting to note that in the Provincial Auditor's report, he stated that there are billions of dollars of uncollected corporate taxes and that they have been written off the books because they weren't collected and no one went after them.

I looked at the other revenues, and the revenues from everything else have actually gone up, except for corporate taxes. Again, that disturbs me, because this is about trust and good management. It isn't just about promises, self-congratulatory advertisement and, if you want, gimmicks like holding the budget speech outside of this House. I believe that maybe sometimes it's an attempt to try to fool the public, and I don't believe this House is a place where that should happen. We should hold this place to a higher standard. Unfortunately, in their intent to portray themselves as good managers, the government will say and do a lot of things that are not facts.

It is that ability to trust—it is about trust. How is it possible to trust a group which has done the unthinkable, to actually move out of a place that's going to provide scrutiny on how they spend the people's money—and what have they done? They take it to a place where they

have invited guests. How do you trust a group which actually acts in that fashion? They can say whatever they want, but they act totally differently.

The day before they presented the budget, they took \$36 billion and spent it with a special warrant or gave themselves the authority to spend it. How does one trust anyone who acts in that fashion and who does those things? I think it's very difficult to trust.

We talk about the budget, and in the budget we note that since 1995, the debt has increased from \$90 billion to \$112 billion. This has increased at a time when we've had unprecedented economic growth. So the question is, how do you trust this kind of fiscal management, when in fact in good times there should be a paying down of the debt? We should be able to meet our obligations instead of eroding our education system. As the Rozanski report said, we've cut \$2 billion out of our education system and yet we've had unprecedented economic growth. It doesn't make sense. I have to say again that it's all about trust.

Create chaos in the schools: you create chaos in the schools by not understanding that the people who deliver education are supposed to be on our side, on the children's side, and they are. You have a government that consistently wants to pick a fight with the educators. They don't deal with the problem. They find an excuse to add something else into solving the problem, just to kind of dig it in. It's unfortunate, because it doesn't do our education system any good. Someone tell me how we are better able to manage the education system by fighting with the teachers. How do we better manage the education system by suggesting that teachers have to be mandated to do extracurricular activities which they themselves are volunteering for? It shows a lack of respect.

When you talk about trust and the budget in the same vein—because to me, it is about trust.

I also have a report from the TD Bank Financial Group, and it talks about how it's really questionable whether or not this budget is actually balanced. I certainly understand why they didn't want to bring this budget to the Legislature because of this. They have to sell \$2 billion worth of assets in order to balance the budget. They will not tell us what they're going to sell.

1600

I'm going to read from the document TD Economics. It was released March 27, as a matter of fact. It talks about how in 2002-03, the federal transfers fill the hole in that budget. You know those federal transfers that they were screaming about needing for health care? Do you know what the document says? Again, these are the top economists from the TD Bank. They say:

“The inclusion of additional substantial revenues from asset sales, or as the government refers to as ‘sales and rentals’ put the government in a quandary last year. In its 2002 budget, the Ontario government had booked \$1.8 billion in net proceeds from the planned commercialization of assets. And, although it was not identified per se, Hydro One, the transmission arm of the province's

utility system, was a likely candidate.... Thus, the government's announcement in January 2003 that it would not go ahead with the planned sale left a sizable hole in the books. Fortunately for the government, however, help came in the way of a significant injection of federal transfers—notably an additional \$1 billion resulting from the February 2003 Accord on Health Renewal and a \$500-million upward revision as a result of an adjustment to a prior year.”

I didn't say this. This comes from TD Bank economists. They are independent. They normally love the whole notion of tax cuts, but they also scrutinize these numbers with a certain degree of objectivity.

They talk here about big revenues to pay for big spending: “In order to finance the 7.1% surge in total spending in fiscal 2003-04—the largest one-year advance in a decade”—could there possibly be an election looming?—“the government is banking on a formidable 7.8% jump in revenues.” I think they're asking for a magic wand.

What I want to state is that this budget is about trust. I, from all the evidence that's before me, do not trust the figures. This budget also had talked about—and we have another bill that's going to be coming up—seniors being rebated on the education portion of their property taxes. When you talk about a society who believes that it's everyone's responsibility to educate the young, what do we have? We have a group of people who are trying to buy votes. That's what this is about. We will have 30-year-olds who will say, “Do you know what? I don't think I should have to pay taxes for hip replacements. I don't have to pay taxes for a service I don't require.” What do we have? We have a government that is trying to use not a policy that's going to make this province better, but a policy that's going to buy votes. That's what I certainly do not trust about how all of this is being projected.

Standard and Poor's, the Dominion Bond Rating Service and the chief economist for TD Bank all say that this budget is not balanced. I certainly do not trust the fact that the numbers don't add up. These are the same people who dropped the revenues from corporation tax from 2000-01 by almost \$2.5 billion, a lot of which is because corporate taxes were not collected.

I want to go on about responsible, trustworthy projections. The Ontario Liberals did something that is unprecedented. We took all of our figures, we took all the specific costing of all of our policies and we handed it independently to three different people—two economists and a forensic auditor—to scrutinize, and they signed off on it. I have to tell you that they took a great deal of time going through this, because we are in an era where fiscal responsibility is important. We have to balance the books—we know that—not create faux budgets and then spend millions of taxpayers' dollars telling the public what a wonderful job you're doing, using their own money to tell them you're doing a great job.

I want to go on about trust and responsible policy-making and not this nonsense of trying to portray some-

thing for something else or to say something and do something differently.

Tim Reid is the former president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and a senior venture capital adviser, and this is what he said: “As president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce I assessed in detail the credibility of nine federal budgets, some Liberal and some PC. In my opinion, Mr McGuinty's fiscal plan is balanced, prudent and responsible. His numbers add up. In fact, I have never seen a detailed fiscal plan so meticulously prepared for a transition to government. The business community can have confidence that Mr McGuinty is well prepared to be Premier.” That is what he has said, and he signed off on it.

Jack Marmer, a forensic accountant, a chartered accountant, a CGA and a CFE, said: “I conducted a detailed, line-by-line review with your staff. To do this I spent about 70 hours. I agree both with their methodology and the costs determined as a result of the application of that methodology ... For fiscal 2006-07, the total incremental cost will be about \$5.9 billion.”

David Hall is with Vista Economics and is the former senior economist for the Bank of Montreal. He said, “... in my professional opinion, your fiscal plan produces at least balanced budgets and a prudent reserve every year.” That's what he says.

Warren Jestin is a senior vice-president and chief economist at Scotiabank. What does he say? He says, “After examining the program details, I believe that it is a workable plan for our province ... your commitment to balancing the budget is both reassuring and an essential ingredient in successful long-term fiscal planning.”

That is about trust. You have independent people evaluate your numbers. You don't know what they're going to come up with because they are not partisan. They are there to do their job as professionals.

Have the Conservatives done this? No. In fact, the independent authorities say that you haven't balanced your books. That's what they say.

We have five—

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Just for clarification, I hear the member opposite speaking about the figures in the plan she's referring to. The plan I've read that was presented didn't have any figures in it. I wonder if she could share those with us—

Ms Di Cocco: That's not a point of order, Speaker.

Hon Mr Hardeman: —so I could follow her conversation more accurately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Prue): The Speaker is aware that is not a point of order. This is a budget debate and there is a very wide latitude, and there has been a very wide latitude throughout this debate. We will continue to hear the member.

1610

Ms Di Cocco: I believe I am speaking about the budget.

What I would like to say about trust is that we have gotten a tremendous amount of support because our fiscal

accounting is about good management. The province has been mismanaged because there is a one-sided approach. The one-sided approach is that we have not invested appropriately in our health care. We don't have enough full-time nurses, for instance. So how does that help our system? It doesn't, because in the end we don't have the capacity to deal with emergencies, not to the extent that we would have had with a good base. I know what the nurses on the front lines are saying, and I don't think we can reiterate it in this House.

It's very important that the government understands it has a responsibility to be accurate, a responsibility to not say one thing and do another. That has been consistent with this government: they do not manage the affairs of this province prudently. We saw how they managed the whole notion of our environment, and Walkerton was a result. They fired five scientists in this province in 2001, one of whom was working on the test for West Nile virus. They fired him. Why? Because they said, "We don't want to spend money on someone standing around waiting for bugs to show up." It's a nearsighted approach to governing.

I believe the budget the Conservatives have brought forward—their phony, made-in-a-car-part-plant budget—is running a deficit. We're spending \$5 million a day in this province on extra interest on the debt that this government has put on the shoulders of our future generations.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments. The Chair recognizes the member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. My congratulations on the promotion you got this afternoon.

It's rather unfortunate that I find in this particular debate that the members on the opposite side—in other words, on the government benches—weren't really paying attention to what the member from the Liberal caucus was saying. I think it's rather unfortunate, because one of the most fundamental things that we do in this Legislature, as far as our responsibilities as members, is how we collect and spend money from the taxpayers of the province of Ontario. That is the essence of how everything else works within this Parliament. If we're going to spend money on health care, education, roads or whatever it might be, we have to demonstrate in the end that we have money coming in, how we are going to account for it and how it's being expended on the way out.

As I was listening to the debate, some of the suggestions she was making I can agree with, some of them I can't, but I thought it was an interesting proposal that she put forward nonetheless. What we have in this place more and more is a sense from the government benches that they find comments made by members of the opposition, and some of their own backbenchers, irrelevant. I think that's rather unfortunate. It demonstrates the degree to which we need to change the way this Parliament operates. We really need to sit back after the next election—I'm hoping it will be a minority Parliament. I think that's probably the only time we're really going to be

able to change the rules in this House, so that members on all sides of the House have a more important role to play when it comes to government policy. I think government backbenchers—and everybody here in the House today on the government side, except for one, is a backbencher—basically have very little to say about how the government spends its money.

I can't believe for a second that all the Conservative members thought going to Magna International with the budget was a good thing. Nonetheless, what you've got is a government that seems to sit back and not take this kind of debate seriously. I think that's rather unfortunate, and I look forward to the day we have an election, we turf these guys out and we change the rules.

Hon Mr Hardeman: I want to say a few words. Not to disturb the gathering or the debate here this afternoon, I was really somewhat at a loss when I heard the member opposite speaking about the budget. I realize the rules of the House say that a budget debate can be far-reaching and cover a lot of areas, but I didn't realize that it meant you could spend the whole time talking about a hypothetical platform that one would like to take to the people at some point in our future, as opposed to talking about that which is happening here in the Legislature today. I was kind of hoping that we would hear her discussion. As the member opposite in his two-minute comment mentioned, we could take from that some advice and some assistance in what was right and what was wrong about the process, because I do think it takes away from the purpose of being here if we do not talk about and discuss the issues at hand.

In fairness, I did stand up to ask the question because I heard the member opposite continually talking about how they had taken their plan and sent it to auditors and to economists and that everyone they paid gave glowing reports on the quality of the figures. But the report I saw didn't have any figures in it, so I wondered what was being audited that got such a glowing report. I suppose if you don't have figures in it, it's not very difficult to get people to say, "If you just tell me what you want in the end, then I will agree that how you're proposing to get there will get you there." I really do question the authenticity of saying that we have three auditors willing to say it is a quality report when there are no figures in it to address those very numbers.

Mr Rick Bartolucci (Sudbury): I rise to commend the member from Sarnia for her very good presentation on the budget. The member for Sarnia, since she was elected in 1999, has been the advocate for public accountability. I want to thank her, because I think she's made a difference on both sides of the House with regard to this. Today was a perfect example. She talked about the importance of being accountable to the people who elect you, she talked about the importance of openness, and she talked about the importance of being credible in your approach to democracy. In all of those she challenged this government with regard to their last budget as making a mistake. I think there's a consensus across the province now that the Harris-Eves Tories were wrong in

the way they presented the budget. I know they'd like to apologize to the people of Ontario for doing that, and we the people of Ontario would like them to be accountable to that. I think that's what she said.

She also outlined that these guys aren't the fiscal managers that they would like the people of Ontario to believe. Listen, they were very, very critical of the 1990-95 NDP, who added billions to our provincial debt. But these guys on the other side of the House, the Harris-Eves Tories, these fiscal managers, have added \$21 billion of debt to our provincial debt. I don't think sound fiscal managers do that.

I thank the member for Sarnia for being so honest in her presentation.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my pleasure to respond to the member for Sarnia-Lambton and respectfully acknowledge that it's important to listen to the full debate. This is about, as you know, the budget. I'm proud to be a member of the Eves government where Janet Ecker, the Minister of Finance, has presented a balanced budget. There will be those that disagree, as they did with every single tax policy and tax measure we've had; they voted against every single one of them. They really, in fact, voted against the over one million new jobs. So there isn't much confidence. I caution the people of Ontario to always keep in mind that the Liberal record, over many, many years, has consistently been one of taxing and spending. I do have a lot of confidence in Howard Hampton that at least we know where he's coming from.

In this budget debate, yes, they can cry and whine with respect to, where is that \$2 billion? That's the number. They have to remember that there is a billion-dollar emergency fund that the government has never used in its four or five years. Each year at the end of the fiscal year, they rolled that into an unprecedented \$5 billion paid off against the accumulated debt.

1620

With all due respect, we can't afford the Liberals. Probably one of the best articles, just flipping through—there's a good article from the Toronto Star. It says, "Promises May Haunt Liberals." They go on to say that some of their ideas might just backfire. In fact, it reminds me of the days when Chrétien and Sheila Copps said to me that they were going to cancel the GST and they're going to cancel the airport deal.

I think they'll live to regret—one policy area specifically in their platform is the 407 announcement, that they're going to freeze or roll back the tolls. I completely construed that as that I think they're going to find another legal battle, just like the one where they had to pay off the helicopter contract in Ottawa.

So stick with the tried and true. We've balanced the budget five consecutive times. There's more to be done, and we're the government, under Ernie Eves, to do that.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Sarnia-Lambton now has two minutes to sum up.

Ms Di Cocco: It's unfortunate that here we have people who say their books are balanced, but they're not

balanced. This is not a balanced budget. That's according to Standard and Poor's, the Dominion Bond Rating Service and the chief economist from TD Bank. They all say this budget is not balanced. That's a fact.

We would love to give tax cuts. I would love to be able to give tax cuts. But you know what you have to do in government? Not bribe the voters. You have to be responsible. This is what's important: to be responsible with the dollars that people have entrusted to the government. This is a government that took \$36 billion, and a couple of people in cabinet went and signed off on \$36 billion even before coming into the Legislature. They did this, and do you know what Premier Eves says? "We didn't want to do this. Somebody made us do it."

Then they took the budget speech outside of the House. The people's money was being spent and promoted to 300 people who were invited guests. The people's representatives were rendered irrelevant in this House.

I would suggest that the actions show the budget cannot be trusted. In my opinion, it is about fooling the public and buying votes. It's certainly not about accountability and it's certainly not about transparency, because this government does not understand how to act in that fashion.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Bisson: I rise today, happy to finally be able to debate the budget in this Legislature. Can you imagine? Earlier this spring the government decided—I would have never believed it in my wildest dreams—that they weren't going to do a budget in the House but were going to take the budget and do it at Magna International and were going to trot out their so-called budget as a public relations exercise. I don't need to remind you, Speaker—we've had an ensuing debate in this House for two weeks—about why the government was in contempt to do so. Here we find ourselves, at this late hour of the spring session, finally starting to debate the budget.

I'm going to repeat what I said at the very beginning. One of the most fundamental things we do in this place is to decide program expenditure and taxation. That's the most basic thing we do. Without taxation there are no schools, no health care system, no roads, no basic programs that people rely on every day. How we organize those programs, quite frankly, as the member pointed out earlier, is one of the basic things we do here. To decide how we're going to spend the taxpayers' dollars and how we're going to organize those services, to make decisions about what it is we want to do as public programs and then move to how we're going to do that is the basic thing.

It's unfortunate that the government doesn't utilize their responsibility more wisely when it comes to how they use this House and our committee process. This government is an ideological government. They're ideologues. Yes, we're all guilty to an extent—New Democrats and Conservatives—of being married to ideology, but where I have problems with this government is that they take it to an extreme. They seem to think there is

only one way and that's their way, and no matter what anybody says, how they say it or how much sense it makes, they're not going to listen.

When they moved to deregulate and open the Ontario hydro market last year, they said, "Rates are going to go down and everything's going to be ginger-peachy, just you wait. The private sector does it best." The New Democratic caucus and our leader, Howard Hampton, said, "Just you wait. You open the market, you do what they've done in California, Alberta and other jurisdictions, and you'll see rates go through the roof." And that's exactly what happened.

The government was not prepared to listen to the wisdom of this assembly, was not prepared to take into context the comments that are made in this place and how our committees operate in order to make a better decision. Instead the government has spent the last year trying to put the genie back into the bottle when it comes to hydro.

I raised this afternoon, in question period, but two of some hundred letters and hydro bills I got from across my riding. The government says, "Oh, well, we messed it up when we opened the market. Sorry, so sad. We'll try to fix it. We're going to put a rate cap in place." So on the one hand they say they're going to fix it by putting in place a rate cap but what they don't say is that we're all having to pay extra things like the cost of delivery of electricity, debt retirement charges and everything else so that your hydro rates are through the roof.

I raised the case of Mr Joe Bergeron, comparing his hydro bill this year to what it was last year. Mind you, Mr Bergeron's house in Kapuskasing is electrically heated. Last January, he paid \$552 for both his heat and hydro, because he is electrically heated in the town of Kapuskasing, from Northern Ontario Wires. This year, when he got his bill in January, his energy costs were virtually the same, but when you add up all the other little service charges—and I've got to read some of these: electricity charges; standard supply service tax; distribution per kilowatt hour charge, residential; debt retirement charge; transmission network services; transmission connection services; service rental charge—he went from \$552 last year to 968 bucks.

You've tried to put the genie back in the bottle but it hasn't worked. Why don't you guys just get it? Every now and then you've got to listen to people who may know something about what it is you're trying to do.

I just want to raise the other example. This one will knock your socks off. I've got a small business in my riding—actually quite a large business. He owns a small grocery store in the city of Timmins. He comes to see me and he says, "Gilles, I'm having one heck of a problem. December last year"—in other words, December before the market opened—"I paid \$1,600 for electricity for my store: for my coolers and the lights etc. In January 2002, I paid \$1,677, and in February 2002, \$1,500." Then what ends up happening is that the government messes up the market opening and we end up having to put in place a cap. You would think at least his hydro bill would be

equal to what it was last year. Well, 1,500 bucks last year for the same period; \$3,816 this year.

Don't you guys get it? You messed up, because you wouldn't listen. People stood in this assembly, as they did in committee, as they did across this province, and said, "Ernie Eves, don't open the market. It's not going to work. It hasn't worked anywhere else; why should it work here?" But, no, this government doesn't want to listen.

It's a running theme we see with this government that quite frankly I think scares a lot of us in Ontario. I think by and large it's true that Ontarians tend to be a little bit small-c conservative by nature and they want to know that their government institutions are working for them. They want to know that the government has, yes, some ideological beliefs that things should be done in a certain way, but at the end of the day they take into account what's been told and they try to rule in a way that is fair for the people the government affects. Well, clearly in the case of hydro, it hasn't been fair.

I note in the gallery—on another issue—we have some of the teachers from the English Catholic board of Toronto here. We see the same pattern in what the government is trying to do with teachers in the province as they did with hydro.

Let's take a look at what they've done in education. In 1995 they appointed John Snobelen as Minister of Education. The guy goes out to a meeting of bureaucrats and says, "I will create a crisis in education as the backdrop to make the changes we want to make in the education system." He should have been fired out of cabinet, because that was a government plan. The last time I checked, under the convention of cabinet, if you leak cabinet solidarity you get fired. And this guy said it on videotape.

1630

Every fight since 1995 has not been to better a system of education, it's been about fighting teachers. Why? Because it's good politics for the Tories. I think Ontarians are getting sick and tired. You turn around and make the type of changes that you did in education by vilifying teachers—the one that really took the cake for me was the recertification of teachers. Look at Hansard. As a New Democrat I said that if you want to come into this House and talk about recertifying electricians, doctors, teachers, professions and trades, let's get into that debate. Maybe there's a logical reason we have to do it. Maybe I missed something that you're trying to say but I'm at least prepared to listen. But when you come into this House and you say to me, "We the Conservative government want to recertify teachers and no one else," I say to myself, "What's that all about?" It's politics, pure and simple. The government wants to vilify the teachers on the backs of our kids and use it as an issue to be able to bump themselves up in the polls. The government goes on. They got lucky and they came back for a second mandate.

Now they find themselves in sort of the twilight hours of their reign, and let's hope twilight becomes darkness

very soon and they're gone. But now they say to themselves, "We're 28% in the polls. What are we going to do?" The whiz kids in the back office with Ernie Eves say, "We've got it. Let's fight teachers again. It's a wonderful thing. Every time we fight teachers we supposedly go up in the polls." I remind you, it was about two years ago when all the teachers were on a work-to-rule campaign and the government at that time took the position that if they fought the teachers, the public would galvanize on the side of the government against the teachers and it would be a good thing politically. Instead, people by the hundreds went to the picket lines to support the teachers. They said, "We don't understand the details of what's going on, but all we know is that you're picking on them. Stop it." So the government was made to back down and we ended up settling that issue a couple of years ago.

That's much the same thing as we see here in Toronto. The government turns around and says, "We've got a solution. Let's see if we understand this: the school board and the Catholic teachers are in negotiations." That shouldn't be a foreign concept. The last time I checked, the most basic thing we do in a democracy is negotiate by way of a collective agreement. Pretty simple. If we value democracy, we should allow that process to happen. The employer says, for whatever reason, "I think they're wrong." The teachers said, "No, we're not prepared to meet your demands." The teachers have a position, the employer has another position and it becomes a bit of a deadlock. The response by the employer is, "We'll lock them out because we know our friend Ernie Eves is going to order them back. Why should we negotiate?" Why would I negotiate if I were a board member? If I sat on the board and I knew that my employees, being teachers and others, could be ordered back to work, I wouldn't go to the table to negotiate anything. I'd know that the government's going to do it for me. They're going to legislate them back and I can do what I want.

So this government says, "We've got a solution." They're going to fix the city of Toronto issue with Catholic teachers by banning all teachers across the province of Ontario from the right to what we call in French "une grève du zèle." In English we call it a work-to-rule campaign. "And we're going to make mandatory those activities that teachers already do on a voluntary basis." What's this all about? Why? What's the point? Don't you get it? All you're doing is coming in and yet again trying to kick teachers between the eyes. It isn't going to work. If you think this is a great big election ploy, at the end of the day—and I don't care what the short poll numbers told you that you saw in the National Post the other day when 500 of your friends were called—the reality is, most people understand that what you're doing—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Yes. Thank you for listening, much appreciated. Any time you want to tune back in, Marilyn, it would be a wonderful thing. I love it when you pay attention. This is good. Maybe we'll finally get through

to some of you that all you're doing is playing politics with kids.

What's really reprehensible in my view is when the government House leader, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Labour and the Premier come in here and try to blame the opposition for the problem. My God, what's the matter with you? The first step to fixing a problem is admitting that you might have one. That's the most basic thing. But you guys won't even admit that you've created this problem. So we, through our caucus, through Peter Kormos and Rosario Marchese, have put forward a proposal in regard to being able to refer the matter off to binding arbitration. The government says, "No, we don't want to send it off to binding arbitration," as we have with all other issues.

I remember the TTC strike. I remember the city of Toronto last year, when the public works people were on strike. I remember various strikes across the province where that has had to be done because we were at a point of being in jeopardy. When it comes to losing the school year, we refer the matter off to binding arbitration. We pick from both sides those that you're able to live with as arbitrators, and you refer the matter off. That way the employees and the employer may not be totally satisfied, but at least they feel they got a fair hearing. This government's response is, "No, we're not going to do that. We're going to introduce legislation, not to deal with the Catholic teachers in Ontario. We're going to deal with all of them." Oh, my God. What's the matter with you guys? Don't you get it? You're doing nothing more than picking on people.

I come back to my first point; that is, you guys just don't listen. I think, at the end of the day, that arrogance—what I believe is arrogance at this point—is going to be your downfall.

As I travelled across my riding, and as I travelled across other parts of the province—I was in Mr Gilchrist's riding about two weeks ago—I was astounded. I was surprised. I figured Mr Gilchrist, being one of the more outspoken members of the government from the backbench, would be in fairly good shape. It was hatred. I couldn't believe it. I went out there to do a little bit of door-knocking with one of our candidates. At almost every door I went to, what people were mad at was the arrogance, the arrogance of this government vis-a-vis how they deal with these issues.

People don't understand the details of what market opening means with hydro, and what deregulation means. All they know is that their hydro bill went up. At the end of the day, when the government was asked to fix it, they dithered, they did nothing. When they said they fixed it, they really didn't.

They don't understand the complexities of what happens at the bargaining table at the Catholic school board here in Toronto. I would argue that some teachers may not even understand. I just say that in fun, because I've been on both sides of that bargaining table. I understand well. Sometimes management doesn't understand.

But all the people know from a gut perspective, from a gut feeling, that what the government is doing is playing politics. All I'm saying to you, by way of this debate, is that we should spend more time trying to listen to each other in this House and in committee so that we're able to do what we're charged to do by our electors, which is to come here and represent the people of our riding, and in general the people of Ontario, in as fair a way as possible. If you can learn anything at all from members of the opposition, it's to at least have a little bit of humility in saying, "Well, maybe they've got an idea over there."

I've been on a committee just recently where Mr Gill brought a bill in. Originally, I think he thought I was being partisan when I was trying to point out that they were gutting his bill. You have to understand that some of us have been around here for a while and have a sense of what goes on, or that some new members who come in here may have expertise in a particular area. It seems to me that if I'm dealing with issues of pensions, I may want to talk to a man like Mr Robert Sampson, who's a Conservative, and who has dealt with that matter for a number of years. He may know more about it than I do, and I'm a member of the opposition. We all bring some kinds of skills into this House so that we can all build on what it is that we do best.

I say that there are a couple of things that have to happen. At the very, very least, I am praying that there's a minority Parliament. I don't want my party to get a majority. I don't want the Liberals to get a majority. I don't want you guys to get a majority. We need a minority Parliament in this place really bad.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Why? Mr Gill, you just don't get it. Let me say this slowly: the reason you need a minority government is so that people like you on the backbench can actually have some say. At the end of the day, what we do know is that the rules in this House have gone really badly. The government can now decide to bring a bill into the House on Monday, and by Thursday it can be passed. We've had examples of flawed legislation coming into this House and having to be brought back sometime later to be fixed—being flawed, having to bring it back again because the government just didn't take the time to do it right in the first place. That's the least.

The second thing that I think we need to do, and it's something we have on our platform, is to change the way we elect people. We need to change the way this House operates. We've got to do what they do in Australia, New Zealand and pretty well all other parliamentary democracies—except for Great Britain, India and Canada—and that is move to a system of proportional representation, so that, at the very least, when a government gets elected, if it doesn't have 50% of the vote, it doesn't have 50% of the members. Imagine what would have happened in 1995 if Mike Harris had won the government with 44%. He never would have had a majority. He would not have been able to build a super-mega-city of Toronto. He

couldn't have picked on teachers as he has for the last eight years unless somebody in the opposition sided with him. I can't speak for other members, but I know where I would have been on those issues.

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Is that a bad thing? Let me put this to the test. If 103 members who are duly elected by the people of their ridings don't feel, as a majority, 50%, that there needs to be something happening in this Legislature one way or another, why should we? If it doesn't pass the test here, it's certainly not going to pass the test out there.

Our problem is that in our current system, members could be elected to the Legislature with as little as 32% of the vote if they are in one of those types of ridings. There are very few of us who get elected at over 50%. I've been quite fortunate; I've had two elections where I've been elected at over 50%, but that's not the norm. Most people in this place are elected at below 50%.

So I propose, as a New Democrat, a very simple concept: let's look at what they do elsewhere. Let's look at what they do in New Zealand, where you have a party election just as you have right now. At the end of the day, you say everybody is elected first-past-the-post. When the election is over, we say, quite simply, "The Conservatives got 44% of the vote; their number of elected members equals 44% of the seats, and the rest of us are adjusted accordingly so that they don't have a majority." If they get 52% of the vote, well, by God, they deserve the majority that they got, but it would be the very odd time that it happens. I don't believe that, under our current system of government, democracy is served well.

I just want to close, in the last two minutes I have, on another issue that I think the government needs to listen to, and that's the issue of pensions. My leader, Howard Hampton, has brought into the House, as I have, a number of examples where people who have worked hard all their lives are seeing their pensions eroded because of bad investment policies on the part of the pension boards. We're talking about defined pension plans; we're talking about pensions like you have. The government doesn't recognize that it has a role and a responsibility as the regulator of pensions in Ontario. I have a case in my riding where the people at Royal Oak had their pensions after retirement devalued by 25%. What do you do when you're a senior and you rely on that money to be able to make ends meet and your pension is devalued by 25%?

What about the examples of the people we brought in here who lost 50%, the workers in the food industry around the Chatham area, where they have lost 50% of their pensions because of bad investment practices? You know what? Believe this: there are no rules to stop this. Guess what the pension administrator or the pension investment person invested in? Derivatives. I wouldn't touch derivatives with a 10-foot pole and I don't know a heck of a lot about investment. I just know derivatives are bad. Most people can't figure out how to play those things. This guy, who manages the pension plan for the Teamsters and for the Associated Employers in the food

industry, invested in derivatives and lost over 50% of the value of the pension fund. As a result, these people's pension plan is defunct and they're going to have to wind it down and cash them out.

If you could do but one thing, I ask you, please try to listen. As my friend Peter Kormos says, "Écoutez." That's French for "listen," if you didn't catch it in the other language. You need to listen not only to people in this Legislature but to people in this province about how to run good government. My prediction at this point is, if you're down 28% in the polls, there's a reason for it, and that is that people are getting pretty tired of the arrogance of this government not wanting to listen to people when they bring forward good suggestions.

I say again, you have an opportunity to do the right thing. Back off on the teachers' thing. I think that's really dumb. Try to fix the pension issue for the seniors who are finding their pensions being devalued, and a host of other issues that you can really turn your attention to, working in cooperation with all the members of the House to make Ontario the truly great province it should be.

The Acting Speaker: Before I call for questions and comments, I wondered if the members opposite—it was a long speech but I think I heard you almost as often as I heard him. He did not seem to be bothered, but maybe a little more decorum.

Hon Tina R. Molinari (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): It's a pleasure to stand up and make a few comments based on some of what I've heard in the debate. I have to mention the importance of having students in school and having them learn and be educated by their teachers, and the teachers doing the full responsibilities that they need to do.

The bill that's being presented on this issue has to do with things that are essential for teachers to perform their duties, and that is to fulfill their obligation and their commitment to do report cards, to meet with parents—things that are a necessity for the education of the students.

I was fortunate enough to be a trustee with the York Catholic school board and a chair of that board for a number of years, and I saw what happened in the school system when the teachers are on work-to-rule. We believe in the integrity of the profession, we believe in the integrity of what goes on in the classroom, and it's essential and important that all of those duties take place within the school setting.

I also want to comment on a few things with respect to seniors. The member opposite talked about help for seniors. This government has done more than any other government to help seniors. As a matter of fact, the education tax credit seniors will be getting is also something we feel very proud of and very strongly about. I encourage the members opposite to also support this initiative, because it does help seniors when they're on a fixed income. These are individuals who have contributed greatly to the province of Ontario and contributed greatly in their taxation. This is just one way of recognizing the fact that they've made all of these contri-

butions and now it's time for us to recognize that they've been paying education taxes and they need to have a break in this area.

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I want to commend the member from Timmins-James Bay on his presentation today. I think what he tried to point out in his presentation is this misconception the public has that, as my colleague Gerry Phillips has said, this government is a so-called good fiscal manager. How can somebody who claims to be responsible deal in the way they have with the finances of this province? The public needs to realize that the debt has increased substantially since this government has taken office. Since this government took office in 1995, the debt has gone from \$90 billion to over \$110 billion, a \$21-billion debt increase.

They have yet to answer the question, with this so-called auto parts plant budget that's been presented, about the \$2-billion hole in this budget, a hole they say they're going to fill by asset sales.

Interjection: A doughnut budget.

Mr Peters: It is a doughnut budget.

When will the government come clean to the citizens of Ontario and clearly state where this \$2-billion hole is going to come from? What assets are you going to put on the table to balance your budget? I think it's very irresponsible. I heard the member speak earlier about five balanced budgets in a row, but it's irresponsible for an elected government to be using asset sales to balance a budget. If you're going to do something that is prudent financially, if you are selling assets in this province, those assets should be put into reserve funds. We saw it in 1999. You sold Highway 407 to balance the budget. We've seen POSO, the Province of Ontario Savings Office, sold. You can't continue to sell assets. This is a government that is mortgaging the future with a \$21-billion debt increase.

Mr Bartolucci: I don't always agree with the member from Timmins-James Bay but we do respect each other. I respect his passion, there's absolutely no question. But he was absolutely right today when he talked about the government's failure toward the teaching profession and the harm this government has done to children because it has demeaned teachers. They've demeaned school boards. They've demeaned the educational process.

The partners of education are very important. Each has a specific but very important role to play, whether it be the school board trustees, the students, the parents or the teachers. Each is responsible, in a way, to forge the positive environment which will maximize education for the child.

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Government has a very important role to play as well. They are the ones who are supposed to encourage, mentor and provide the opportunity for each partner in education to manifest its part fully. This government has robbed that process since 1995. You have done harm to education that will only come to real fruition in the years to come. You will be out of power. Someone else will be

in power. We will be trying to fix the problems that you created because of the ideology you started in 1995.

It's not something to be proud of. It's not something that you will want as a testament to your government. I say that you have an opportunity now by calling an election and righting the problems.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I would like to remind the members of the House, especially those on the government side, of the main reason why we are in this particular place. If it's not us who speak on behalf of the people who have sent every member of this House here, including the Premier, then who is it? We have a government that since 1995—we've been repeating this, day in and day out, in this House—has been after the weakest people in our community: the young and the seniors. Why? Because this was the way they wanted to do it. That was their mentality. Education has been decimated. Health care has been decimated. That is why we are here.

Yesterday I had a chance to do some pre-election canvassing, and there was one core of people after another saying, "Why are you doing this?" I said, "Look, it's not us, it's the government." "Why don't they call an election?" I said, "Yes, an election is going to be coming." They said, "Well, good, because this time will be our time to tell the government where we stand on those issues that they have dealt with since 1995. We're not better off today than in 1990 or 1995, and it's because of this particular government."

It's a shame, because we have gone through some of the best economic years in our province, and on top of that, we have seen the harshest and deepest cuts to our most important institutions. I think it's time this government face the people and answer for the actions of the past eight years.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Timmins-James Bay now has two minutes to respond.

Mr Bisson: First of all, I want to thank all the members for their comments in regard to my presentation here today.

I just want to come back to the point again, because I think it needs to be repeated, and that is that we could best serve Ontarians, in my view, if members in this assembly were better able to work together. I don't pretend for one second that one political party or another has all of the answers. I think it's a combination of ideas put forward by one side of the House or the other in the best interests of the people of Ontario, and then we work out how to make it happen.

There have been examples of where we've done that. There have been a couple of examples where we've gone on committee, done some good work and brought forward some good recommendations. And it is partisan. Let's not kid ourselves, politics are partisan. I have my point of view, the Liberals have their point of view and the Tories have their point of view, but at the end, in a couple of examples in this Parliament, we managed to bring forward what I think were good, solid recom-

mendations about how to draft legislation. Who was the better for that? I think it was the people of Ontario.

What I really find discouraging for the people of Ontario in this House is the arrogance that the government brings to these debates. It's not an exercise of just sitting here and doing your House duty because the whip tells you to do so. As a matter of fact, I am the whip, and where are my people? But that's another story. I just say it's the fact of coming into this place and, together, listening to each other and what we have to say so we can then go back and make better policy decisions on how to best serve Ontarians.

I don't think we're serving anybody well by doing what we're doing with the Catholic teachers in Toronto. I think that's seen by most people in this province as being a highly partisan position for the government to take, for political gain, supposedly. At the end of the day, what are we doing? We're not serving the kids; we're serving a government's political agenda. I'd say we'd be better off working together, so that at the end of the day we do what we're meant to in this place, and that is to serve all Ontarians in a fair manner.

Hon Jerry J. Ouellette (Minister of Natural Resources): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd just like to take a moment to introduce three very special guests from the riding of Oshawa. We have Anne Wright, the chair of the board of directors for the Lakeridge Health Corp, and president Chuck Powers and Don Blight from the Oshawa General Hospital Foundation. We welcome you to Queen's Park.

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): This afternoon it's a pleasure for me to address the House to talk about how our government is continuing to fulfill its commitment to all Ontarians, including seniors.

This bill acknowledges the contributions seniors have made in the past and for what they continue to give their families and communities today. Ontario's success and prosperity is due in part to the contributions of the 1.5 million seniors who live in this great province of ours, and we intend to recognize all their contributions and hard work. Seniors have helped create an Ontario that's prosperous and proud. Our government recognizes and celebrates their achievements and the important role they play, and continue to play, in their communities to help build the great quality of life we enjoy in Ontario. Our programs and services for seniors reflect our respect for them and include a broad range of initiatives from health care to safety and security, and property tax cuts.

We are proud of our commitment to seniors and of setting our goals to the highest standard for assisting seniors and their families. I'm proud to say that my own parents, who live in Malton, fall into that category. They are quite pleased with the latest budget as well as the election document we just released the other day. I know you were quite impressed with it too, after you saw the substantial nature of the election document, *The Road Ahead*, 61 pages of it.

Interjections.

Mr Gill: I must have touched something there. They're quite upset about something. I welcome those remarks, by the way.

We want to ensure that our seniors have the support they need to live safely and independently with dignity. How do we achieve this? I must point out to the people at home that we do this by investing in the areas that would protect the health and well-being of seniors.

The 2003 Ontario budget—the budget speech, by the way, was held in my riding, the great riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, and there was great input from citizens, which has never happened before. They were able to ask questions. The media, including the ethnic media, were able to directly ask questions of the Premier as well as the Minister of Finance. I was quite pleased that this was an open process. In the 2003 Ontario budget, we introduced new initiatives that would help seniors to remain in their own homes and assist them with rising costs. Our 2003 budget proposes to provide new property tax relief for seniors through the Ontario home property tax relief for seniors program. If approved—and we're discussing it and hoping to approve it soon—this bill would have the residential education property tax on seniors' principal residences refunded through this new program. I was quite pleased to join the Premier at the announcement of the seniors property tax refund, with Olive Russell. I'm sure many people at home saw that. That was again in my great riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale. So we've had quite a number of interactions and input from the people in my riding, as well as from across Ontario.

Going back to the budget document, as well as the platform, *The Road Ahead*, considerable consultations have been done with the people through direct contact, e-mail and all kinds of technical utilization of tools where people had great input. It started out in 2001 with STO, *Seizing Tomorrow's Opportunities*, the largest consultation we've had with Ontarians in terms of how they would like to see this province being run in the next five, 10, 15 years. It's because of their input that we have been able to substantially bring in a great election document which everybody's so excited about.

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If approved, education property tax relief would be available to both senior homeowners and senior tenants and would be implemented in two stages. In 2003, seniors who own or rent their homes would be eligible for a credit that would reimburse the portion of the residential education property tax they will pay on the principal residence for the period after July 1, 2003. That, on average, amounts to about \$450, I believe. I know seniors are quite excited to get money back. In fact, Olive Russell, when she was asked by one of the reporters if she feels she should be spending more money on education, said that in her 50 years she has paid enough in education and it's her time to get a tax break.

Starting in 2004, the relief would be based on the full year's residential education property tax paid. This new tax relief for seniors program would provide \$450 mil-

lion in net benefits for seniors. That's a substantial number. People thought it wasn't enough and perhaps more needs to be done. We'll continue to look at more tax cuts and more refunds of their own money.

A lot of times governments feel—and I know the NDP government, when they were in power between 1990 and 1995, especially felt it was their money and they kept spending and spending. In fact, they were producing at that time \$11.5 billion of deficit; if I can spell it out, \$1 billion is a thousand million. There was \$11.5 billion, which meant they were spending \$1 million per hour more than they were taking in.

Since we took office in 1995, it has taken us some time to turn the ship around, if you want to call it that—and this is an argument that the Liberals keep putting forward. I know they keep saying it and they intend to keep saying it in the next election as well. They're going to say, "Guess what? The PCs have increased the debt." They're going to keep saying it. They said that last time. The fact of the matter is, we have balanced the last five budgets. It has not been done since 1908. Yes, there is more debt than when we took office—

Mr Peters: Tell us where the \$2 billion is coming from.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Gill: The reason for that extra debt is, when we took office and there was an \$11.5-billion deficit every year, you can't just come in the first year and say, "OK, I'm going to wipe that." There's no magic. It took us a while to turn the ship around. Perhaps the first deficit might have been \$8 billion, then \$6 billion and whatever. In the meantime some of the debt went up, but it is in the last five years that we have balanced the budget. It's not been done since 1908. I'm quite happy that we are going to continue to do that. That's a promise to Ontario taxpayers. Not only did we balance the books, but we've also reduced the debt by \$5 billion. We did that ahead of time. We had said it was going to take us four years to pay back \$5 billion. We were able to do that in three years.

Again in *The Road Ahead* document, we have a promise to reduce another \$5 billion of the debt, which I think is very important to continue, first of all, balancing budgets as well as paying down the debt.

On an individual basis, the seniors property tax credit would mean an average annual net savings of \$475 for each of about 945,000 senior households. This new tax relief for seniors is an enhancement to Ontario's personal income tax system, which already provides a variety of tax credits that recognize—

Hon Chris Stockwell (Minister of the Environment, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Could you get Conway to stop bothering the Hansard reporter, please?

The Acting Speaker: I don't think he is bothering her. At least I trust he is not. Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr Gill: This is so good that I better repeat what I had just finished saying, because people at home might have missed part of that. I'm sure that a lot of seniors are quite

interested. This new tax relief for seniors is an enhancement to Ontario's personal income tax system, which already provides a variety of tax credits that recognize that senior citizens have lower average incomes than the population as a whole. These include Ontario's age credit and the Ontario property and sales tax credit, which provide support to seniors and their families. Seniors have also benefited from Ontario's broad-based tax cuts to date.

The budget also announced new benefits that would help seniors and their family caregivers. We are proposing to enhance Ontario's current tax support for caregivers with improvements to the non-refundable credits supporting individuals with disabilities and family caregivers effective January 1, 2003. These enhancements would provide annual benefits of \$50 million to about 165,000 family caregivers and people with disabilities. This would mean an average saving of about \$300 each.

It is vital for seniors that the members of this Legislature pass this bill. I would certainly strongly recommend that everybody exercise their vote and pass this as quickly as we can. Its passage would demonstrate to them that all parties agree that their past contributions deserve recognition. It would also demonstrate that the members of the Legislature support seniors' rights to a safe and secure lifestyle.

The Ontario government believes strongly in making sure seniors have the best possible quality of life in safe and healthy communities. Our commitment to supporting seniors involves many ministries throughout the government. Through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, our government has increased health care spending from \$17.6 billion in 1995 to invest \$27.6 billion this year.

I must point out that one of the largest hospitals in Canada, which is the largest community-based hospital, is going to be built in my great riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale. It is going to be 608 beds with all the specialities in that hospital. After 30 years in the making, we're looking forward to having a new hospital, and I know the sod-turning is going to be done fairly soon.

This is an increase of \$10 billion in the health care system itself since we came to office. In 1998, our government committed to increasing its annual spending on long-term care by \$1.2 billion from 1998-99 to 2005-06. This investment plan includes approximately \$700 million to fund the construction and operating costs of 20,000 new long-term-care beds, the first new beds in over a decade.

The other day I was in committee, as I am several times, and I did not think I would hear what I heard from the third party, the NDP. They said we have too many long-term-care beds now. That's amazing. We had a great shortage; now they're saying too many. I don't think we can tune it to the finite numbers, saying, well, now we're matching the long-term care to the long-term needs, but I can assure you that great progress is being made. I was quite amazed and quite happy to hear the NDP say that we have too many long-term-care beds.

It also includes a \$55-million increase in annual spending on vital long-term-care community services such as visiting nurses and homemakers, Meals on Wheels and transportation services. Funding new long-term-care beds is only part of our plan to provide residents in all long-term-care facilities with additional nursing and personal care.

Again I'm quite pleased to say that in my great riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale we have two long-term-care facilities being built, one in Malton and the other one in Bramalea right next to the hospital, right next to the wellness centre. I am quite pleased to be going to the opening of it fairly soon.

The Minister of Finance announced in the 2003 budget that our government will provide an additional \$100 million annually specifically for nursing and personal care. This is in addition to the \$100-million increase for nursing and personal care that the Honourable Dan Newman announced last August.

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Some examples of our recent investment in long-term-care facilities include the creation of 186 new and 184 redeveloped long-term-care beds at the F.J. Davey facility in Sault Ste Marie—I'm sure the member for Sault Ste Marie will be quite pleased and happy to hear that—160 new long-term-care beds in the town of Kingsville and 200 new long-term-care beds at the Yee Hong Centre in Markham.

By the way, this Friday I'm going to be hosting a golf tournament in aid of Yee Hong long-term care. It's a charity golf tournament and I would welcome anybody who would want to come and pay some money for the good cause that this is. I'm also quite pleased that our government is helping the Yee Hong Centre in terms of 200 new long-term-care beds at their facility in Markham. I know they are building another facility in Mississauga as well—great work being done by the volunteers of the Yee Hong committee.

Our 20,000 new long-term-care beds will be on stream by 2004, plus an additional 16,000 existing outdated beds are being renovated to bring them up to standard.

We have also made other improvements that would benefit many seniors. We have increased the number of MRIs in Ontario from 12 in 1995-96 to 42 today, and have approved another 10. We have established 16 regional and district stroke centres since 2000. We have reduced the waiting time for cardiac surgery by 50% since 1996.

We are undertaking more initiatives to prepare for our rapidly aging society, to protect the health and well-being of seniors. Seniors are the most vulnerable to many illnesses. As the population ages, eye disease, osteoporosis and dementia are common illnesses afflicting them. Our government has addressed and provided increased support to assist seniors who are affected by these diseases.

To reflect the higher cost of using our drug program, we announced that we would provide almost \$200 million more in 2003-04 to cover these increases. Our

government spent approximately \$2.1 billion for drug programs in 2002-03, an increase of about 112%. That's a substantial increase: 112% since 1994-95. More needs to be done; I know that. I know my esteemed colleagues will agree with that. In the 2003 budget we announced that spending on the Ontario drug benefit program would increase to \$2.3 billion—again, a substantial increase of 132% since 1994-95. Also, since 1994-95 more than 1,300 products have been added to the formulary, bringing the total number of products to more than 3,200 prescription drugs available today. Ontario's drug benefit program is the most comprehensive of its kind in the whole of Canada.

The Ministry of Citizenship and the Ministry of the Attorney General, in partnership with seniors' groups and other stakeholders, are implementing Canada's first provincial strategy to combat elder abuse. The Attorney General has committed more than \$4 million over five years from our victims' justice fund, starting in 2002-03. for our elder abuse strategy, to ensure that seniors can live with dignity, are treated with respect and are protected from harm or abuse. The strategy focuses on three priorities: coordination of local services, training of front-line staff from various professions and public education to raise awareness of elder abuse.

To help seniors live independently, my colleague the Minister of Citizenship and minister responsible for seniors, the hard-working Honourable Carl DeFaria, also launched a guide to provincial, federal, municipal and community programs and services for seniors on February 7, 2003. This guide to programs and services in Ontario lists provincial, federal, municipal and community services for seniors. It gives Ontario seniors the information they need to help them lead independent, fulfilling lives.

To assist seniors to live safely and securely in their own homes, the Ontario seniors' secretariat also provides educational seminars on subjects such as avoiding investment fraud, safe driving, safe use of medications and advanced care planning. To assist seniors living in retirement homes, the province provided \$1.1 million to the Ontario Residential Care Association.

I'm pleased to be supporting the budget. There's much more that needs to be done. Let me assure the people at home that we, the government, will continue making these reforms.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I'd very much like to react to the comments by the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale. If we were federal, you'd have to say it in English and French and it would take half your speech.

The first thing I must say is that I know the member and I believe he is sincere in his beliefs about things. But I must tell him that the seniors that I meet certainly don't see that they have been favoured heretofore by this government.

It's quite revealing—as a matter of fact it's indicative and telling that this budget begins to address and target

seniors in a variety of fashions, because they know that many seniors are dissatisfied with this government. They know they're dissatisfied with long-term care. As a matter of fact, there was a report, yesterday or this morning, that mentioned that 88 long-term-care facilities—homes for the aged—were deemed to be substandard in this province because of the poor funding that was available to them.

Rather than offering \$450 million to help shore up long-term care and home care—one of the biggest complaints I get in my riding, and I suspect you get in yours, is that home care has been cut or, if it's available to you, you now have to pay for it. So for the measly little amount of money that someone is going to get back, a hundred bucks, ask them to add up what they've lost over the period. That's exactly why you're targeting them: because you know they're very dissatisfied and displeased. I don't think you're going to be able to buy off votes in this election at this particular time. I don't think seniors are that stupid and I don't think the attempt to buy their votes will win the day. Shore up their programs instead.

Mr Bisson: The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale made a comment that I thought I had to ask a question about. He says his government was putting in place, by way of the policies in the election document, measures to help seniors stay in their homes, and he points to the tax credit. I guess there are a couple of things that I have to ask him.

First of all, if you think cuts to the education portion of property tax on houses for seniors are an issue, how do you allow people who are renters to benefit by way of that policy? It seems to me that if your stated goal is to assist seniors living independently at home, wherever that home may be, you would have some sort of a universal policy that would assist all seniors, no matter where they live. But what we seem to have is a policy that just speaks to people who actually own homes. So is it that you only care about seniors who own their own homes and you don't care about seniors who rent? I think it's a fair question and I'd like to have an answer to that.

The other one is, if you're really saying that your government put in place a whole bunch of measures in order to help seniors, why is it that your government basically made the humungous changes that they did to the CCACs? Budgets have been flatlined, with the result that many CCACs across the province are having to reduce the amount of hours available for seniors who stay in their homes independently. In fact, we all have examples across the province, in our ridings, of seniors who have had to be institutionalized because the service that they used to get from their CCAC has been reduced to the point that they can't live independently in their homes.

So it seems to me your government should have taken a more universal approach and said, "Let's put back some of the money that we need to re-invest in CCACs to allow people to live independently in their homes." And

why is it that his government only cares about people who own houses and not people who live in apartments?

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Mr AL McDonald (Nipissing): It's my pleasure to stand in my place and join the debate on the budget. I just have to look at my riding and what this government has done. There's a new hospital in North Bay. There's a new hospital in Mattawa. There's a children's treatment centre. They're four-laning Highway 11 north. They've included tax incentive zones throughout the north, which is going to help all of us.

But what I don't understand is why the opposition is against tax relief for seniors. When I talk to a lot of senior citizens, they hear about this tax relief—and it's upwards of \$500. I heard the member opposite say “a measly 500 bucks.” Well, I don't know what kind of income level he's at, or what his residents are at, but I can tell you that in my riding of Nipissing those senior citizens welcome that tax relief so that they may be able to stay in their homes.

As taxes go up municipally, and just all the different things that go up, they are very fearful that they are going to have to leave their homes. I can tell you that they like this relief. It's a good thing. I don't understand why the opposition doesn't stand up and say, “You know what? We're wrong. We'll support this.” At this point, they're sticking to their guns. They're not voting for this. As a matter of fact, they're voting against this. I guess the question really is, what do they have against senior citizens?

The other one that I find very interesting is young couples trying to buy a house. They might have a child or two, and they're scraping their money together. Now we can have this deductibility on their taxes so that they would be able to buy a house and move into it. Let's face it: young couples want to move into their own house. It's a sense of pride for them.

I must say that I'm very disappointed with what I'm hearing from the opposite side—that, really, they're not trying to help our seniors or our young couples.

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments about the Conservative budget of late, the one that was delivered outside of the House and not in the Legislature where many of us, and many of the public, believe it should have taken place, with the members of Parliament.

There was nothing in the budget about rural schools. I was very disappointed with that. You might remember that, under the flawed formula that is in place for our schools, the first school in Ontario that was closed with this fatally flawed formula was Romney Central in my riding. It was a wonderful school in a rural setting. The school did not qualify for a rural grant. It did not qualify for a remote grant. But it was out in a most rural setting, where even deer ran through the backyard. There couldn't have been a school that was more rural than that one, I say to members. But their formula has allowed schools to close and just rip the heart out of communities in rural Ontario, and in small urban Ontario as well.

There was nothing in the budget about monies for a made-in-Ontario farm safety net. Farmers in Ontario have been waiting for the government to come forward and say what part, what role and how many dollars they are going to supply for our farm safety nets.

There was nothing in the budget to help farmers comply with the new nutrient management rules. There was no mention of monies for them in that regard.

There was nothing in this budget about helping municipalities with roads, bridges and infrastructure. Funding for OSTAR—the Ontario small town and rural development initiative—is repeated for the fourth time. Since his \$600-million program was announced three years ago, less than 25% of the money has actually been spent in those rural communities that desperately need the help.

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): I'm particularly pleased to be able to join in this two-minute debate in response to the great speech that was made by my esteemed colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, who, I should add, is an extremely hard-working member of the Legislature and clearly understands the great contribution that the Ernie Eves government has made to prosperity in his riding, of course, as well as my great riding of Scarborough Centre.

It really doesn't surprise me that the rebuttals we have heard from both the Liberal and NDP benches didn't speak to the really good things in this budget. My colleague discussed the seniors. As my colleague from Nipissing so astutely explained, I think it's a huge insult to all of the seniors in this great province of ours when the member for Ottawa Centre would suggest that the education tax credit is a measly amount. I can tell you that the seniors I've been hearing from in my riding are very pleased with this initiative and others that are contained within the budget document. I think the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale is to be congratulated for informing us of what a great budget it is.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale now has two minutes to respond.

Mr Gill: I congratulate the member for Scarborough Centre, who so nicely had the two-minute debate and summed up a lot of issues that were brought up.

I want to address a specific issue, which I think the member for Timmins-James Bay didn't quite listen to when I was bringing it forward. I will go back and reiterate: in 2003, seniors who own or rent their homes would be eligible for a credit that would reimburse their portion of the residential property tax. They will pay on the principal residence for the period after July 1, 2003, and in 2004, the relief would be based on the full year's residential education property tax paid. I know that was a specific question that the member for Timmins-James Bay had brought forward. I also want to thank the member for Ottawa Centre—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. The bantering back forth—your own colleague and the member for Timmins-James Bay are hogging. Please continue.

Mr Gill: Thank you, Speaker. You're doing a wonderful job in refereeing the two sides at this point. I want to thank the members for Ottawa Centre, my great, esteemed colleague AL McDonald from Nipissing, Chatham-Kent-Essex and Scarborough Centre.

I also want to touch on what somebody said was a measly amount, \$500. To me, \$500 dollars is not a measly amount, or any amount that the taxpayers have worked so hard for and paid into the treasury. It is money that belongs to them. If we have any tax cuts or if we take in extra revenues, I think it's fair that we give that money back to the rightful owners. It is the consumers who know very much how to spend the money; it's not the government that is the best to spend the money.

Mr Joseph Cordiano (York South-Weston): I'm pleased to join in this debate, but I can't help thinking that it sure would be nice to have these debates on the election campaign trail. It would be most appropriate. The time has come for the people of this province to decide whether in fact this is a budget worthy of support.

I can't help but think also that the people of this province would say that this is truly a cynical budget. It was born and conceived in a cynical way at the auto parts plant in Brampton. We certainly debated the matter before this House for a considerable amount of time, and justifiably so. This was a budget that was, for the very first time in the history of this province, intentionally read outside of the Legislative Assembly. Therefore, I say it is a cynical budget. It's a budget that this government has introduced in many respects to curry favour with the voters, but in the most cynical kind of way because it doesn't all add up. It is a very dangerous budget in the long run, as have been many previous budgets that this government has introduced.

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We are experiencing a great economic boom. We continue to experience that in Ontario. Before too long—and I hope not—we may see that turn around and we may see more difficult times ahead. In fact, this budget estimates forecasts of 3% GDP growth, which is quite rosy. Many banks have said in fact that this is a rosy outlook, that it cannot be sustained and that the government should curtail some of those projections back down to 2.5% growth. But the government continues to say that good times will be ahead and in fact plans for that GDP growth as an integral part of this budget. So the revenue projections that have been made by the budget are too positive and overshoot what will be the reality, and as a result, this government may find itself in a deficit position, just from that overshooting of the estimates.

I think Ontarians have to be very cynical about this budget. I want to talk about some of the essential features of this budget and as well about what the government has proposed in its platform as we approach an election campaign. But before I do that, I want to just quote

various groups, economists and editorial pages and what they had to say.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce: This budget gives "optimistic revenue projections" which "may hamper the government's ability to keep its commitment in key areas such as health care, education and transportation." Very interesting, from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The Canadian Urban Transit Association says, "[We] are disappointed that [our] recommendation to dedicate three cents a litre of current gas taxes toward public transit funding was missing from today's Ontario budget," unlike what we are proposing to do. Liberals propose to dedicate two cents a litre toward the funding of public transit.

Various economists have commented. Don Drummond, TD economist, says, "In essence, they are presenting a \$2-billion deficit in 2003." Of course he's referring to the \$2-billion hole that exists in this budget, a \$2-billion hole that the government proposes to fill by having a fire sale of assets. They've done that previously, or have at least proposed it previously. Some \$2.2 billion in assets has to be sold to actually balance the budget in the coming year.

I want to quote Paul Pagnuelo from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation: "They get an Oscar for the best fiction movie of the year, the Fudge It Budget." That's what he called it: the Fudge It Budget.

Then there are the editorials from the various Toronto dailies. The Toronto Sun, no less a supporter of the Conservative government of Mr Eves, and Mr Harris before him, and I quote: "Yesterday, under Premier Ernie Eves, Ontario Finance Minister Janet Ecker delivered a budget in which image was everything and substance was, if not nothing, then almost nothing."

The National Post, an ardent supporter of this Conservative government, says, "Overall, what is missing from this budget, much as it has been from most of Mr Eves's decisions, is a clear sense of purpose."

So there you have it, from a wide range of people, editorialists, economists and various groups, most of whom have supported this government. They're all saying the same thing. This government has brought forward a very cynical budget, designed, I believe, to try and shore up support for the Conservative government. Its electoral prospects do not look good going into this election campaign. This is a very cynical budget.

Those of us who sit on this side of the House can't help but repeat that. Inasmuch as we are partisan and that is what we do in this House—we are different parties; we are members of the official opposition, charged with the responsibility to hold the government to account—we couldn't do that when the budget was read away from this assembly. When the budget was read outside of this place, the members of this assembly could not hold this government to account. In fact, we are still debating the budget long after the budget was introduced, almost two months ago. This is why we can't help but be cynical about it.

As well, let's look at some of the major planks, major proposals, by this government. This is in their election platform but it is backed up by the budget: going forward, they will have to fund this.

Let's talk about the idea the government has with respect to a tax credit for mortgage interest, a mortgage break for citizens who have bought a house and have a mortgage. The government often cites, "They do it in the States. We should do it here. It's a good idea; it gives people a tax break." Let's look at it.

For all intents and purposes, the way this government has operated on tax breaks in general, they have repeatedly allowed people at the top end of the income scale to receive the highest percentage gain from whatever tax break has been instituted by this government. The same will be said for this mortgage break, although they capped the amount, but of course the more of a mortgage you have, probably the more you're going to qualify for. We don't have the details, but let me just say this. The reason this mortgage break is not an effective way to go about cutting taxes or providing some assistance is because it doesn't target the group that needs the most help. It doesn't target people with low incomes and it doesn't target first-time homebuyers. It's an across-the-board break.

The other reason this is a flawed idea is because the mortgage relief that is being provided is done in Canada. In fact, what we have here is no capital gains on your principal residence. In the US, if we compare the two countries, they do have a capital gains on a principal residence once it's sold. If you're going to provide mortgage interest rate relief on top of a capital gains, it certainly increases the amount of money that's going toward this. But when you compare it to the US, there's no reason to provide mortgage interest rate relief when you do already have a capital gains relief at the end. Once someone does sell their principal residence, they're not taxed on it. That's the greatest benefit there is in terms of a tax break. So I would say that this is a flawed idea from that perspective as well, and we could hardly afford it.

The other thing this will do is increase the price of houses right across the board. It will create additional demand, which is probably not a bad thing, but it will also drive prices upwards. This has been the experience south of the border. That is another specific reason for this flawed plan not to be a good idea at this time.

The other interesting plank that has been brought forward is the break for seniors on the education portion of their property tax. I might even consider supporting something like this if it were targeted to seniors who are living on fixed incomes alone. It is not. It will in fact benefit seniors who are at the highest end of the income scale—seniors, for example, like Frank Stronach, chairman of Magna Corp. He will receive a huge benefit as a result of this break, as will many other people who are in high income tax brackets. They hardly need a break. I think those revenues ought to be dedicated toward

seniors who genuinely need the help, and then I would say to the government it would be a good idea.

1740

In fact, we used to have a break for seniors. I recall that in the 1980s we used to have a property tax grant which was given to seniors. That was probably not a bad idea then and it wouldn't be a bad idea now. But to give a tax break right across the board which disproportionately benefits the very wealthiest in our society is the wrong thing to do, particularly now when there are so many other pressing needs.

Those two ideas are very flawed, and I say to the government that they are the most cynical kinds of electioneering I have seen. They're designed to gain votes on the part of the government, to get the maximum benefit at election time. I would say to seniors, think about this in that context. It benefits the wealthiest among us, the people who least need that kind of tax relief, and those people who need more tax relief will not get it. It is a very cynical ploy on the part of the government.

When we look at this budget in its entirety, where's the real benefit to people in the province? Where's the real benefit in terms of health care? This is a government that is using health money that comes from Ottawa to balance last year's budget to the tune of \$967 million. It's going to count on \$771 million next year from the federal government as well. Again, that's based on a very rosy outlook in terms of the economy performing, probably a flawed strategy. I hope the economy keeps chugging along, but frankly it may not. Nonetheless, this government will bank on that money before it even has it.

There are gaping problems in our health care system, and we see it. In my riding alone, the matter with regard to renovations and updating the local hospital, Humber River Regional Hospital, still hasn't been resolved. I say to the government, you closed one of the acute care facilities, Northwestern General Hospital, and that is still a problem in my riding. We experienced the greatest number of ambulatory redirects and critical care bypasses, more than any other hospital in the GTA. That's just an unacceptable situation. It is incumbent upon the government to recognize when there are real needs, pressing needs, acute care facilities that are left dangling in a community that is left without the very services it needs to depend on.

It is incumbent upon this government to explain in education, for example, why it's only funding 57% of the promises it made when Dr Rozanski brought his report forward last December. They made a commitment to fund \$610 million in pledges, and they've only increased funding to education by \$349 million, 57% of the way.

I say, in light of what's happening with the Toronto Catholic District School Board lockout, that blame can rest squarely on the shoulders of this government for what has happened there and the kind of situation we have presently with the kids being out of school, the teachers locked out of the school, and the strife that exists currently between the board and the teachers. The

government has caused this. If you look at the funding formula, the Toronto board has fallen behind in its ability to fund necessary programs. We know that Toronto school boards have special needs above and beyond some of the other school boards across this province: English as a second language, just to name one, and special education programs. These were all programs that took increasing amounts of revenues to sustain. What's happened in Toronto, with the Toronto Catholic District School Board in particular, is that they fell behind in terms of paying their teachers at the same level as other GTA boards, because of these additional requirements in previous years. What has resulted is an institutionalization of inequity in terms of salary structure for the teachers.

Do not be deceived, I say to the people of this province. This government would like to blame teachers for the problems that we face. The fact is, there is an inequity in terms of the salary structure as a result of the lack of funding in previous years, as a result of the funding formula that was in place. It's institutionalized. They're not going to be able to catch up unless you give them additional funding. You still haven't funded the Rozanski report 100%.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board has fallen behind and they chose to lock people out. Now they're saying, "Let's have back-to-work legislation," falling right into your hands.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: The minister is cat-calling and he isn't even in his seat.

Hon Mr Stockwell: For that?

The Acting Speaker: I would suggest that if you want to heckle, you should at least be in your seat and keep it quiet. Please continue.

Mr Cordiano: The government wants the public to believe that it's somebody else's fault. Well, when it comes to this lockout, it is entirely on the shoulders of this provincial government. Their lack of funding in the past, the inequities that existed, the funding formula and the way it's structured, have caused institutionalized inequities. The board had no choice but to fund special education programs, to fund English-as-a-second-language programs, in Toronto, with high needs and high demands for those kinds of special programs. They fell behind and as a result the teachers were not being paid at the same level as other boards. So they have a point.

The board, in order to resolve this lockout situation, should look no further than this provincial government and say, "Why haven't you come to our aid? Why haven't you recognized the inequities that exist?"

They would have us believe that it's all the teachers' fault, that the teachers are to blame in this lockout situation. Nothing could be further from the truth. They are asking to be at the same level of salary structure as other GTA boards, and I think that's appropriate. They're not asking for anything more; they're asking to be at the same salary levels. The government could resolve this

matter very quickly if it wanted to. It lies at your doorstep.

There are a number of other things that are wrong with this budget. I have run out of time, but let me just conclude by saying that this is a very cynical budget that was introduced by this government in a cynical fashion—it's never been done in the history of this province—and, for that reason, no one should be fooled by this government's budget.

Mr Bisson: First of all, I wouldn't call this a budget. The exercise that the government engaged in was a media stunt. It was nothing near to a budget. Now we're into a budget debate. That's a different thing.

I have just three things. One is with regard to a comment made earlier by the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, who says that they're doing great things to help seniors live independently at home by way of giving them relief on property tax credits on their homes. I posed the question to him and said, "It seems to me if you wanted to have an approach of allowing people to live independently in their homes, you should have a universal approach that treats everybody the same, because that particular policy would not be applicable to renters." I couldn't believe my ears: the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale got up and said, "It's going to apply to renters." I just heard policy being changed. I want to know how the heck that's going to work. All I know is that if the landlord gets a rebate on his taxes for a senior living in his building, there's no mechanism in what they've announced that would allow that saving to go directly on to the renter. I think either the member doesn't know what he talks about or he's divulging further spin that's going to come out of the Conservative campaign document.

1750

The other comment I want to make is to the member for York South-Weston in regard to the whole thing around the teachers. I think he's right: this is nothing more than a government that's trying to play a hot-button issue by pressing the teacher issue. That's all this is about. If they really wanted to resolve this strike, they would have done what my House leader and Rosario Marchese had suggested, which was to refer the matter to a mutually agreed-upon arbitrator so that they're able to make a decision that's binding to both parties. That would have resolved the issue—or they could have put the money into the board in order to reach equity; one or the other. What they're doing now is nothing more than bashing teachers.

The Acting Speaker: Further comments?

Hon Mr Stockwell: Thank you, sir.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): You wanted to bring the Rolling Stones.

Hon Mr Stockwell: No, that was a Liberal. Dennis Mills, wasn't it?

It's funny to listen to a good Italian Catholic, my friend Joe Cordiano over there—

Interjection: Hey.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Not that there aren't good Italian Catholics on both sides of this House—talk about separate school funding and the unfairness of our situation and our position. You should know better than any that we were the ones who actually fully funded the separate school system. You should know that, Joe. You should know that you made the promise as a Liberal government when you were in the administration and didn't do a darn thing about it.

Then, when we came to office, we went through the pooling process and provided industrial and commercial taxes to the separate school system so that it would be on a fair and equal footing. Do you know how you voted on that? You voted against it. You voted against that initiative, that bill that provided funding for the separate school system on a fair and equitable basis to the public school system.

Then you have the nerve to stand up here today and tell us the challenge we face is that we're not fairly funding the separate school system. I mean, that has to be hypocrisy on stilts. I never heard anything so ridiculous in my life. The separate school system had a windfall of cash because of the position this government took with respect to pooling and fair funding.

So, my good Italian Catholic friend from west Toronto, close to my riding, I know you'll want to go back to your constituents and say that when it came to fair funding, you voted against it. There can't possibly be any propriety in your position. It's very upsetting to me. After we went through all the trouble and all the grief to fund the separate school system equally to the public school system, you're telling us that we're not funding them fairly.

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): Boy, I had other comments prepared to talk about the budget, but the performance from the member from Etobicoke Centre begs a number of questions. First of all, I'd like to know why you think it's important to refer to the person's ethnicity when you're debating—"good Italian Catholic" three times. That's silly. That brings the debate down, and you know it.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Because his kids go to separate school.

Mrs Bountrogianni: There are a lot of people from different ethnicities in separate schools, as there are in public schools, and you know that. So why even put that? You're not doing your caucus any favours by speaking that way.

Hon Mr Stockwell: Wake up.

Mrs Bountrogianni: I think your colleagues should wake up and put a muzzle on you, member from Etobicoke Centre, because you are not doing them any favours at all.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I'll do my best.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Thank you. I would appreciate you doing your best.

I'd like to comment on the budget now, and I'd like to thank my colleague from York South-Weston for the excellent debate on the actual issue of the budget. First of

all, from the beginning, this whole process was flawed. The Magna budget: we got a budget in a factory. Do you know that kids all across the province in grade 10 civics classes are talking about the lack of democracy in this process? Do you know that? Are you aware of that?

Hon Mr Stockwell: I have a kid in grade 10.

Mrs Bountrogianni: I hope that he comes to you with his complaints on the democracy, as well as for the \$36-billion warrant signed by two cabinet ministers.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please. The government House leader and former Speaker certainly knows better.

Please continue.

Hon Mr Stockwell: I apologize.

Mrs Bountrogianni: Half the budget, \$36 billion, signed away by two cabinet ministers? Regardless of what you think of warrants, the fact that that amount of money was signed by two cabinet ministers to be spent is tremendously undemocratic, and you know that.

I only have a few seconds left, but there was nothing in the budget for operation grants for post-secondary schools. It looks like we're going to have yet another round of anxiety from students from the universities, as we had in the last two years with the double cohort. With respect to the education tax for seniors, most of the seniors I speak to feel it is their right to fund education.

Hon Mr Stockwell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: My point of order is a clarification. In any cabinet meeting, an OIC is signed by the affected cabinet minister and the chair of cabinet. The entire point you were talking about was passed in front of an entire cabinet. Every motion or OIC is signed by two cabinet ministers.

The Acting Speaker: That was not a point of order, but it was interesting.

Mrs Bountrogianni: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The point was that it didn't come here, that half the budget didn't come here for debate.

The Acting Speaker: You have both made your points.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): That's the problem with the government House leader. He just doesn't know how to accept a compliment gracefully.

Saturday morning I was up in Montebello Park in St Catharines with Niagara regional members of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario. They're doing a walkathon along with similar regional groups of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario—persons with schizophrenia, families of persons with schizophrenia, consumers, friends and advocates.

One of the things of great concern that was expressed was this budget's failure to address the acute needs of so many communities, indeed every community, and so many families and individuals within those communities with respect to adequate funding for mental health services. Down in Niagara region, we've been robbed of the nine adolescent mental health beds that we were promised. We've seen ongoing underfunding of mental health services, most acutely in the area of youth and

adolescent mental health services. It was brought to my attention so poignantly and so powerfully by families who deal with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses, especially amongst young people the inadequacy of this government when it comes to providing resources so that we can treat persons with mental illness: the lack of hospital beds for mental health patients and, once again, especially youth and adolescents. What happens is that youth and adolescent mental health patients, especially those arriving at the hospital in crisis, end up being put into adult psychiatric units. That's dangerous. It's not supportive of proper mental health treatment. It's counterproductive. One of the many real tragedies is the lack of adequate funding for mental health services in this government's budget.

The Acting Speaker: Finally, the member for York South-Weston has two minutes.

Mr Cordiano: Let me say to the House leader, you know I'm very proud of my Italian-Canadian heritage. I know he meant no offence to Italian-Canadians, that they somehow owed this government a debt of gratitude for funding separate schools.

Hon Mr Stockwell: They do.

Mr Cordiano: Oh, come on. Listen, it was my colleague and friend the then Minister of Education, Sean Conway, who brought a separate school funding bill into this House.

Hon Mr Stockwell: No, he didn't.

Mr Cordiano: Sure he did. We funded the extension of separate school funding. So let's not go there. Let's not discuss that.

The other fact is, with respect to funding, it's Toronto that you have prejudiced time and again, because you haven't funded Toronto with the notion that Toronto has additional needs. The funding formula, as I've repeated, does not reflect that. So what you're talking about is total nonsense. The funding formula does not respect special consideration for Toronto's high needs. We have the largest immigrant population. Newly arrived Canadians need English-as-a-second-language. With respect to adult education, you've cut one of the schools serving all those new immigrants, new Canadians who need help to get started. What did you do? You cut the legs right out from under it. Repeatedly this government has shown its total neglect of the city of Toronto, and as a government you have completely undermined the ability of the boards of education in this city to fund those special needs. They need additional resources. Your funding formula doesn't reflect that. Per pupil student funding just doesn't cut it. It tries to equalize things in a phony kind of way. It doesn't recognize and acknowledge that Toronto is different, that it has a higher immigrant population. You totally ignore that.

The Acting Speaker: It now being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

Hon Mr Stockwell: It's not quite six o'clock.

The Acting Speaker: It is six o'clock. I can see it from here and I'm in the chair.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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