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of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 12 June 2003

Jeudi 12 juin 2003

Speaker
Honourable Gary Carr

Président
L'honorable Gary Carr

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 12 June 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 12 juin 2003

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

PREVENTING PARTISAN
ADVERTISING ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 VISANT À EMPÊCHER LA
PUBLICITÉ À CARACTÈRE POLITIQUE

Mr Bradley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 91, An Act to end government spending on partisan advertising / Projet de loi 91, Loi mettant fin aux dépenses du gouvernement en matière de publicité à caractère politique.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): The member for St Catharines has up to 10 minutes for his presentation.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): It would be an understatement to say that I have been somewhat obsessed with the issue of government advertising for a number of years, and there's a very good reason for that. I happen to believe that partisan, self-congratulatory advertising by any government is not a justified use of taxpayers' dollars.

What I am particularly offended by—and I think the public is—is not the pamphlet the minister has in his or her office or some of the publications that go out to a few people. I've noticed in various ministries of economic development over the years that there have been some things with nine pictures of the minister and so on; I'm not talking about those. What I'm talking about is the virtual barrage of advertising on television. We're hearing it on radio stations. We're seeing it in newspapers, in full-page ads in some cases. We're seeing it in magazines. We're getting pamphlets of this kind—I don't want to use a prop, but various kinds of pamphlets that show up at our houses. There are the road signs I look at, which say, "Building Ontario Together: Ernie Eves, Premier." Even where there's no construction work going on, there are huge, expensive road signs.

I think it's an abuse for governments to do this, an abuse of public office. I think it's an abuse of the taxpayers. It's particularly galling, I guess, to those of us on this side when we look at a government that was elected to save taxpayers money. That was one of the thrusts this government had. Both Premier Harris, when he was

Premier, and certainly Premier Eves have said, "We're here to save money for the people of the province." So I think it's particularly galling, as the taxpayers' federation mentioned, when it's a government that was elected with that particular mantra.

I noticed several kinds of advertising. First of all, television: it's clear it's an expensive buy. The government puts it on where it's going to be seen the most, around newscasts. They must have been deeply saddened that the Toronto Maple Leafs did not make it to the second or third round of the playoffs or to the finals, because we would have seen them during that period of time; no doubt about it.

Hon Jim Flaherty (Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation): And other reasons.

Mr Bradley: And other reasons.

There are the health care ads, one spreading what I would call inaccurate information about how many nurses have been hired in the province, and another about the government's efforts to recruit doctors and other professionals. They're all using strategic messaging about how the government is, as they would say, making health care work for you.

Education: they have one that touts, in what I would say again is an inaccurate fashion, student testing results. Another promotes the government's teacher testing requirements, and another torques the government's allocation of funds for special-needs children, all using the strategic message, again, of helping kids learn.

The opportunity bonds, which I think are reasonable to sell in this province, and the regular savings bonds, tout the government's supposed job creation record and international reputation rather than the actual bonds themselves.

SARS: the 30-second TV ads running in border states and beamed into Ontario, featuring our own Premier Eves, at a cost of over \$1 million. The West Nile virus ads—I want to say this because there is a reason for providing information. Again, with the permission of the members of the Legislature, and even without it, I'm going to hold up an ad here. The reason I'm going to is that I think it's a good ad. This is an ad that talks about, "Ontario health update on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS): make your family aware." It is straight information. You know at the bottom where the government always puts, "Making health care work for you"? They don't have that. This is what I call reasonable information provided to the public of Ontario.

I noticed that in the radio ads, once the government thought it had SARS licked, they started to say, "Here's

what your government is doing,” and the same thing with West Nile virus. It’s quite legitimate for the government to say what people should do out there: to give the caution and provide the information. But on every occasion, this government—and it’s not necessarily the members of the Legislature; it’s the whiz kids in the backrooms who say, “This is what you’re supposed to do.”

The government has spent, they admit, over \$401 million on government advertising. I’m not even quarrelling with that, because I think that in this particular year, with the special emergency circumstances, there is a legitimate buy to be made. What I’m objecting to is the nature of the media-wide advertising that I see in the province.

I’m rather interested in the fact that we have these householders, we have newspaper ads, we have the glossy inserts—I think everybody remembers the very glossy 30-page insert about SuperBuild in Maclean’s magazine. All it was, again, was a self-congratulatory message to the people of this province, which I think annoyed a lot of people. That money could be better used for programs such as health care, education, the environment and other areas of the province of Ontario than squandering it on self-congratulatory partisan advertising.

1010

I’ve brought forward a bill which establishes standards for government advertising, including that it be in the public interest and that it be non-partisan. A member of cabinet may ask the Provincial Auditor of Ontario to decide if specified government advertising meets the standards before the advertising is made public. A member of the assembly may make a complaint to the auditor that specified government advertising does not meet the standards. If the auditor decides after a complaint that specified government advertising does not meet the specified standards, the governing party may be ordered to reimburse the crown for the costs of the advertising. The bill requires the auditor to report annually to the Speaker of the assembly on government advertising.

I can’t be objective in this, nor can members of the government, but I think the office of the auditor can. Our own auditor has expressed his concerns about this in years gone by in the auditor’s report. The Speakers of the assembly have expressed their concern about it. I think we, as an assembly, have a chance to end this nonsense once and for all.

This is not coming from a fringe party that has no seats in the Legislature and no chance of ever forming a government. This is coming from—and I’m sure it will be supported by the New Democratic Party—one of the three parties in the Legislature that have a chance to form a government in the next election, whether they choose a Conservative, Liberal or NDP government. We are people who have a chance to form the government, so you might say it is in our interest, politically, not to bring forward a bill of this kind.

I feel so strongly about it and leader Dalton McGuinty does because he’s had a very similar bill before the

House that we should end this. It should be put outside, as it is in Britain—there’s an objective observer in Britain who vets the advertising and makes decisions on it. I saw a CBC program a couple of years ago. I think it showed Ontario government ads. The person who was reviewing the ads in Britain said these would never pass in Britain because they were clearly ads which were there to promote the government.

Even when the government is advertising in the United States, they advertise on border stations. The message is, “Invest in Ontario.” Is that a reasonable message? Yes, it is. But it’s funny that it’s not a message that’s going into Kentucky or Arkansas or Texas. It’s a message which is in the border states, immediately adjacent to Ontario, so that people in Ontario will see the ads and it will make them feel good about the province of Ontario.

In my view, I agree with the many editorials out there. The Owen Sound Times says: “Can we get some stricter controls on government advertising—or as it should be called—propaganda ... Currently the Tories are in power, they’re behind in the polls and an election is looming. We’re therefore being treated to a barrage of government TV ads telling us how great Ontario’s doing.”

The St Catharines Standard: “This is not a necessary document; it doesn’t tell taxpayers how to utilize a particular aspect of the SuperBuild process, its primary purpose isn’t to provide access to information for Ontarians who may require the services and there is no emergency or particular urgency that requires the dissemination of this information. The overwhelming message is, ‘Here’s what the magnanimous government of Ernie Eves has done for you.’ And the Ontario Conservatives are putting out this message not at their own expense, but at the expense of taxpayers.”

Now, if the government wishes to, it has a lot of people who work for it and its communications. If the Premier or any minister or any member wants to call a press conference every day and provide information to the news media, I don’t object to that. That’s part of the process.

If the government party, the Progressive Conservative Party at this time, wishes to spend money from its funds to advertise in a partisan sense, that’s quite legitimate in our system. I think what we have to do, though, is end this abuse of the taxpayers of this province. The government will now not even provide the cost of the advertising when they are requested to give those costs to the people of this province. They no longer want to provide that. Again, I go back to the fact that most observers who are objective in this look not at the volume of advertising; what they look at is the content. Clearly it’s unacceptable. This bill will change that.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): New Democrats support this bill. In fact, it’s consistent with similar bills that have been presented by the New Democratic Party and it’s consistent with our serious concern about the escalating abuse by this government of its access to consolidated revenues, to taxpayers’ dollars, and the

utilization of huge amounts of taxpayer dollars, the exact amount of which cannot be determined—that's one of the problems—to engage in partisan self-promotion.

Mr Bradley suggests it's fine if the governing political party uses monies out of its political party coffers to pay for advertising. One can't object to that, yet one understands why this government feels all the more compelled to use taxpayers' money, because obviously it's using tax-receipted, taxpayer-subsidized political donations to send its cabinet ministers and their families on luxurious European vacations, leaving precious little for partisan advertising. Hence this government's eagerness to dip its hands, elbows, shoulders, deep into the taxpayers' funding to engage in partisan advertising.

One of the interesting things as well about this bill is that the auditor may elect to proceed when conducting an inquiry as if he were operating under parts I and II of the Public Inquiries Act. That's an important consideration. I would have hoped that it would have included part III, for the one obvious reason that it would include the power to search and seize. When this bill goes to committee, I will be calling upon Mr Bradley to consider supporting an amendment to the bill that would include the utilization of part III. Because we know that this government can be oh-so-cagey—has been oh-so-cagey—and clandestine and secretive about burying any number of costs, including the costs of partisan advertising, burying them deeply—the same way Mr Stockwell tried to bury the taxpayer-subsidized funding of his vacation in the most expensive of European capitals: Rome, Paris, London, Glasgow, in five-star accommodations. Stockwell, on the taxpayers' tab, gave the Michelin guide a workout; no two ways about it.

Others pale in comparison. Brad Clark, the Minister of Labour: his riding association buys him a suit with taxpayer-funded dollars.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): What kind of suits, Peter?

Mr Kormos: It was \$699, all in, tax included.

Mr Bisson: For what?

Mr Kormos: I don't know. Where I come from, I thought you could get two or three suits for \$699, all in, tax included. But as it was, Mr Clark used taxpayers' money to buy himself a tuxedo. Fair enough, I suppose, if one wants a tuxedo, if one thinks that a tuxedo complements one's presence.

Mr Bisson: Doesn't he make enough?

Mr Kormos: The guy is into a six-digit income, and where I come from people buy their own clothes with their own money. Quite frankly, if they can't afford to buy a tuxedo, they do without; they wear a dark blue suit, which, believe it or not, I've borrowed on occasion to wear at events that would otherwise call for so-called black tie.

Why do governments do this? Why do governments dip their hands into the cookie jar? Why do cabinet ministers do it? They do it because they can. They do it because there's a regal sense of entitlement that develops, where there's an emperor-like perspective of the world

acquired, "It's ours and we can do with it as we wish." What this bill does is (1) permit scrutiny, and (2) provide a modest disincentive because the auditor has the power to compel the governing party to pick up the tab, should the auditor find that the partisan advertising was indeed that—partisan.

1020

We've seen the abuse of power, though, in so many other ways other than just the actual taxpayer expenditure. I was shocked at a recent press conference by the emperor—rather, the Premier—Eves, wherein he was making what was purported to be a substantive announcement. When Ms Churley and I arrived at the venue where the announcement was being made, the Sergeant at Arms was sent in, in an effort to escort us out. I found that bizarre. Thank goodness Ms Churley was there—

Mr Bisson: She protected you.

Mr Kormos: —and protected me from being seized physically by anybody. God bless her. She's small, but she's tough. She does indeed roar. But no, we stood our ground. What that invited, though, was a very angry person, who I was told was one Deb Hutton. I understand she lives down in Wainfleet at least some of the time, and I've met her from time to time at public events with that fellow she's married to. Ms Hutton came down, angrily stomping, and although I know it's physically impossible, I was sure I could see smoke rising from each side of her head. But she kept a careful watch on the potentially subversive Churley-Kormos team.

But again, it's that sense of, "Why do we do it? Because we can." We've seen that from this government as it gets more and more desperate and as it advances more and more desperate policies and legislative initiatives, utilizing the airwaves. Our blue boxes—my goodness, what they've done to the blue box industry is remarkable in and of its own right because, again, on my street, down on Bald Street in Welland, people can identify this stuff pretty rapidly. It fills the blue boxes to overflowing in relatively short order. But that simply is an observation about the volume and the incredible cost to the taxpayer.

This government hasn't got the dignity or any sufficient sense of restraint to control itself. It's not the first government to engage in advertising, but certainly, coming from me as a 15-year person here now, and certainly reinforced by others who have been here much longer, we've never seen as thorough and as expensive and as costly and as voluminous a program of partisan advertising by any government as this government, all on the taxpayer tab.

Mr Bisson wants to speak to this bill. I'm looking forward to his comments, as are other members, I'm sure. Marilyn Churley noted earlier today that she finally understands now how it is that it's Tory members who get identified as the best-dressed members in those whimsical columns at the end of the year. Of course it's Tory members who are always identified as the best dressed; it's the Tory members who are having their riding associations use taxpayer-subsidized funds to pick

up their tailoring and clothing tabs. If you doubt me, take a look at the records filed over there in the library. Take a look at all 103 of them and take a look at which of the piggies have their snouts ear-deep in the trough. It's the Tory piggies at the trough. It's the Tory piggies in there ear-deep, gobbling away at taxpayer dollars.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate with respect to the bill from the member from St Catharines. I guess I would comment quite frankly that this is obviously a partisan bill. He's concerned about the government message that's getting to the people, and that people understand it.

He sets out standards in his bill with respect to what he thinks are the standards. He states that "Government advertising shall meet the following standards:

"1. The advertising must be a reasonable means to achieve one or more of the following purposes:

"i. To inform the public of services available to them.

"ii. To inform the public of their rights and responsibilities under the law.

"iii. To encourage or discourage specific social behaviour in the public interest."

That's what's been happening. That's what the public has a right to know. The public has a right to know what their government is doing.

This bill, in essence, is trying to stifle democracy with respect to providing information on government programs to the public. I note what he's doing here. When the NDP and the Liberals were in the government, they did the same type of advertising that he's complaining about, and they also spent more money than this government has ever spent on government advertising.

But the one area he doesn't go to—and I know he doesn't want to go there because he doesn't want to bring his federal Liberal cousins into this—is that the Auditor General recently talked about the federal Liberals with respect to—I don't worry about their advertising. The Auditor General said the cronyism in the federal government advertising has never reached such a level. Let's get this thing clear in terms of what we're dealing with here. At the federal level, the problem is that the Auditor General believes that all there is is cronyism in terms of how they do their advertising.

What the provincial Liberals have a problem with is, "What are you doing speaking to the public about government programs and information? Why are you doing that?" Mr Bradley sets out, in essence, an auditor's court of litigation. That's essentially what it is. I would say to you that a better use of resources and the auditor's time would be not putting in place what we're talking about here. He's got it set up whereby the cabinet member would go the Provincial Auditor and say, "Is this all right, Mr Provincial Auditor?" The Provincial Auditor already looks at government spending. That's that person's job, and I've never seen a complaint from the Auditor General that he hasn't been able to do his job.

There are other processes here, since I've been here, in terms of how you deal with government messaging. You

can deal with that through the Integrity Commissioner; it has been used before. I sit on the Legislative Assembly committee. We deal with members' actions and proper conduct. I can tell you, those committees have been used. The Integrity Commissioner has been used in a situation where you're dealing with government advertising that was prematurely sent out and the language was not properly set forth. I stood on that committee and I dealt with that particular piece of legislation and the minister who was responsible for it. That process is still in place.

What we have here is partisan legislation designed to stifle the government message with respect to telling people about program information. It meets the standards on his own test. I guess what he doesn't like is looking at other people's pictures. I think they used to look at his picture when he was the Minister of the Environment. There weren't any complaints then, but perhaps times have changed.

I see no need for this bill. The auditor is perfectly capable of reviewing whatever material he sees fit. I know that he has done an admirable job of this in the past, and I'm sure he will continue to do that. I have no doubts about that. I'm surprised to see that the Liberals continue to have such little regard for the auditor than to think he needs to be told how to look at this, where to look at it, and here's how you're supposed to deal with this. What they're putting in here is their own subjective views on this. That's strictly what the member has put forth.

I'm grateful for my colleague having brought up these important issues before, and I want to look at some of the other weaknesses of the bill, because it's fraught with weaknesses.

Let me start with the issue of resources. The bill would require the auditor to review all advertising at one point or another. Whether it is reviewed prior to the release at the request of the government, whether it is required as a result of a complaint, or whether it is reviewed as a result of the year-end requirement, this is a huge undertaking. The auditor would be required to look at every notice a ministry posts in which it advertises a job, every posting that gives a notice of an environmental assessment, every notice of public hearings. It would have to review every single public health announcement, including those ads that have been posted dealing with SARS and the West Nile virus. I take it that the member didn't have any problem with the West Nile virus advertisement.

1030

This would be a tremendous new workload for the auditor and would make the auditor's office litigious. The auditor's office is a review agency; it's not a litigation office. That's what he's trying to turn it into. The problem here, of course, is the fact that the member opposite has given absolutely no consideration to where the auditor would obtain these extra resources or how they would be employed in this new process. If he has, there is no evidence of that in the bill. This is particularly disturbing in relation to these new, unprecedented duties.

There is no thought about how the auditor would evaluate compliance, which is especially troubling, given that this is not traditionally an area that the auditor would look at in detail.

This is really not surprising. The Liberals are always happy to criticize but do not put forward any good ideas about how it would happen. They're perfectly happy to let someone else do the work, as long as they get the credit; happy to put it forward and let someone else figure out the details. Well, the devil is in the details, and the details here cause some serious problems.

We, on this side of the House, have to be concerned about these details. It is incumbent upon the government to think about how this would really work and consider the real-life consequences of policy. We can't afford the luxury of pie-in-the-sky ideas that create new problems and accomplish nothing.

Let me also for a moment talk about something that really bothers me when the Liberals put forward things like this: the sheer hypocrisy of the policy. I'm getting close to the end of my time, and I think the member for Northumberland is seeking that time. But I would say I think this is a very subjective view by the member with respect to government information. That information has to be given to the public so that they know what the government is doing, what their rights are and, in fact, to make sure that we deal with people protecting themselves from, for example, the West Nile virus. What's wrong with that?

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I'm pleased to support my colleague's bill. I would just start by saying that the public are not fools. They see millions and millions of their dollars, hard-earned tax dollars, being spent in a blatant attempt to get the government re-elected. They're not foolish. They see these things—and they know they cost big money—flowing into their homes, on TV, on the radio, and it's all paid for with their money in a blatant attempt to get the government re-elected.

The member who just spoke made some comments about the Provincial Auditor. The Provincial Auditor has asked us to give him this responsibility. In his annual report, he pointed out the problems with this, pointed out the abuse that goes on with the government deciding it's going to spend taxpayers' dollars to attempt to get themselves re-elected, when the taxpayers' dollars should be used to do the things that are spelled out in Mr Bradley's bill. The member may not be aware, or someone may not have told him. Whoever wrote those notes for him conveniently made him look a little foolish, because the Provincial Auditor himself has asked for these sorts of powers.

I would say that \$400 million of taxpayers' money may not seem like much to Mr Eves, but for the taxpayers, \$400 million of their money spent on advertising, in many cases in a blatantly partisan way, and frankly some of it not particularly straightforward. The advertising council looked at the education report and said, "Listen, it's not factual. It's misleading. You're

going to have to correct it." That's not the opposition speaking; that's an independent body that looks at accuracy in advertising.

There's this pattern: an election coming up and suddenly the taxpayers see their money being spent in a blatant attempt to get the government re-elected. We're going to see that again in July, August and September.

The bill will be passed very shortly here in the House for the seniors' tax credit. The administration of that is going to cost \$15 million a year. Why? There were two ways the government could have done this that would have cost no money. It could have simply said to seniors, "Don't pay your education property tax; you're exempt from it now." That would have cost nothing. The other way would be to make it part of the income tax return; simply change the income tax return. That would have cost nothing. But the government chose another way, and they're going to spend \$15 million of your money to administer it. Each senior will now have to apply for the refund, fill out a big application form and mail it in. Then there are going to have to be a million of these applications screened and a cheque mailed back. The cost of that, according to the government, is \$15 million.

Why is that? Why are we spending \$15 million of taxpayers' money? It's for one simple reason: so that in July and August, leading up to the election, Ernie Eves will run advertisements saying, "Fill in this application and I'll send you back a cheque"—a blatant use of taxpayers' money to try to buy the election. If they wanted to go ahead with the seniors' tax credit, it could have been done at no cost by simply saying, "You don't have to pay your education property tax. Just don't send that in, because you are now exempt from it." Or they could have said, "When you fill in your income tax form, you will be getting a tax credit." Those two things would have cost nothing, but this one, \$15 million.

I guarantee you—the government said, "We're going to be advertising this." I can hear it now—taxpayers' dollars—saying, "Fill in this application, and Ernie Eves will send you a cheque." Of course it's all taxpayers' money, but he'll send a cheque and he thinks that will buy him the election. So it's just a series of abuses.

I was quite resentful, I must say—there was an advertisement thanking the health care workers for their tremendous work on SARS. All of us in this Legislature, and everybody in Ontario, owe a debt of thanks to them, but it says, "The Ernie Eves government thanks you." I really found that offensive. I think it should have said, "On behalf of the government of Ontario," but to try to get a partisan advantage in something as serious as this, I found offensive.

I support my colleague's bill. I think it's sensible, reasonable and something the Provincial Auditor has been asking for.

Mr Bisson: I was really interested in the response from the Conservative members in regard to this bill. For the Conservative members to stand in this House and say, "We can't pass this bill because the auditor doesn't have the resources to properly monitor this bill and make it

work,” I think is really an unbelievable statement on the part of this government.

I sit on the Board of Internal Economy, and when the auditor came forward to the members of the board asking for an increase in his budget to deal with issues such as this, so that he could properly do his job, he got turned down flat. He was turned down flat to be given the resources by this government for him to audit the books. What was even more galling was that the government board members didn't even have the courtesy—and I think he should have been given the courtesy—to have the auditor come before the Board of Internal Economy.

This government on the one hand is trying to limit the role of the auditor by not properly financing him, and then comes in here and says, “We can't pass this bill because he's not properly resourced.” You're talking out of both sides of your mouth, and quite frankly I think it's somewhat hypocritical—not somewhat; I think it is. Sorry; that's unparliamentary, and I take that back. I would just say it is a bit beyond the pale.

I want to bring this to the beginning. Do people remember what they did to members' budgets and caucus budgets in 1995 when Mike Harris got elected? Prior to 1995, a member of this assembly, no matter where they sat in this assembly, be it in opposition or in government, had the ability to communicate with his or her constituents through three householders per year. In other words, every member was able to write up a piece that was non-partisan, that talked about what was going on in the constituency and what was happening at Queen's Park and send to every household three householders per year. In addition to that, members and caucuses had the ability to mail out, I think, 7,000 or 7,500 letters per week if they chose, and some members chose to do that, in order to keep their constituents up to date.

For Toronto members, I think that's important, because it's hard for Toronto members to get into the big media. If they're going to communicate with their constituents, urban members especially need to have that type of ability to communicate directly with their voters. The same thing goes for people like me. I've got a riding that goes from Hudson Bay down to Timmins. In some parts of my riding, people really don't get the news. The paper ain't delivered there. So it's important to be able to send mail out to your constituents and say, “This year we're dealing with this particular issue in the session; if you would like to make comment at committee or whatever”—you can communicate with your constituents.

1040

This government took all that funding away. This is what I find so hypocritical—oh, I can't say that; it's unparliamentary, and I withdraw again. But I find it somewhat difficult that the government on one hand is spending record amounts of money to communicate with voters in an attempt to prop themselves up to get elected, but the first thing they did when they got elected was slash—they didn't slash; they eliminated—all budgets that members and caucuses had to be able to mail to their constituents. I just say, what a double standard. And I

think it was very calculated; I think the government knew exactly what it was doing.

It said, “If we can eliminate the ability of the opposition to communicate with their constituents, if we can eliminate the opportunity for caucuses to communicate information to voters across the province in government members' ridings by way of mailings that our caucuses are able to do, we're going to take away an opposition voice.” It would allow the Conservatives to flood the market with government advertising, and there's nothing the opposition parties can do.

I think this government has really taken partisanship in this Legislature to an extreme, to an actual extreme. What you've got is a government that has all the resources of government and uses them to all their entitlement. They fly the private plane around, they go to everybody's riding—they're always trying to go out there to prop themselves up—they communicate by way of government advertising and they took away the ability of opposition members to even mail into their own ridings. I say, what a bunch; that's really big of you. I think it was very calculated.

I look forward to a change of government—that at least we get a minority Parliament—and we're able to come back to this Legislature and put some fairness back into the system. We need to have the type of legislation Mr Bradley talks about, because quite frankly it is tempting for governments to abuse their power by way of advertising, no matter what their stripe is. We should make sure, by way of a process such as legislation like this, that governments are limited in what they can advertise about, so that they are truly advertising information that is not partisan in nature. Second, if caucuses and members have to communicate with the greater electorate across the province and in their ridings, there should be budgets for that which everybody has access to. So if Ernie Eves and his caucus want to send out a report card on what they've done, do it through your caucus budget and let the opposition parties do the same.

I want to thank the member for St Catharines for raising this issue. I don't think the government is going to support it at the end, because they like the one-way street they've created. They like the idea that they are the only ones who are able to advertise and basically stifle the opposition. I think that just shows how big this government really is. They're, like, really big.

Hon Doug Galt (Minister without Portfolio): Just before I get off to speaking on this topic the member for St Catharines has put forward, I invite the members in the Legislature today to join me in welcoming, in both galleries, students from MacLeod Public School in Sudbury.

I was a little excited when I saw that the member for St Catharines was going to come forward with a private member's bill. Knowing that he's not very often partisan, I figured it would be a really good bill, and I'm disappointed. I'm extremely disappointed. Mr Bradley is such a great orator in these hallowed halls, and I thought he'd be coming forward with a bill that had some sub-

stance in it. But in fact, it's a wedge issue. It's partisan politics at its worst. Maybe I was expecting too much from the member for St Catharines, who is a friend I hold in great respect, but he really disappointed me on this one.

I think of the spending that's been going on in advertising, promoting and letting people know about government programs. I look at what happened when they were in government in the late 1980s—some \$20 million more than we have spent, if you adjust that according to inflation; the NDP spent some \$10 million more.

One of the criticisms I hear of our government is that we don't let them know enough about the programs our government has. You will recall, I'm sure, that back about two months ago we did some consultations in Ontario prior to the throne speech. It was interesting that about half of the suggestions I was hearing had already been implemented by our government, but the very kind people who came out to assist with those consultations were unaware of it. This comes around to the importance of informing the public about what government is doing and the programs that are available to them.

I can also relate to you the recent consultations I did with the plastics industry, a very delightful, enjoyable three weeks last summer that we spent on the road visiting the plastics industry. One of the things that came out was that they were unaware of government programs. When we released the report recently, we had an appendix in it that indicated the various programs, both provincial and federal, that were available. I'm sure that will be helpful to the plastics industry.

I think it was unfortunate that the member from Scarborough-Agincourt was speaking about the auditor's report and doing follow-up on it. That's exactly what we've done. The auditor came out and he spoke, and in 2001 we implemented those directives. If the member from Scarborough-Agincourt would have a look at that, he would see that we are doing exactly as the auditor requested—an auditor whom I believe their government appointed. I'm not absolutely sure on that, but I think that happened.

I think this new policy gives the guidance and direction that's necessary. Certainly we have been following the direction that has come forward as a result of the concerns expressed by the auditor, not only about our government but also about previous governments and how they were using taxpayers' dollars to inform the public about various programs.

My apologies to the member from St Catharines when I say this, but I see that his bill is actually an insult to the auditor. I think the auditor is going to be a little perturbed, just a little upset at the content of this bill. If he had gone to the auditor and maybe worked with the auditor, he might have come up with a pretty good bill, but I don't think he did. It's a weak bill. The content in it is certainly not putting forward the kind of information that's in the directives Management Board now has as it relates to advertising the various government programs we have here in Ontario.

I'm also concerned with the content of the bill in that it's going to create a tremendous amount of red tape, which I think is really very unnecessary. It's going to create red tape as it relates to filling job vacancies. It's going to create red tape as it relates to letting the public know about conditions like SARS, about conditions like the West Nile virus and the concerns there. The member from St Catharines held up an advertisement about SARS, providing information to the public. I don't think he would want that information held up because of having to go through the kind of red tape he is suggesting in this bill.

With all due respect, I would suggest he just stand up in the House in his last two minutes and withdraw the bill. It would save embarrassment to himself and to his party, particularly as to what they did when they were in government back in the late 1980s, over 10 years ago. That, by the way, was part of the lost decade in Ontario. That's when the debt skyrocketed, when deficits took off, when budgets were never balanced, even though they tried to indicate one year that the budget was balanced. Certainly when Bob Rae came along he laughed at it and said he wanted to be Premier in the worst way, and that's exactly the way he received government—in the worst possible way. That's just a bit of a quote, my words, but essentially it's what Bob Rae said in this Legislature and on the street; that was the way he found that government.

I look at this bill. I compliment the member from St Catharines for thinking about this kind of thing and being concerned about it for the sake of the taxpayers, although when he was Minister of the Environment back in the late 1980s, obviously he was not that concerned as it related to the taxpayers of the day and the kind of red tape that was involved in the environment. It was totally unnecessary. I spent some four years trying to get rid of that.

Coming back to the bill, I suggest the member stand up and withdraw it. It would save embarrassment to both him and the Liberal Party of Ontario.

1050

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings):

Although I can't agree with everything the members on the government side said, I do have to agree with the comment that this government does a lot of things they don't tell the people about. I understand and fully support that. Thank goodness there's an opposition that does tell the public what the government is doing.

About \$400 million has been spent by this government. It was very clearly partisan advertising. We need to remember that it's borrowed money. This government increased the debt by \$21 billion, and part of that debt-borrowing was to pay for these ads. So the debt was increased, although that wasn't mentioned in the partisan ads, and the rest of the province has to pay for it. Four hundred million dollars is a lot of money. It's a little difficult to comprehend what that is.

Let's think about where that money came from to pay for those ads. It came from affordable housing. In my community, I hear today that there are over 700 people

on the waiting list for affordable housing. The money for these ads has come from nurses. In my community, with Quinte Healthcare, they are laying off nurses. In spite of the rhetoric, they're laying off nurses. There is a \$4.4-million budget shortfall for Quinte Health Care. We have no money for the nurses, but we have \$400 million for partisan ads. The monies come from these nurses who are losing their jobs.

The money for these ads has come from ODSP recipients who have had no increase since 1992. There's money for ads, folks, but there's no money for people who are living \$7,000 to \$8,000 below the level of poverty. The simple little cost-of-living increase, which the government has consistently voted against, a little 2% or 3% increase has been opposed because the money is needed for the ads. You should be ashamed of yourselves. For people on ODSP who try to get a job to supplement, because they're \$8,000 below the poverty level, this government claws it back. It claws back any money from the federal government; it claws back any child care benefit; it claws back 75% of what they make over \$235 for a family because they need the money for their partisan purposes.

Ironically, the money for these ads has come from the schools in our system. The system for funding special education in Ontario is a disgrace. There has been no money for special-needs kids, but there's money to run partisan ads telling the people how good the special education system is. If it worked and it worked well, you wouldn't need to advertise. People would know. Money for these ads has come by taking what this government considers frill programs out of schools, things like music and things like late buses that allow rural students to have full access to clubs and sports and extra help. School-children in this province have had to pay for these partisan ads.

There are cutbacks to access centres, where we have seniors having to leave their homes—think about it—to give up their independence and move into an institution because there's no money for access centres, but there's been \$400 million for ads telling what a great job you're doing. You wouldn't have to do that. Just do a good job. Give it a try, give it a shot in your waning months and see if the people are not more impressed than by running ads telling them.

On a funding basis, post-secondary education in this province continues to linger right near the bottom for all of North America. It used to be that if you were intelligent and worked hard, you went to college or university. Now you need to be intelligent, work hard and have a rich family. What a disgrace when we think about the talent that exists out there that's not going to happen.

People in Ontario are not stupid. They work extremely hard for their money, and to see it squandered by a government that is, in a sense, a party that's on government welfare, using government money—maybe what we need is a snitch line. You were saying it's difficult to monitor if the ads are partisan or not. Set up a telephone number. You'll get calls from people who see the 30-

page insert in Maclean's magazine. They know what that 30-page insert cost. And just in case you don't get Maclean's, you mailed it out to every house anyway. What a disgraceful use of money that was earned the hard way by so many taxpayers. Your ads have been funded on the backs of some of the most vulnerable people. You should be ashamed of yourselves.

I heartily support this bill from the member for St Catharines.

Mr Bradley: I appreciate very much the supportive remarks I have received from this side of the House. I have a difficult time taking seriously the objections raised on the other side. It appears that someone in the government backrooms, the "whiz kids," as I call them, have made a decision that the government will not support this. We're not going to see a genuinely free vote, as I was hoping for in the House on this issue. We will likely see the government try to defeat a bill, which I think most people in Ontario, in fact overwhelmingly, would want to see.

I want to quote from an individual in this House who used to sit in your chair. He was making a ruling at the time and said this about government advertising:

"At this point in my ruling, I want to express some personal concerns about the propriety of public funds being used to advocate, through advertising, a particular position on a matter that is before the House. Let me be clear: I am not speaking here about politically paid-for advertising, but rather about funds that are contributed to by every Ontarian, regardless of his or her political view. Personally, I would find it offensive if taxpayer dollars were being used to convey a political or partisan message. There is nothing wrong with members debating an issue and influencing public opinion; in fact, it is part of our parliamentary tradition to do so. But I feel that it's wrong for a government to attempt to influence public opinion through advertising that is paid for with public funds."

That was the Honourable Chris Stockwell, before he was in cabinet, as an impartial Speaker of the Legislature. I agreed with him then. I hope that he would have the same point of view now and would try to prevail upon his colleagues in government to vote for this bill.

It has to be taken out of the hands of those of us who are partisans, as I said, in a reasonable fashion. My interpretation of advertising by government members is going to be different. I think we need somebody impartial. The Provincial Auditor has indicated in his reports that something has to be done. The government did come up with some guidelines. Unfortunately, with the guidelines they don't live up to them. Ask any member of the public to apply these guidelines to what they've seen on television, heard on radio, seen in Maclean's magazine or other magazines, seen in newspapers or see on highway signs or pamphlets that are sent out.

It says that "material should be presented in unbiased and objective language, and in a manner free from partisan promotion of government policy and political argument."

It says that material should not be liable to be misinterpreted as “partisan political.” Information campaigns should not intentionally promote or be perceived as promoting political party interests. Communications may be perceived as being partisan political because of any of the following factors.

So it talks about it. Material should be presented in an objective and fair manner. Information campaigns should be directed at the provision of objective, factual and explanatory information. It should be presented in an unbiased and equitable manner. Information should be based on accurate, verifiable facts, carefully and precisely expressed in conformity with those facts.

I don't think any person who has an objective viewpoint, applying that to the government advertising, would conclude that the government was even following its own weak guidelines at this time. We need an enforcement mechanism. That enforcement mechanism can be provided by the Provincial Auditor, who is neutral in these matters.

Ads of this kind will pass because this is an inappropriate use of taxpayers' dollars to provide direct information. Subsequent to this, the government is now telling everybody what a great job they're doing and then adding some information. But this kind of ad is exactly what governments should be providing. They should not be providing the kind of advertising that, as Advertising Standards Canada ruled on May 12, the government violated the Canadian code of advertising standards in an ad which lauds the Conservatives for investing \$250 million more this year in special education, as recommended last December in a report on education financing. Advertising Standards Canada was objective and said, “Look, this ad is inaccurate, providing inaccurate information.”

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John Williamson of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation said, “I think the opposition is absolutely right ... the government would be well advised to announce an end to these kinds of practices. If they want to get a message out they ought to do it through the political organs, not through the tax-funded system, which is available to them but appears to be being abused.”

My final concluding remarks on this: look, I have a list of editorials. This is something pretty hard to find. I was surprised to see the number of editorials being critical of this government. The reason I am is, remember, the newspapers, the television stations, the radio stations, the print companies, but particularly the mass media, make money from this advertising. When they are prepared to be critical of you, even though they are making the money from it, that tells me that they see what you're doing as being wrong.

I think most people in Ontario would think the bill that's being put forward—it's a bill that's based upon a previous bill from Dalton McGuinty, the leader of the official opposition, that says, “Look, if the Liberal Party happens to be elected, chosen by the people after the next election, we're prepared to live by this legislation.” We also think it should be applied to any other party that is

elected to be the government of Ontario. That's the choice of the people of this province.

So we have the auditor, we have a Speaker, we have the advertising council. I've heard people say to me that it is cheating in an election campaign if governments are allowed to do this, because they are using taxpayers' resources that are not available to the other political parties to do this. I don't even want to say it's something that only a Conservative government has ever done. I have seen it in my years in this Legislature. I think it's time to bring it to an end. This government is approaching an election. We see ads that are clearly partisan advocating government policies, patting the government on the back, and all paid for by the taxpayers of this province.

This legislation, I think, is very reasonable. Nobody is going to be looking at government ads when you're advertising for who you want for a particular position. They're going to be looking at the advocacy ads that you have out there. This is a reasonable piece of legislation. I hope all members, in good conscience, will support it.

The Acting Speaker: This concludes the time allocated for debating ballot item number 13. I will place the question regarding this ballot item at 12 o'clock noon.

DISCLOSURE AND PROTECTION OF ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA DIVULGATION ET LA PROTECTION DE RENSEIGNEMENTS SUR LES ADOPTIONS

Mr Wettlaufer moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act and the Child and Family Services Act in respect of disclosure and protection of adoption information / *Projet de loi 60, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil et la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille en ce qui concerne la divulgation et la protection de renseignements sur les adoptions.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): The member for Kitchener Centre has up to 10 minutes for his presentation.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I think I would like to go through the preamble.

“The bill amends the Vital Statistics Act to give adopted persons who are at least 18 years old a right of access to their own original birth registration and to give birth parents of an adopted person who is at least 19 years old a right of access to the original birth registration of the adopted person. The rights of access do not apply if either party has, by filing the appropriate notice under the Child and Family Services Act, requested no disclosure of identifying information. The difference of one year allows adopted persons time to file the notices after they reach the age of 18 years.

“Under the Child and Family Services Act, birth parents and adopted persons are entitled to file with the Registrar of Adoption Information written notices of their wish not to have the registrar disclose their identifying information to each other. A person who files that notice can provide a statement of reasons for not wishing to be contacted. A birth parent who files that notice can provide a statement of medical information.

“The registrar forwards the notices to the Registrar General under the Vital Statistics Act who matches them with documents on file. The notices take effect no later than seven days after their filing, so that the Registrar General has time to do the matching. Once the notices are effective, the Registrar General communicates them to adopted persons and birth parents who request a copy of the original birth registration of the adopted person. Contacting the other party despite having received a notice of non-disclosure of information constitutes an offence.

“The bill also amends the Child and Family Services Act to provide that counselling for adopted persons, birth parents and others who may be affected by the disclosure of information about the adoption must be made available on request, but is no longer mandatory.

“The provision that gives a right of access to birth records comes into force one year after the provision that allows birth parents and adoptive persons to file notices requesting no disclosure of their identifying information.”

We’re all aware that the member for Toronto-Danforth, Ms Churley, put forward a bill earlier this year, Bill 16. It dealt, in part, with what I’m doing, but I felt that her bill went too far. The right of retroactivity that she had in her bill was too all-encompassing.

What we have tried to do is to put a balance in the bill—hopefully it will be legislation—with what the Information and Privacy Commissioner wanted. We met a day before Ms Churley brought her bill forward for second reading, hoping that we could attain some sort of a compromise with her. At that time, she did not want to compromise her position. I understand what she was trying to do and I’m not going to criticize her for it. It’s just that I felt I couldn’t go along with what she wanted in her bill. That is the purpose behind this bill.

The commissioner has mentioned in a letter to me that: “Providing an unqualified right of disclosure of adoption information to adoptees and birth parents represents a violation of generally accepted privacy principles. The right to file a no-contact notice does not go far enough to protect the reasonable expectations of privacy that may have existed at the time of adoption.”

She also states that she would not object to a bill that created a retroactive right of access to information by adoptees and birth parents where adoptions occurred prior to the enactment of the legislation, if the bill also allowed these individuals the opportunity to file a disclosure veto, which is in my bill.

I received an interesting letter on June 5, dated June 1, from a lady in London by the name of Ellen Walker. I’m going to quote a little bit of what she said:

“I worked with birth mothers for many years and witnessed the rejection, loneliness and heartache of giving up a child to another family but also knowing someone would be able to give the child a better life.

“It is a witch hunt on the part of NDP MPP Churley to go back to the 1940s for birth mothers. How cruel. Those birth mothers are near the end of their lives. They do not need this constant harassment in the House.

“It would be a betrayal on the part of the PC Party to allow retroactive info. They were told their records would be sealed. How can anyone with any compassion or heart destroy their family now?”

We have really tried to be reasonable with this bill. I sat down with the Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services and found that the ministry is committed to improving the disclosure system so that individuals can find their personal information, the identifying information listed in the birth registration and adoption orders. However, the ministry also said that sometimes a reunion between a birth parent and child is not in the best interests of the parent or the child. This bill would allow adoptees or birth parents to block or refuse to share information, effectively declining any contact by the other party.

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I was trying to keep any emotion out of the bill. Adoption is a very emotional subject. I think many of us have relatives who have either been adopted or are adoptive parents or had birth parents who gave up a child. In my case, two of the three apply. I know how they feel. It’s difficult for these individuals. I don’t think the people who have given up their children ever get over it, but I also feel that in some cases they don’t want their spouses or their present families to know that they were the father or mother of another child 40 or 50 years ago. They don’t want, that for the very reason that they don’t want to destroy their family, and I can understand that as well.

We were trying to have an element of stability in the legislation, to make sure the legislation provided that element. I hope we have succeeded. I expect there is going to be considerable debate about it today on both sides of the issue. I welcome that debate. I hope we can keep emotion out of it, although that would be very difficult.

I think we have to understand the interests of all parties. Again, that was an attempt in this bill, trying our hardest to keep in mind everybody’s interests, whether it be the adoptive parents, the birth parents or the adoptee. I welcome any debate. I welcome the concerns that will be voiced by other members on all sides of the House and I look forward to it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): This is an extremely difficult topic, which I think all parties struggle with. I did not support Bill 16, as you’re aware. I know that one of the difficulties with finding birth information in contacts is a simple underfunding of the current system by the provincial government. If one party

registers, it can be a matter of years before the other is found.

But I've struggled, and I've struggled more in the last two weeks probably than in all of my life previous to this, because I have what I believe are firm, concrete examples of when it is not in the best interests to share the information. On the other hand, I think these cases are extremely small in number, and I am increasingly convinced that it is wrong to penalize everyone because of the one or two or three examples that I can bring to mind. In the particular children's aid society that I'm on the board of, for years mothers giving up children for adoption were read a statement which included the phrase that, "Your name will never be shared with the adoptive parents or the child." I suspect that the vast majority of these are not interested in that being honoured and may indeed want contact. But there are some who may have heard it and want that kept.

I know in other cases from time to time people have committed horrible acts. I can think, as a foster parent, of children who have come into care and subsequently moved on to adoption, where it's not in the best interests for contact to be made by that birth parent with that child, but it's a very small minority.

I am wondering, and perhaps this needs to come out at committee, if there is a mechanism whereby judges could in very rare instances give an order at the time a birth parent is convicted of an offence or when a child is made a crown ward, which is necessary to move on to adoption, that there be a bar or a ban on contact being made between the parties, certainly on the part of the birth parent initiating it. There are very few examples, but from time to time people do horrible things to their children and are bad people.

I'm also wondering if we can reverse it—there may be a few birth parents in this province who believe that they have the protection of not having their name given—and open a registry for a period of time, for six months or a year, and allow individuals who believe it is important to them that their name never be divulged to register. If they do not register, then they automatically remain in the system and the information can be shared. I believe for some people it is extremely important. I've been contacted by some who naturally can't go public because it is that important to them, but there are very few.

I know of one Web page but I understand there are a number of Web pages where an adoptee seeking to find a birth parent or a birth parent seeking to find their child can register. I happen to think that's great. There are two parties who have come forward, voluntarily wishing contact with each other, and I think it's great. But I do think it is important that for the few exceptions, when we're making a bill retroactive, we give the parents who don't want to have their information shared the chance to opt out. I highly suspect it will be very few. It will be unfair to the adoptee, but you have to balance the unfairness to the adoptee versus the unfairness to the birth parent. I would feel better. I think I could certainly support a bill that would be retroactive if there is some

opportunity—and it would have to be limited, from the sheer viewpoint of making the system work—to allow it to happen.

I am more and more persuaded by the number of individuals who have the desire and the urge or the need even to have contact. I can't support this bill as it stands. I think we need to go back to a bill that will facilitate more contacts, and I don't believe this one does it. But I do sincerely believe there need to be amendments made that would allow a birth parent to opt out for very special reasons.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I supported Bill 16, the bill that Marilyn Churley, the member for Toronto-Danforth, has brought forward. I think if we sent that bill to committee, we would be able to deal with some of the questions that have been raised here today.

I'll be speaking against Bill 60 but taking the opportunity to thank my colleague for all of her work and her unflagging desire to make sure that adoptees and birth parents have access to the information they desperately need. I will leave the remaining time to my colleague because I know she has so much to say on this bill and other matters.

Hon Brenda Elliott (Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill 60 today and thank my colleague for bringing this forward in the Legislature.

I think, as all have indicated, this is a very sensitive topic for adoptees, for birth parents and also for legislators, because we know that everybody on all sides of this topic is quite passionate about this particular matter.

I am speaking in favour of this bill today because I think for future adoptions this bill once and for all will begin to bring clarity to the system and allow birth parents and adoptees to find more information about each other.

I think it goes without saying that all of us understand it's very important to find ways to support families. While on the one hand I want to compliment my colleague across the way for unceasingly bringing this forward to find some sort of resolution, I also want to indicate that when there were other ideas on how to work together and find solutions to try to bring this issue forward in some sort of compromise or workable solution, without confrontation, I was disappointed that Ms Churley could not find the ability—at the time, at any rate—to work with us. So I guess it will have to be done through a legislative committee. So I compliment Mr Wettlaufer for bringing forward another point of view that gives us another way to look at this whole very complex matter.

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I do want to say that this government understands that it is important to help adoptees and birth families find each other. In 1995, there were 18,000 adoptees in Ontario waiting to search for a birth relative. When we came into office in 1995, we were very concerned about this. We found that waiting list and that number of people unacceptable. So our government took action. We have

committed money and staff to eliminate the backlog. I want to inform this House that now all searches are initiated within three months. That is a tremendous difference compared to the seven years that it used to be under the former NDP government.

In the matter of disclosing adoption information, there are many different and strongly held views on this. It often, I think without exception, comes from personal, heart-wrenching experiences. That is why it is so very important, and puts the onus on the government, to make sure that whatever actions are taken, respect is given to all parties: the adoptees, the birth parents and the adoptive parents.

Access to adoption records is currently limited in Ontario. Adoptees and birth parents are not, under the present legislation, given—and this is the word that's important—unilateral right of access to identifying information except in the case of health, safety and welfare, where it may be disclosed without consent. We want to improve the disclosure system so that individuals can find the personal identifying information listed in birth registrations and adoption orders. This bill would make it easier for adopted children to find contact and updated medical information about their birth parents and would also help birth parents learn about the children they placed for adoption.

As one of the speakers here said, "It's not always in the best interests of the child or the parent to seek a reunion." So this bill will allow adoptees and birth parents to block or refuse, effectively, to share information, declining contact by the other party.

We know that many want an open approach to disclosing adoption information, but at the same time, I think it is very, very important that we find a way to respect the rights of people who, upon giving up their child for adoption, did not expect their information to be released. Privacy is very important.

To address these concerns, this bill would ensure that only parents who give their children up for adoption after this bill passes would be subject to the changes within. In this way, birth parents will know when they place their child what is expected from them and what they can expect in the future.

We are sensitive to the fact that changing the rules now for disclosing adoption information is unfair to birth parents, who in the past had an expectation that their privacy would be protected. We feel it is essential that balancing both the needs of parents and children is respected.

The issue has come before this House many times. One of the things we have heard from the advocates is that the requirement for mandatory counselling be changed. I agree with that. People who make the decision to search out their past in this way do not do so frivolously. This bill will give the people the option of getting counselling, and it responds to the message we heard time and time again from the community.

In addition to drastically cutting the waiting list for searches, it's important to understand that the govern-

ment has made other changes within the existing legislation to the adoption disclosure register. We have improved the medical information available to adoptees and made the application process simpler and more accessible. I spoke to someone just the other day who indicated that that information had been shared with one of his family members in just under three weeks. As well, we have allowed for more detailed information to be released if, through the search process, we find the birth parents are deceased.

I think, through the efforts of my colleague across the way, we have an appreciation that this is an issue that requires action. It is complicated social policy, and I think it is important that we respond to society's changing attitudes on adoption. What has concerned me is that in days past we have been presented in this House with essentially what I would consider an all-or-nothing option. This has troubled me greatly because I think, as a member of the government, it is important that we always strive to find the right balance. It's so critically important that we maintain fairness to those who have entrusted their information to the government in days past and have expected that fairness, that information, that sharing, to be honoured. That is what has troubled me about this for so long. We want to ensure that all improvements to adoption disclosure services strike that balance between helping the adult adoptees and the birth relatives who do want to reunite, while protecting those who have trusted us with their privacy.

I commend my colleague Mr Wettlaufer for bringing the bill forward. This has taken courage. This is a bill designed on the go-forward basis. In my view, this is the right thing to do. I thank my colleague across the way, Mr Parsons, for his advice. Perhaps there is a way, once this bill can go to committee, that through working together and trying to find a way, perhaps with amendments—it is a very complicated matter. I say that in Mr Wettlaufer's work I know that he has tried to find ways to add as much flexibility as possible while still maintaining integrity in this position. One of the key challenges will be to find ways to speak to those in the adoptive community, and I use that word broadly, so that when any change might be undertaken, all the right people are notified fairly and properly before any changes are undertaken.

I simply want to say I thank my colleague for introducing this and bringing another perspective, a fair perspective, I think, that is essentially designed on a go-forward basis. I will support him in this endeavour, and I thank him again for bringing it forward.

Mr Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London): I just want to state right off the bat that I won't be supporting this bill. In her presentation, the minister said twice that this is a "go-forward bill." But it's actually a regressive bill, because it isn't going forward, it's not doing what the honourable member Ms Churley wanted to do. We need a piece of legislation that is progressive and is going to work in the best interests of adoptees and those

families in this province. That's why we should be supporting Bill 16.

The minister said that it requires action and it's all or nothing. If she wants to see some action, then let's get Marilyn Churley's bill to committee and have it debated and not continue to have this bill blocked. It's amazing in the four years that I've been in this Legislature how many times this bill has come forward, received second reading and then been blocked. I don't think it's appropriate that that should be happening. Quite honestly, you get to a point in this Legislature where I say we should call the question and let those who are in favour stand up and let those who are opposed stand up. But let's call the question and get on with it and not continue to delay this bill and put it on the back burner. Let's get Bill 16 to committee. But Bill 60 isn't a piece of legislation that is moving this forward; it's a step backwards in time.

We've certainly received a number of e-mails and correspondence. I think some of these e-mails need to be read into the record.

From Parent Finders National Capital Region, which has been supporting individuals and members for over 28 years: "We consider this bill to be retrogressive, in that its clauses show a punitive approach to family meeting families. In addition, this bill shows a clear disregard of all new thinking in adoption, of all new research in adoption, and of all similar legislative changes in adoption in Canada. We are, frankly, appalled to see such legislation showing up at this time in Ontario."

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From a constituent of my own from Dorchester, Ontario: "For many years the adoption community has been fighting to get the adoption records opened for ... adoptees ... Bill 16, that is currently on the table, ... would allow adoptees to learn their heritage and more importantly their medical history.

"By allowing Bill 60 to be brought forward it would set Ontario members of the adoption community back in time several decades.

"Over the past 50 or more years illnesses and diseases in families have been recognized and labelled. Birth parents of those adoptees, with the expertise of our educated medical researchers, have recognized severe diseases that have plagued their families. This knowledge must be passed on to the adoptees in order for them to continue on with a healthy life...

"I am a reunited birth parent and an adoptive parent of four adult adoptees who have searched and learned their heritage and medical background history. My birth daughter has learned, although it was too late, where the genetic disease came from that her son was born with but unfortunately her son died of this illness when he was seven years old."

From another e-mail: "As an adopted child nothing would please me more than to know where I came from, who I look like and what traits I get from who."

Another: "Many, if not all of you, do not know what it's like to be adopted, do not know what it feels like to

have no idea who you look like or what genes you may be carrying."

Another comment: "Bill 60 does not reflect the wishes of the adoption community."

Another e-mail: "This is the first time I have ever supported a political action.

"I am almost 50 years old. I have no adopted family left. I want to know and deserve to know who it is that I am related to.

"My own adopted sons will one day know who their entire family is. Why must I be an orphan forever?"

Another e-mail: "My husband was adopted when he was a baby. He's been searching for over five years with the help of the Canadian Adoptees Registry... My husband was finally successful. The relief he and our children experienced at being able to get medical history was monumental."

Those are just some of the numerous e-mails that all of us have received. I hope that everybody has taken an opportunity to read them. Let's be progressive, not regressive. Let's stand up and be counted, and not find ways to block a bill in trying to make a trade of two private members' bills for one. Let's stand up and do the job that every one of us was elected to do, and that's to stand up and be counted, not try and hide behind one reason or another. Let's just get on with it, not for the sake of Ms Churley but for the sake of these individuals who are here and the countless others across the province. Let's stand up and be counted. I say, at some point, let's not delay this and let's call the question.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I'd like to welcome members from the adoption community who are with us once again today. They've been down to this place many times over the past 20 or 30 years, I believe. Let me be clear here: this issue has been studied to death. We are not reinventing the wheel here. It sounds as though, in listening to the government members, they haven't read or haven't paid any attention to the research and recommendations that have come to this House under every government of every stripe over the past many, many years. Every single report that has been written since the 1970s, every single committee that has sat on this issue, has recommended that we move forward with adoption disclosure reform now, retroactively.

When the minister and Mr Wettlaufer talked about calling me to a meeting to talk about some kind of compromise, I must admit I was a little bit excited and pleased, thinking, "Perhaps we can talk here." But I went to the meeting to find out that what they were talking about was the bill that Mr Wettlaufer put forward today, which is not retroactive. I must tell you that, upon reading the bill and consulting legislative counsel, it's an ambiguous bill; it's not all that well written. There are some who believe that, accidentally—although Mr Wettlaufer has made it clear today and on other occasions that he doesn't want it to be retroactive—if this bill were to be passed, it could very well end up in court. God knows what would happen then, because it's so badly written.

We all know that the intent is for this bill to not be retroactive, and that defeats the purpose of what this is all about. We've been fighting for years for retroactivity in this province. Most adoptions today are open adoptions. The bill is not needed for today's adoptions. These people are here because they've either been seeking and have found each other or are seeking. These people are here because some of them have been ill. There's a lawsuit that was just—Kariann Ford, who was down at the committee hearings, found out that in her records provided by her birth mother there was information about a deadly disease that's hereditary that she wasn't told about. Her birth mother put that on the file when this woman was 16 years old. They had tried to find each other through that and at least get the medical information relayed, and it wasn't done. They recently settled that suit. That's just one example. There are so many others.

This is about retroactivity, and to try to pretend otherwise and say, "Ms Churley won't compromise" is pure nonsense. We don't need this bill today. I urge people to understand that this just muddies the waters. We do not need this. Let me say, and I believe the adoption community would agree with me, that it is better to pass nothing, which has been what's been going on in this House for a number of years, than to pass this bill today and send it to committee, because it is not retroactive.

It would be a cruel hoax if we were to pass this bill, because many people out there, the people who actually want adoption disclosure reform, the ones seeking, the ones looking, will not be helped at all. To make matters worse, the way this bill is now worded, it could in fact, if this bill were to pass, make things worse than the existing situation.

I'd like to point out that the minister was wrong when she said searches are now only taking three months. You ask these people—it's still taking years. And the system, no matter how long it takes, is not adequate and doesn't work properly.

The other thing this bill possibly does—and again, because it's so badly written it's hard—we're trying to get clarification, but legislative counsel believes that although this bill is not retroactive in terms of people being able to get information and search, it is retroactive, they believe, when it comes to the draconian \$100,000 fine that could be laid on some of these people sitting here, from Parent Finders, the very people—Holly Kramer, who helped me find my son. We went outside the system and found him. Can you believe it that under this bill she, Parent Finders, could be fined \$100,000? The way this bill is worded means that, if it's passed, you will only be able to search within the confines of the registry. If you go off on your own with a private detective or with Parent Finders and other groups who do this work and make a contact based on information received through other means, you could actually get a \$100,000 fine. This is incredible.

I can only believe that's put in there because one of the things—and I'll point it out again, and I've pointed it

out time after time and it's all over the world; we're not reinventing the wheel here—is that there's a contact veto. I know there's at least one person, and many others, who don't even support that, because in jurisdictions now all over the world where this has taken place—in England since the 1970s—and progressively as other jurisdictions are passing such bills, they're not even putting in a contact veto. They're not even putting it in any more. In BC where they have a disclosure veto, which is what the privacy commissioner is now saying she'd like to see, there are lawsuits over it. There are all kinds of problems with it.

What this is all about is an individual's right to know personal information about themselves. So when we talk about my rights as a birth mother or the rights of the adoptive parents—listen, I forget when it was, but about 20 years ago the adoptive parents were able to stop their adopted adult child—I shouldn't use "child" because this is all about adults. The adoptive parents would try to stop them, in some cases, from getting information, and that has been ruled against the law. People have the right to their own personal information, and that is what this is all about.

Let me point out to people that, when the government members stand up and say it's a very complicated issue and a very difficult issue, I know it's an emotional issue, but it's not complicated. If you read the information that's there—go to the files. There's 30 years of research that shows this kind of retroactive bill, correcting a wrong that was done to people in a different social time that has caused so much harm and continues to cause so much harm, as aging birth parents are getting older and dying, as their adopted children who are now growing up or are middle-aged are searching for them, as more and more people are finding out after the fact, in this age of understanding genetic diseases better, that they have diseases that, had they known about them, they would not have passed on to their children—this literally can be a life-saving matter we're talking about here.

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When Mr Wettlaufer first introduced his bill, without consulting with me or anybody from the adoption community, without reading any of the research, he based his rationale on a letter I received from the privacy commissioner. I asked for it because I knew what had been said in other jurisdictions and I thought, well, the privacy commissioner, as she admitted to me, has a very narrow scope. She said that adoption disclosure was outside her scope, but she wanted to comment on it anyway as the privacy commissioner. She expressed, within that narrow scope, concerns about privacy, without the knowledge of other jurisdictions, which most people don't have, and the fact that other privacy commissioners wrote very similar reports, and that on social considerations other governments went ahead anyway.

Since that time, she has written a letter that Mr Wettlaufer read a bit of into the record today, and she would now agree to retroactivity should there be, in addition, an information veto. I can tell you that there are

all kinds of problems with that, as we're seeing in BC and other jurisdictions. I don't know; perhaps the adoption community just wants to fight on until people are willing to be progressive enough to move on and give people this right to their own records and their own information.

I'll tell you what the special commissioner, Professor Ralph Garber, said in 1985. The then Liberal government commissioned the Disclosure of Adoption Information report, and this is a direct quote from him. This was back in 1985, and it goes back even before then: "Facts surrounding a person's adoption belong to that person regardless where the information is stored; revealing those facts has not been shown to cause harm; and renunciation of a right to parent a child at an earlier time does not limit reconsidering a relationship with that child later on."

That was back in the 1980s. Every report you will look at, when the studies are done and the information is collected, shows very clearly that that information, even in terms of human rights, belongs to that individual.

That's what my bill is all about. I would urge members to please—you may want to support your colleague. I understand that. There's a sense that when a colleague comes forward with a bill, it's important to him or her to get it passed and to say, "Even if I don't support it, I'll support it so it can go to committee." I don't want members to do that today, and I'll tell you why. As I said earlier, it will simply muddy the waters and complicate things further, because it is not retroactive.

We all agree within the adoption community—I'm talking about thousands of people who have been struggling for years to get reform in this province—that this bill does absolutely nothing for them. It does not carry us forward. I think we would all agree that we'd rather just stay where we are than to actually pass a bill that is not retroactive in terms of being able to get the information and make the contact, but also could actually shut down a process that is working for people—because the government system isn't working—and that is, for third parties or they themselves to do the searches and then make the contacts. My God, if this bill goes through and people can be fined \$100,000 for going outside the system and doing that, that's reprehensible. It's just not acceptable.

It's not acceptable to me for a member to call me to a meeting to discuss a compromise and then present me with a bill that would not be retroactive, which goes against the grain of everything my bill stands for and everything the community wants. Then to say he's trying to find a compromise and for the minister to say I'm not willing to work on a compromise—my God, this is not about compromise; this is about shutting down what we've been trying to do and build for the last 30 years. It's time for us to move forward.

If people would only read all the research and reports that are available, they might understand what this is all about. What is extremely frustrating to me and to those involved in this fight is that people talk as though we're

reinventing the wheel here. Just since we last debated my bill in this House, Alberta has passed a bill. We've got Newfoundland, Alberta, BC, Yukon—Northwest Territories, I think. We've got jurisdictions all over the world—all over Europe and in the US. It's been done, folks. So when you stand up and talk about individual cases—by the way, under my bill, people could file a contact veto. Again, if you look at the information and the studies that have been done in other jurisdictions, it works. It actually works, because people who are seeking each other are so respectful in the process. After losing each other for so long, when they finally get the information to know they can actually make that contact again, the last thing anybody wants to do is offend or hurt the possibility of that contact taking place and a good relationship developing.

I urge people that if you don't want to support my bill, fine, but don't let this one pass today. I would recommend that my bill go to committee and we can move forward from there.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join in the debate with respect to the member for Kitchener Centre's bill—and that's what we're debating here today.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): Let's get the feds in there.

Mr Tascona: I'm going to get to the federal government.

This bill is An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act and the Child and Family Services Act in respect of disclosure and protection of adoption information. There certainly are issues with respect to this, and the member for Toronto-Danforth has raised one that she specifically thinks is important; that is, the issue of retroactivity. She makes the comment that it would be better for nothing at all to happen here today with Mr Wettlaufer's bill than to pass it.

Interjections.

Mr Tascona: With respect, this is private members' business. He has a right to put forth a bill he believes in, and he's done that.

Dealing with the retroactivity of this bill, I just look at this issue in terms of what we're dealing with here in terms of disclosure and protection of adoption information. I recall a day when the NDP was in government—I believe the member for Toronto-Danforth was in cabinet—and I didn't see anything happen with respect to adoption. From what I understand, all that came forth was through a private member; I think it was Tony Martin who brought forth an adoption bill.

So here we stand today, in 2003. Mr Wettlaufer from Kitchener Centre has brought forth a piece of legislation to deal with this issue. There are issues with respect to retroactivity; for example, the federal gun registry is being heatedly debated in the House of Commons specifically on the issue of retroactivity. The federal government won't go into the retroactivity area. They believe it's against the charter of rights to go retroactively with a specific piece of legislation. That's a

fundamental issue with respect to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms when we deal with public statutes.

We also have the letter with respect to privacy that was given to Mr Wettlaufer from Brian Beamish of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and it very clearly addresses the issue of retroactivity. There are privacy issues; there are also charter issues with respect to that issue.

Let's focus on what's before us today, which has been put forth by the private member, who has a right to bring forth legislation like any other member in this House and not be berated for not having supported someone else's bill. He has a right to put forth a bill. I think he's put a lot of thought into this bill. There are a lot of protections that are put in place, very similar to the legislation, I understand, in British Columbia. So I say to the member for Kitchener Centre that I know he's a hard-working member, I know he's put a lot of thought into this piece of legislation and he has a right as a private member to come forward with it, and we have a right as other private members to debate it and vote on it, and that's what I intend to do.

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Mrs Leona Dombrowsky (Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington): I am happy to have this opportunity to speak today on a topic that I think is very important. I will not be supporting this bill, as I have had an opportunity to review more than 100 e-mails that have come to my office about this bill from people who could possibly be impacted by it. That is compelling in and of itself. We as members receive communications regularly from constituents and from people who will be impacted by legislation. The volume of letters and e-mails we have received on this particular piece of legislation urging us as legislators not to advance it so it could become law in the province—it is seen as retrogressive—was certainly noteworthy and something I know I talked with my caucus members about.

I really have a number of reasons for not supporting this bill. I have, as the record will indicate, supported Ms Churley's Bill 77 and also supported Bill 16, and spoke in favour of those bills on both occasions. I had the opportunity to attend the committee meetings that were held here at the Legislative Assembly. I was most impressed by the presentations that were made at that time. For me, certainly, reading a piece of legislation does not have the same impact as when we go to committee and hear from the public—represented by the people in this room—their views and thoughts on proposed legislation. On that occasion I was quite impressed with the presentations that were made.

All of them, I might add, were in favour of Ms Churley's bill. When I reflected and had the opportunity to review the public record of those presentations, clearly the most important part of the bill that was being considered by the committee was the fact it was retroactive. I recall, particularly, the stories of people who had health issues, who said that if they had had the opportunity to

access and understand that there was a particular health issue in their birth family, that would have enabled them to make decisions in their own lives that may have prevented, or at the very least enabled them to understand, health issues they needed to be aware of. I think it's important to note that this bill has no consideration of that.

I have a lot of things I want to speak to. It has been suggested by members of the government that this bill is a compromise. This is not a compromise. This really does very little to change what is in place in the laws of Ontario at the present time. Ms Churley's bill, on the other hand, would be more akin to legislation that is in place in many progressive jurisdictions around the world. It was at the committee meetings that I understood that in Canada, British Columbia, Newfoundland, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut have opened their adoption records. England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Argentina, Mexico, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Austria, Germany, France and New Zealand all have their adoptions open. I guess my question is, I don't understand why we in this province are so reticent to provide enabling legislation.

I have every respect for those people who were given to understand that their circumstances would always be their own business and their information would not be shared. And Ms Churley's bill does include the contact veto component, which is designed to address the issues that have been raised around the privacy commissioner. I do respect an individual's request for privacy, and I believe that Ms Churley's bill indeed did that.

I don't think that this is a progressive bill. Certainly the contacts that have been made to me about it have not been positive. I will not be supporting the bill this morning.

Mr Bob Wood (London West): As many members know, I favour as much openness as possible in the adoption process. I do that because I think giving people all the facts about themselves gives them the maximum opportunity to live their lives in the most positive way possible. I know that members on both sides of the House feel strongly about this issue and I think they all have reasons that are genuine and credible.

My heart in this debate, however, is with the side of as much information as possible being available to the individual. But my head also tells me that a good idea badly executed becomes a bad idea. I think that when we look at the history of adoption in this province, we have to note that people who were involved in adoptions years ago became involved on the basis of the ground rules that existed at that time. To make fundamental changes to those ground rules later, in effect without their consent, surely is not fair to them, nor is it likely that those people are going to perceive themselves as having been dealt with fairly by the government.

I think our object with this bill or any bill about adoption should be reconciliation and healing. I think we have to proceed with great care to make sure we're doing that

and not unintentionally involving ourselves in something that doesn't promote that.

This bill I think is a step forward. I am not at this point convinced that retroactivity is the right route to go. I would invite members of the House to consider that this bill should go to committee. The principle of this, which I have voted in favour of on a number of occasions, is greater openness. That's a sound principle. The execution of it is a very legitimate matter that should be considered in committee.

I invite the House to support this bill in principle, refer it to a committee and give the committee a chance to take a look at the details. I hope that it will be possible to get from committee a bill that this House can consider and vote on for third reading.

I would like to make one brief observation about this bill. There's been a lot of talk about privacy considerations, and I think those concerns are well founded. I think the fact that this bill increases penalties for privacy violations is a good provision. It may well be the provisions themselves, as to whom they apply to, have to be looked at, and that should be done at committee, but the principle is surely sound: to punish privacy violations.

Mr Wettlaufer: I want to thank all of the members who have spoken on this bill: the members from Prince Edward-Hastings and Trinity-Spadina, the Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services, the members from Elgin-Middlesex-London, Toronto-Danforth, Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, and London West.

The one thing I would like to say to the members—the member from Prince Edward-Hastings and I share a lot of beliefs on the adoption procedure and adoption legislation. He did say that we need a bill to allow a birth parent to opt out. I believe that this bill does that. That is the purpose of the legislation, to allow the parent to opt out.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner referred to the member from Toronto-Danforth's bill. She said it that was too exclusive, that once the contact veto was withdrawn, it could not be renewed. In this bill here, contact and disclosure vetoes can be withdrawn and renewed at any time, any number of times. We have tried very hard to provide a bill which will meet the needs of the majority of those impacted. I would be more than willing to have this go to committee. I would love to hear what the members of the committee would have to say on it. The member for Toronto-Danforth said that it was poorly written. That's an accusation against leg counsel, the same leg counsel that she likes to support so many times. I'm a little surprised. I thought that's why we had lawyers around here.

The member for Toronto-Danforth was the registrar general. Why did she not pass legislation herself?

The Acting Speaker: This completes the time allocated for debate on ballot item 14, it being 12 o'clock noon. I will now deal with ballot item 13.

PREVENTING PARTISAN
ADVERTISING ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 VISANT À EMPÊCHER LA
PUBLICITÉ À CARACTÈRE POLITIQUE

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Mr Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 91, An Act to end government spending on partisan advertising.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will have the division after I deal with ballot item 14.

DISCLOSURE AND PROTECTION OF
ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR
LA DIVULGATION ET LA PROTECTION
DE RENSEIGNEMENTS
SUR LES ADOPTIONS

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): Mr Wettlaufer moved second reading of Bill 60, An Act to amend the Vital Statistics Act and the Child and Family Services Act in respect to disclosure and protection of adoption information.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All in favour will say "aye."

All opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the "ayes" have it.

We will now call in the members for second reading of Bill 91. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

PREVENTING PARTISAN
ADVERTISING ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 VISANT À EMPÊCHER LA
PUBLICITÉ À CARACTÈRE POLITIQUE

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): All those in favour will please stand and remain standing until their name is called.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie
Bisson, Gilles	Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hampton, Howard	Peters, Steve
Boyer, Claudette	Kennedy, Gerard	Phillips, Gerry
Bradley, James J.	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Pupatello, Sandra
Caplan, David	Levac, David	Ramsay, David
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Martel, Shelley	Smitherman, George
Cordiano, Joseph	Martin, Tony	
Dombrowsky, Leona	McMeekin, Ted	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please stand and remain standing until their name is called.

Nays

Arnett, Ted	Gill, Raminder	Mushinski, Marilyn
Baird, John R.	Guzzo, Garry J.	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Hudak, Tim	Sampson, Rob
Chudleigh, Ted	Johns, Helen	Sterling, Norman W.
Clark, Brad	Johnson, Bert	Stewart, R. Gary
Clement, Tony	Kells, Morley	Tascona, Joseph N.
Cunningham, Dianne	Klees, Frank	Tsubouchi, David H.
DeFaria, Carl	Martiniuk, Gerry	Turnbull, David
Ecker, Janet	Mazzilli, Frank	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Elliott, Brenda	McDonald, AL	Wilson, Jim
Flaherty, Jim	Miller, Norm	Wood, Bob
Galt, Doug	Molinari, Tina R.	Young, David
Gilchrist, Steve	Munro, Julia	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 31; the nays are 38.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost. We will open the door for 30 seconds.

DISCLOSURE AND PROTECTION OF
ADOPTION INFORMATION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR
LA DIVULGATION ET LA PROTECTION
DE RENSEIGNEMENTS
SUR LES ADOPTIONS

The Acting Speaker (Mr Michael A. Brown): All those in favour will stand and remain standing until their name is called.

Ayes

Arnett, Ted	Gill, Raminder	Sampson, Rob
Barrett, Toby	Guzzo, Garry J.	Sterling, Norman W.
Chudleigh, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Stewart, R. Gary
Clark, Brad	Johns, Helen	Tascona, Joseph N.
Clement, Tony	Kells, Morley	Tsubouchi, David H.
Cunningham, Dianne	Klees, Frank	Turnbull, David
DeFaria, Carl	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wettlaufer, Wayne
Ecker, Janet	Mazzilli, Frank	Wilson, Jim
Elliott, Brenda	McDonald, AL	Wood, Bob
Flaherty, Jim	Miller, Norm	Young, David
Galt, Doug	Molinari, Tina R.	
Gilchrist, Steve	Munro, Julia	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please stand and remain standing until their name is called.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic	Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie
Baird, John R.	Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard
Bisson, Gilles	Hampton, Howard	Peters, Steve
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kennedy, Gerard	Phillips, Gerry
Boyer, Claudette	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Pupatello, Sandra
Bryant, Michael	Levac, David	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Marchese, Rosario	Ruprecht, Tony
Churley, Marilyn	Martel, Shelley	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	Martin, Tony	Smitherman, George
Cordiano, Joseph	McMeekin, Ted	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mushinski, Marilyn	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 34; the nays are 34.

The Acting Speaker: I cast my vote in favour.

The ayes being 35, the nays being 34, I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, the bill is now referred to the committee of the whole.

Mr Wayne Wettlaufer (Kitchener Centre): I request that it be submitted to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

The Acting Speaker: Agreed?

All those in favour will please stand and remain standing.

All those opposed will please stand.

A majority is in favour. The bill will be referred to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

Hon David Turnbull (Associate Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm sure all members would like to recognize the presence of my daughter Nicole, here in the gallery.

The Acting Speaker: That, of course, is not a point of order. Welcome, Nicole.

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask unanimous consent for Bill 91 to go to the general government committee.

The Acting Speaker: No.

It being after 12 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1214 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**RUSSIAN CANADIAN COMMUNITY**

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Just 13 years ago, a monumental event took place that shook the world and changed the geopolitical nature of Europe and Asia: a new Russia was born. On June 12, 1990, the Russian Parliament proclaimed the national sovereignty of the Russian Federation. Russia started to build a new democratic civic society where political and economic freedoms and human rights are its main values. Today we congratulate the Russian people for joining our democratic countries and embracing the values of freedom and liberty and new independence.

Today, as we celebrate, we're also mindful of the contributions that Russian Canadians have made all over our country. In fact, the first Russians appeared on Canada's shores in 1790 as fur traders. Since then, as immigration waves came to this country, we find that Russian Canadians have made contributions in all aspects of Canadian life, and we share in that pleasure.

Our congratulations go to the distinguished guests who have joined us today in the gallery from the Russian consulate in Toronto, which started its activities half a year ago to promote trade and cultural ties between friendly nations.

I'm delighted today to introduce them to this Legislature: Nikolay Smirnov, consul general of the Russian

Federation; Valery Timashov, deputy consul general; Valery Tokmakov, president of Tokmakov TV Productions; Roman Ostrovsky, business consultant; Yuri Vaulin, senior adviser to the vice-mayor of Moscow; Sergei Kobzev, representative of the federal construction department of Russia; Duchess Olga Kulikovskiy-Romanoff; and Alina Pekarsky.

I'm delighted they have joined us today. Congratulations to them.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): We welcome our honoured guests.

FAIRY LAKE ARTISANS FESTIVAL

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): This coming weekend, June 14 and 15, the North Newmarket Lions Club is hosting the fifth annual Fairy Lake Artisans Festival and juried art show and sale.

The first festival was held in 1998. With 55 artisans, the event attracted 3,500 visitors to Newmarket. In five years, the artisans festival has grown to 115 artisans and 11,000 visitors. Artisans and visitors travel from all over Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Florida to take part in this exciting event.

Artists' work in woodwork, leather works, glass blowing, metal works, painting and handmade clothing are all on display and are for sale. Everything is handmade by the artisans. Even when moulds are used, the mould must be of original design. A jury of accomplished artisans judges all applications to ensure that only high-quality products are displayed in the show.

There is entertainment for the whole family. Musicians and balloon artists perform throughout the weekend.

Why not come to Newmarket for Father's Day? There is something for the whole family at the Fairy Lake Artisans Festival, June 14 and 15, 10 am to 5 pm, at Fairy Lake in the Wesley Brooks Conservation Area in the town of Newmarket.

A very special thank you to Elda Brown, Ernie Crossland, Dan Rivet, Michael Springford and the rest of the North Newmarket Lions Club volunteers who make the artisans festival the great success it has become.

MINISTER'S EXPENSES

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): There is not a day that I enter this chamber without being in awe of the responsibility I have as a member of provincial Parliament. Decisions made in this Legislature affect health care, education and so many other matters for both us and for future generations.

We are privileged to be here, but a tremendous responsibility rests on our shoulders: a responsibility to every taxpayer in Ontario to be a trustee of public money, a responsibility to be a role model and a responsibility to be personally accountable.

Clearly, the Minister of the Environment has lost this vision. While his method of financing his family trip to

Europe demonstrates bad judgment, his continually changing version of how it was funded clearly demonstrates his inability to assume responsibility for his actions. His explanation that everyone does it is a child-like defence of the incident. This remark unfairly attacks the reputations of members on both sides of this House.

Democracy works only when the public can have absolute trust in the actions of their elected officials. Our citizens need to have total faith that a cabinet minister is working for them as their servant. This is clearly not the case with the Minister of the Environment's European excursion.

For the sake of democracy, for the sake of the interests of the people of Ontario, for the sake of our citizens being able to have faith in our system, I call upon the Minister of the Environment to submit his resignation from cabinet, effective immediately.

HEALTH SERVICES IN BARRIE-SIMCOE-BRADFORD

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): As MPP for the riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, I wish to thank all my constituents who attended my seventh annual pancake breakfast, held at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 147 in Barrie, and first pancake breakfast held at the Innisfil Lions Hall. Proceeds go toward women's cancer research, treatment and prevention at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie, through the state-of-the-art women's imaging centre.

I am proud of our government's health investments in my riding, which include the new Royal Victoria Hospital, opened in 1997—RVH has Simcoe county's only MRI machine; the expansion of RVH's cancer care centre is to be completed this summer; the new RVH kidney dialysis centre; the new RVH kidney stroke recovery centre; and the RVH expansion and the regional cancer centre are at the final approval stage at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

The north Innisfil centre recently opened to serve our seniors at Sandy Cove Acres. The Southlake Regional Health Centre expansion and the new regional cardiac care centre are some of the other accomplishments.

I am very proud of being able to provide these closer-to-home health services to my riding, which is Barrie, Innisfil and Bradford-West Gwillimbury. It's important for people to get their health care services closer to home, and we've accomplished that.

PHILIPPINES INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): It is my honour to rise today to help the Legislature acknowledge and appreciate Filipino independence day. Today, June 12, represents 105 years of Philippine independence. If you look outside the Legislature today, the Philippine flag is flying, as it is down at city hall, where a number of our members—in fact, 10, including our

leader, Dalton McGuinty—attended a ceremony a short time ago, where a number of attendees still are.

In 1898 was the beginning of what Filipinos recognize as their independence, and they recognize today in the way they behave today here in Canada as exemplary citizens, Dr Rizal and the sacrifice he made at the beginning of that revolution.

But there have been other struggles, and those struggles have conditioned the people who have been enormous contributors as a group to the well-being of Canada. What then should happen in return from the rest of the Canadian community—and I say, Mr Speaker, that these things put meaning into flag-raising; the unconditional respect of their citizens to acknowledge the amazing contribution they've made, people like Monina Lim-Seriano and Pilar Miguel and Ricky Castellui, people who attend today and a number of the people who are in attendance. We also want to acknowledge Alejandro Mosquera, the new consul general from the Philippines, who's with us here today.

1340

I know that everyone in the gallery will want to especially appreciate the disproportionate role and risk that fell to the Philippine community during the SARS outbreak for the nurses, the doctors and the health care workers. I ask you to join with me in acknowledging this community today.

MISSISSAUGA WATERFRONT FESTIVAL

Mrs Margaret Marland (Mississauga South): I am pleased to advise all members that the Mississauga Waterfront Festival starts tomorrow and runs until Sunday, June 15, in Port Credit's Memorial Park. Now in its seventh year, the festival features top-rated performers, including world-renowned Jann Arden, Kim Mitchell, Paul James, Loco Zydeco, Infra Red and Carol McCartney.

Families will love the Children's Village, with attractions such as the Toy Castle, McDonald's Sports Zone and many more activities for children of all ages.

The excitement is also on the water, as the Mississauga Canoe Club holds its home regatta. And no one will want to miss the Festival of Fire, lighting up the night sky on Friday and Saturday.

This fun-filled event is a true bargain at just \$5 for children and \$10 for adults for the whole weekend.

On behalf of all Mississauga residents, I am honoured to thank the hard-working festival board, chaired by Pat Anderson, and the many corporate sponsors. While they are too numerous to list, special mention must go to the presenting sponsor, Expedite Plus, and to the Port Credit Business Association, which has been instrumental in developing the festival from the beginning.

No event of this scale can succeed without many dedicated volunteers. We also owe them our gratitude. I would particularly recognize the supporters of the Spon-

sor a Child program, which allows 2,000 children recommended by caring local agencies to enjoy a carefree weekend.

Thank you, everyone, for your commitment to our community.

MINISTER'S EXPENSES

Mrs Marie Bountrogianni (Hamilton Mountain): It seems some people have trouble learning their lesson. Usually when someone gets caught with their hand in the cookie jar, they don't reach right back in for more. But not the Minister of the Environment: he reaches right back in and asks for more.

What's worse is that after he's caught, he keeps changing his story. One day the reporter misquoted him, but it turns out he didn't. One day Chris Stockwell paid for his family himself, but it turns out he didn't. The people of Etobicoke and the people of Ontario have lost all of their confidence in Chris Stockwell. Nobody trusts a word he says, and why should they, when he can't keep his own story straight?

Here are the facts. Chris Stockwell hid expenses through a private company, and he still refuses to say how much that private company paid for his European vacation. Chris Stockwell said he paid for his family to go on vacation with him; he didn't. Chris Stockwell said the reporter made up quotes; the reporter didn't.

The behaviour of Minister Stockwell is despicable and reflects poorly on all people in public office. Shame on Chris Stockwell for channelling his expenses and changing his story. He has no credibility. He has no integrity. He must resign.

Where is the Minister of the Environment today? He can run, but he can't hide.

PAM NEWTON

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I believe that a quality education is necessary for our students to succeed. Teachers play a very important role in this process by opening the door for children to learn. With creativity and energy, students enjoy school and want to learn.

On that note, I would like to bring the attention of this Legislature to a wonderful achievement by a teacher in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. Pam Newton, a grade 5 art and grade 7/8 special-education language teacher at William Beatty Public School in Parry Sound, has been awarded first prize in the A&E Canadian teacher grant program. The A&E television network launched this program in 2001, and this is one of three first-prize grants awarded by the program.

Through these grants, A&E challenges teachers nationwide to develop innovative and challenging curriculum using their classroom programming. Ms Newton used A&E's Michelangelo: Artist and Man program to introduce a study of that artist. Her creative lesson plan

allowed students to see and discuss Michelangelo's famous works in order to better understand the challenges he faced and his achievements.

I met many of these students two weeks ago when they visited this Legislature. They are bright and interesting students with good questions. Ms Newton's art lessons have opened a new world to these students.

I congratulate Ms Newton on this award and grant. It is great news for her and everyone at William Beatty school, especially the students.

NORTHERN ONTARIO ECONOMY

Mr Tony Martin (Sault Ste Marie): Every day that passes now, northern Ontario's economy is being hit. Every city, town or hamlet in the north has lost significant population, a very clear indicator that there is something drastically wrong. What's wrong is a provincial government missing in action, not doing anything, and when they do, their actions further disadvantage communities in the north—sins of omission and sins of commission.

I've raised on numerous occasions the challenges facing the small town of Wawa and surrounding area where hydro is concerned. This Tuesday in Sault Ste Marie we gathered together 50 community leaders to look at the challenges facing my city, the city of Sault Ste Marie.

Today I'm sending an open letter to the Minister of the Environment concerning a small business in a little hamlet just east of Sault Ste Marie in Echo Bay, where a sawmill has been shut down by his ministry for no good reason.

Echo Bay Milling Ltd is a small specialty mill run by two of my constituents, Conrad and Shirley Mainville. The mill employs seven people in a town with few employment opportunities. The mill has recently been shut down by your ministry for supposedly not meeting emission standards. The fact is that the mill does meet the emission standards based on the test that currently exists in legislation. After passing the test that is on the books, your ministry demanded that they be tested again on a new stricter test that does not exist under law.

Minister, we're asking you to intervene immediately to give those people back their ability to make a living.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I was speaking this morning on Bill 60 from the member for Kitchener Centre. I want to correct the Hansard. I referred to the federal gun registry, and I should have been referring to the federal sex offender registry, on the issue of retroactivity.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I thank the member for that.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

DWARF TOSSING BAN ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003

INTERDISANT LE LANCER DE NAIN

Ms Pupatello moved first reading of the following bill: Bill 97, An Act to ban dwarf tossing / Projet de loi 97, Loi interdisant le lancer de nain.

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. Carried.

The member for a short statement?

Ms Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): I appreciate that this is likely news for the members of this House. We have tried to have a copy of the bill placed on your desk in time for question period today so that you can read it.

The background on this bill is simple. This evening in my riding, a particular establishment is actually planning an event that includes dwarf-tossing. My community is up in arms. My phones have been besieged. The community is outraged that this event should be allowed to happen.

Dwarf-tossing has been banned in other jurisdictions around the world, and I believe it should be banned in Ontario as well. I have had legislative counsel work diligently from just before noon to be ready for this afternoon, the bill to be printed, the bill to be translated, and, as well, time taken so we could speak with the House leader's office, the whip's office and the Attorney General's office. I have had the opportunity to speak with Minister Norm Sterling about its content and he has seen it.

After question period, I would like to ask for second and third reading, giving our minister an opportunity to read the bill. Hopefully, we'll be able to have second and third reading today. My goal is to have the bill become law so that this event will in fact be banned tonight.

1350

The Speaker: I thank the member. As members will know, we do not allow bills to be put on desks before they are introduced. Having said that, now that the bills have been introduced, if members would like copies to be made available to them and if that would be helpful, we will try to accommodate them as quickly as possible.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PUBLIC HEALTH

Ms Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Minister of Health. I'd like to turn your attention to information that was made available on the CBC

this morning which is actually the submission to cabinet on SARS infectious disease control and the ministry's plan for action. Given that information was made public this morning and includes the difficulty the health ministry has had to grapple and cope with SARS, the difficulty and crisis level that our health system has reached, will you stand in your place today and admit that we have not properly funded our public health system to allow us to respond to these kinds of crises? Will you admit that finally today, Minister?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm not entirely sure what document she is referring to. I do not have a copy of the document she is referring to, and she has not provided one to me.

I can tell the honourable member and, through her, this chamber that indeed public health unit budgets have increased each and every year since 1998, and more is being spent on public health than ever before. Between 1998 and 2002, the overall budgets for all 37 public health units across Ontario increased by over 43%, and staffing levels have also increased between 1998 and 2001, by 31%.

Today in Ontario there are almost 5,200 public health nurses, public health doctors, public health inspectors, scientists and other staff. Certainly, we have all been grappling with a difficult situation, and I must commend public health officials throughout the province for their excellent work on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Ms Pupatello: For the minister, I must say that this was presented to cabinet on April 29, and in the cabinet submission to your cabinet at the end of April it identified that public health programs across the province do not have staff in place to provide programs mandatory under the Health Protection and Promotion Act. It says that all food safety, immunization tracking and Healthy Babies programs in Toronto have been suspended. It goes on to say that in the event of a major disaster in Toronto, the Ontario health system would have been brought to its knees.

You just stood up and started spouting a whole bunch of numbers to the public. What really matters is that we have told you repeatedly that you fired scientists in laboratories that we've needed, that you have cut funding to public health so that they cannot do their mandatory programs, and now the proof in the document submission is that your cabinet knew it. Minister, will you stand in your place today and admit finally that you have had a hand in our not being able to cope with this SARS outbreak?

Hon Mr Clement: No, I wouldn't do that, because that would not be true. I would say to the honourable member that of course we are aware that in the midst of the emergency that is SARS, public health officials in some public health agencies did, for a period of time, take employees off other programs to work on the SARS emergency. That has been a matter of public record that has been confirmed by Sheela Basrur as well as other public health officials. So the great revelation that the honourable member refers to is in fact no revelation at

all. It is a fact that that occurred, and that was the right thing to do. When you're dealing with a public health emergency, you do take resources temporarily from other areas in order to deal with the emergency. Our job, on behalf of the government of Ontario, is to ensure that we have the right responses for the future, the right resources for the future, the right officials for the future, and nurses, doctors and other medical professionals for the future, so that we can be even better—

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

Ms Pupatello: I need to remind this minister of something this House should never forget, and that is, in 1996 your government's cabinet was presented with business plans for how ministries were going to operate under your new normal for funding of ministries, and it meant cuts. So you may want to talk about increases, but it is well after you significantly cut public health units in this province. When they received this submission for the Ministry of the Environment, it resulted in and is linked through the inquiry recommendations to those deaths in Walkerton.

I am telling you today that we have a copy of the cabinet submission. In the submission that you brought to your cabinet colleagues, it tells us clearly that our system is not able to cope with the SARS outbreak. It is not able to cope with everything else when an outbreak is going on. It suggests to us that all other programs under public health have been suspended because of their pursuit in trying to deal with SARS.

Minister, we have had over 30 people die in this province. You didn't learn the lesson from Walkerton when your cabinet was given information about what happens when you cut ministries. Will we see this happen again or will you finally take action to see that our system is secure?

Hon Mr Clement: We have done more than the rhetoric that the honourable member is espousing here in the House. We've actually acted. Premier Eves—and I was very proud of him when he did this—announced \$720 million of SARS-related funding to the hospitals, to health workers, to public health, for the future of public health, for a better public health system for the province in the wake of some lessons that we have learned together. I don't think anybody is trying to avoid that issue. We're actually dealing with the issue head-on. We acted.

If the honourable member really wants to be helpful in this House, I have another copy of a letter directed to the Prime Minister of Canada. I'm signing it right now. There is a signature line for Tony Clement and there is a signature line for Dalton McGuinty, Leader of the Opposition. If a page could come here right now, I'd be happy to present that to Mrs Pupatello so she can send it to her leader. If he wants to be helpful, if you want to be helpful, sign the letter now. Sign it now, be helpful. Be helpful for the people of Ontario; be helpful for the future of this province.

The Speaker: I'm afraid the minister's time is up.

MINISTER'S EXPENSES

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): My question is for the Deputy Premier. It's a short question and it could get a short answer. Does the Ernie Eves government stand 100% behind the actions and judgment of Minister Stockwell?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): I think the member knows that the issue of Mr Stockwell and his expenses has been referred to the Integrity Commissioner by Mr Stockwell.

Mr Bryant: The Deputy Premier could have said yes, that the government is going to defend, and she didn't. Yet you continue to let this persist. I say that you need to start listening to the voices of Ontarians, who have said that this obstinate defence of this minister is the wrong thing for the government of Ontario to do.

In the *Globe and Mail* today the same editorial board that endorsed the PC government in 1999 called for Minister Stockwell's resignation not only from cabinet but from the House. The *Toronto Star* said that either Minister Stockwell should resign or Ernie Eves should fire him. The *National Post* columnist said that Minister Stockwell's story just doesn't wash. The *Globe and Mail* columnist said that Ernie Eves is leaving the minister twisting in the wind and that in fact his behaviour is defenceless.

It is defenceless, Minister. It is defenceless, I say to the Deputy Premier. Why do you continue to defend it? Either Premier Ernie Eves is lowering his standards to avoid the embarrassment of the resignation of a frontbencher or in fact the Premier's standards are just as low as Minister Stockwell's.

Hon Mrs Witmer: I would just repeat what I said before. The minister has referred this to the Integrity Commissioner and I understand that the Integrity Commissioner will be making a ruling on this issue.

Mr Bryant: I think the dismissal of this matter and the refusal to either defend the minister or have some action is simply unacceptable. I say to you, you've got to listen to not only the voices in this Legislature but also the voices of some representatives and stakeholders who, frankly, have been your traditional allies. Consider the call from John Williamson, the Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. He said the minister should step down and if he doesn't step down, the Premier should ask for his resignation. This, from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

It's not just the official opposition that is calling for this minister's resignation; it is also from voices that can hardly be accused of being your traditional foes. The voices are piling up, and I know that members are hearing in their community that the culpable judgment that has been exercised here by this minister and the mortal wound to his credibility that has been struck by the change in the versions of his story demands his resignation. The people have had enough of this. It is time for the government to act. It is time for the government to call for the resignation of this minister now.

1400

Hon Mrs Witmer: The minister has referred this to the Integrity Commissioner, and as the member opposite knows, there is a process in place. I understand that the independent Integrity Commissioner will be making a ruling on this particular situation.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Health. You say you do not have a copy of your own government's cabinet submission. What a surprise. Everyone else in the building seems to have one.

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I have one.

Mr Hampton: Oh, you have one now. Minister, I refer you to page 4 of this document, where it talks about the impact of SARS. I'll just read a couple of the quotes. For example, "Wait times for cancer services ... are increasing from 62 days to an anticipated 90 to 100 days." Then it says, "One weekend at Sunnybrook, a 648-bed acute care facility, the trauma unit was closed, the intensive care units were closed, the burn unit serving Toronto was almost closed. In the event of a major disaster in Toronto, the Ontario health system would have been brought to its knees."

Over the past month, we've been raising these exact concerns with you, that health units were having to take staff from one area to fight SARS, that hospitals were having to cannibalize programs, and you denied it all. Minister, why did you deny those things when, in fact, your own cabinet submission says that they were true, they were happening? Why did you deny it?

Hon Mr Clement: I don't know what the honourable member is talking about. I remember attending several press conferences with Cancer Care Ontario as we sought, in the midst of the initial SARS outbreak, to ensure that cancer care patients were looked after within a system—just to remind the honourable member, hospitals in the GTA in the first SARS outbreak were shut down for all elective procedures. This document to which he refers is dated April 29. On April 29, that was the situation, which we at no time denied. In fact, the document that he refers to goes on to say, "In spite of the scale of the challenge, Ontario has coped well." That is because our health care workers, doctors, nurses, medical practitioners, EMS staff and public health officials are doing and were doing their jobs, and we owe them all an applause of thanks for the excellent work that they did and are still doing in the province of Ontario.

Mr Hampton: Those health care workers are indeed doing excellent work out there, no thanks to you and no thanks to your government. In a question that I put to you and the Premier on May 26, I noted that Dr Sheela Basrur, one of the heroes, pointed out, "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.” I referred to cannibalizing one health care program in order to deal with the SARS crisis. At the time, you denied that. You said it wasn’t true. You said that people were exaggerating—the same sorts of things that you said about Walkerton. Minister, why did you deny that health units were having to cannibalize programs like food inspection, having to shut down programs like Healthy Babies, having to shut down other health care programs in order to deal with SARS? Why did you deny at the time that that’s exactly what was happening out there?

Hon Mr Clement: Speaker, this emergency and then the outbreak has occurred over the space of three months. If the honourable member is talking about a point in time, let’s make sure that members in the House know that different things happened on different points in time with respect to this outbreak. I think that’s being honest and fair. But if you want to get to this document, why don’t you read along with me the short-term action plan and what has been done by this government to make sure that our health care system is operating properly?

“Immediately establish six mobile SARS/infectious disease mobile response teams, rising to 10 teams if required.” Done.

“Proceed with the immediate implementation of the integrated public health information system.” Done.

“Announce a comprehensive SARS research program and future research on other infectious diseases.” Done.

“Establish a staffing stabilization fund to ensure ongoing availability of critical health care staff.” Done.

“Establishing ‘new normal.’” Done.

If the honourable member wants to keep on asking me questions, I’ll keep on answering him, but I think—

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

Mr Hampton: Minister, you know what? Your government is very good at making announcements. While 33 people die, while dozens of nurses risk their health, you’re very good at making announcements.

Do you know what is really telling about this document? What’s really telling on the communications section is this: at a time when people were dying, at a time when nurses couldn’t get the equipment they wanted and needed in terms of masks, what was your strategy? Your strategy, the first step being advised by you and your ministry, was, “Reassure the public in Ontario and in fact internationally that Toronto and the GTA are safe.” Your whole directive was about communications; it wasn’t about continuing the guard, keeping up the guard against SARS; it wasn’t about providing nurses and health care workers with the equipment and support they needed. Your whole answer was communications spin.

Minister, here’s some communications advice for you. Maybe if you’d been as concerned about containing this virus and protecting the public and health care workers, we wouldn’t be facing the second outbreak of SARS. When did communications spin take precedence over protecting the public of Ontario?

Hon Mr Clement: This is patently absurd. If you want to read the document in its entirety so that the peo-

ple of Ontario know that we had at that time worked on an implementation plan which we are now doing or have done—that is much closer to the truth. If the honourable member wants to say it is unsafe to be in Toronto, unsafe to be in Ontario, I want him to stand in his place and say that right now, because that is against the public health information, that is against the evidence of the day, that is against the interests of the hard-working health care workers and the people of Ontario, that is against the interests of Ontario, because it’s just not true. That is not what an aspiring Premier should be spreading, either in this place or throughout Ontario. Shame on you, sir, and shame on your caucus.

MINISTER’S EXPENSES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My next question is for the Deputy Premier. When Cam Jackson was expelled from cabinet by the Premier, he claimed it was because Mr Jackson had been less than forthcoming about his lavish steak house expenses, yet your Minister of the Environment has been anything but forthcoming. He has done everything he could possibly do to hide the facts. First, he tried to hide the fact that a private corporation, Ontario Power Generation, paid for his junket to Europe. Then, when that became public knowledge and he was forced to admit it, he tried to say that he paid for all of the personal expenses himself. But then it emerged that that wasn’t completely accurate either, that in fact the riding association, complete with a lot of big contributions from corporations that are interested in hydro privatization, had paid for a major portion of his expenses. The minister has been anything but forthcoming. In fact, he makes Mr Jackson look like Honest Abe Lincoln. Why is the Minister of the Environment still in the cabinet when Mr Jackson is sitting on the back bench?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): In response to the question from the leader of the third party, I would just remind him that the issue has been referred to the Integrity Commissioner and that no doubt we all await the recommendation and the outcome of that investigation.

1410

Mr Hampton: You and the Premier have to set some standards, Deputy Premier. You can’t say that it’s all the Integrity Commissioner’s fault. Either you have standards or you don’t.

Last summer, when your government’s privatization and deregulation of hydroelectricity was sending hydro rates skyrocketing through the roof across the province, the then Minister of Energy, now Minister of the Environment, was traipsing across Europe on a junket paid for by one private hydro corporation and by a whole lot of individuals who were interested in hydro privatization because they wanted to make a lot of money out of it.

Since then, he has done everything he could to avoid being straightforward. He has tried to hide these facts.

When Mr Jackson did that, he lost his job. Why is the Minister of the Environment still in cabinet when he hasn't been forthcoming, when he hasn't been straightforward, when he has tried to hide the truth?

Hon Mrs Witmer: As the leader of the third party knows, there is a process in place, and the process involves asking the Integrity Commissioner, who is an independent official, to take a look at this particular issue. He's doing that, and I know we all await his recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): New question.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): To the Deputy Premier: I would say to the minister that I've got a pretty good sense of the answer you want to give, but in this one I might give you an opportunity to actually answer the question that's asked.

We know the matter has been referred to the Integrity Commissioner. That's the very narrow matter of Mr Stockwell's use of OPG to cover his expenses. Madam Minister, I know you're trying to pretend you can't hear this, but the real matter at stake is Mr Stockwell's conduct, because over the past week or two he's demonstrated a capacity to tell a story that keeps on changing to suit his need of the moment. I'd ask you to stand in your place and answer this question, Madam Minister: is the conduct of Chris Stockwell, the Minister of the Environment and government House leader, at a standard, at a level that is satisfactory for the standards that Ernie Eves sets for being in his cabinet?

Hon Mrs Witmer: I think it's extremely important that we remain respectful of one another in this House. Everybody is endeavouring to do the best job they can. I would simply remind the member opposite that this issue regarding Mr Stockwell has been referred to the Integrity Commissioner.

Mr Smitherman: Madam Deputy Premier, before you give me lectures on how to treat people, why don't you stand in your place and tell us why you're prepared to defend the actions of a minister who has demonstrated over the past week or two a willingness to say whatever he thinks will work for him at that moment, whether it's the truth or not? Why don't you stand in your place and defend those standards, Madam Minister?

The Speaker: I'm afraid he's going to have to withdraw saying "whether it's the truth or not."

Mr Smitherman: I will not, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: I'll give you one more chance to do it.

Mr Smitherman was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: Just so we're clear, if people didn't hear it, I want it to be clear. He was named and was asked to leave the chamber. The Deputy Premier.

Hon Mrs Witmer: Mr Speaker, I have no further comment.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is to the Minister of Finance and it has to do with the skyrocketing rates for auto insurance. Not only in Ontario

but across Canada and around the world have people experienced these huge increases. I've been hearing a lot from my constituents, I'm sure every member in this House has heard from their constituents, about the skyrocketing costs of their insurance. I'd like to know what we are doing as a government to protect these people. They are becoming rather impatient about what this government is doing to help consumers, in particular seniors on fixed incomes who rely on their automobiles for their independence.

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): I'd like to thank the MPP for Burlington for an extremely important question. He advocates very strongly on behalf of his constituents.

We certainly share the concern about the cost pressures that consumers are facing in the auto insurance area. For example, we took action shortly after we came into government some years ago. With Bill 59 we were actually able to reduce premiums by some 12% for consumers.

It is clear that despite that progress, more work needs to be done. That's why in my budget last spring I launched a process to do precisely that, to make sure we could take steps for better access to treatment for consumers, for example; to deal with some of the fraud and misuse that had crept back into the system; to also make administrative procedure improvements that would help manage the cost. So far we've taken a number of steps to do that. We've removed mandatory pre-inspection insurance inspections. We're phasing out the retail sales tax on auto insurance premiums and some other steps—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The minister's time is up. Supplementary.

Mr Jackson: Minister, all of what we've done up to this point isn't helping a couple of my constituents. On Friday, I met with—

Applause.

The Speaker: If you agree with the member, I'm sure you will let him ask the question. He does have the floor. I will give you your time. Sorry for the interruption, member for Burlington.

Mr Jackson: On Friday, I was at a ceremony for veterans marking D-Day. We went back to the legion afterwards, and a couple of them approached me about some of their concerns. One in particular is a veteran, and on the 22nd of this month his insurance with Allstate is going to go up by 300%. This man has never had a speeding ticket in his lifetime. I just want you to know for the record that there are a large number of people out there who are experiencing these kinds of rates. I'm asking, how soon will you be bringing forward remedies so that consumers are protected in this province?

Hon Mrs Ecker: He raises some very valid points about the pressures consumers are facing. There are some significant questions about the underwriting rules that are being used. That's one of the things the superintendent of insurance is looking at. As you know, the regulator approves rate increases and has been diligent to try to make sure the information that is there is accurate.

In the meantime, we're bringing forward regulations that are going to expand the legal rights of innocent victims to sue for damages in excess of the no-fault benefits; to expand the right to sue for damages for children; to make sure there is faster treatment being provided to consumers; and to improve many of the administrative procedures, not only to benefit the consumers but to help stabilize the rates. There will be more action taken as we work with all the stakeholders, including advocates on behalf of consumers to make sure auto insurance here in this province is indeed—

The Speaker: Your time is up. New question.

MINISTER'S EXPENSES

Mr Michael Bryant (St Paul's): My question is to the energy minister. It's about the OPG expenses involved with Minister Stockwell. My question is this: what about the land yacht? What about the ground transportation used by Minister Stockwell that was expensed by Ontario Power Generation? What was this, a fleet of cars, Winnebagos, limos, drivers? What was expensed and paid for by Ontario Power Generation?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): When this issue was written about in the media, the first thing the Minister of the Environment did was pick up the telephone to contact the Honourable Justice Coulter Osborne to ask Justice Osborne to look into the matter. We have a tremendous amount of confidence in Justice Osborne and his capacity to conduct an inquiry and review of this issue.

Mr Bryant: This is becoming pretty clear. The Deputy Premier won't defend the minister. The energy minister won't defend the former energy minister. We're asking some questions about the standards of this government, and this government has no response and refuses to defend the minister. This silence and this refusal to defend the defenceless actions and judgment of this minister speaks volumes. So does the refusal to provide the exact amount that Ontario Power Generation expensed. This is not your money, Minister. This is not Ontario Power Generation's money. This is the people's money. The people have a right to know. Was it \$5,000, was it \$10,000? Ten thousand dollars is twice \$5,000. This is a pretty huge discrepancy. I do not understand. The people of Ontario have no idea why you won't release these expenses. Why won't you pick up the phone and tell Ontario Power Generation to release these expenses? There's absolutely no reason for not releasing these expenses.

I ask you again, and I'm sure I'm going to get no answer again, and it will speak volumes: how did OPG expense, what was it for, and when are you going to release the expenses?

1420

Hon Mr Baird: I know the Minister of the Environment, the government House leader, to be an honourable, decent and hard-working individual. To his credit, the

minute a question or concern was raised to the minister in question, he did the honourable and decent thing and picked up the phone and contacted the office of the Integrity Commissioner, Justice Coulter Osborne. What the honourable member opposite wants to conduct—he wants to be the judge, jury and executioner. Rather than you conducting an inquiry review on the floor of the Legislature or on television, we believe that the former Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Ontario is the best person to conduct such a review.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. As you know, in the communities of Burlington and Halton, both my colleague the member for Halton and I have expressed concern about the planned mid-peninsula corridor and its treatment going through the Halton region. We have specifically met with CONE and with COPE, Citizens Opposed to Paving the Escarpment. We agree with many of the points they have raised about the process, and as you know, our city has expressed concern about the manner in which we're proceeding. My question is this: have we exhausted every opportunity in order to ensure that we've fully explored opportunities for alternate transit corridors, as well as full consideration of the environmental impacts, before we proceed for an environmental assessment on this site?

Hon Frank Klees (Minister of Transportation): The member of Burlington has indeed been a strong advocate for his community on this issue, along with the member for Halton. I want to confirm for him as well as for the House that the initial needs assessments study that's been done for the mid-peninsula corridor has in fact already examined numerous options, including an expanded transit rail, bus, the widening of the QEW and maintenance of a corridor and other roadway improvements. The ministry has held extensive consultations with the public. We have conducted some 15 information centres and three additional public workshops. So there has been extensive opportunity for input.

Having said that, we continue to work with the city of Burlington. In fact, my staff met with the city of Burlington staff and we've agreed to incorporate a number of additional terms into the terms of reference for the upcoming environmental assessment. We want to ensure that we address all of the environmental—

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

Mr Jackson: There's clear evidence that there's been some movement on the part of the government. However, these concerns still remain. The city has a resolution from its council and from its region that they will be suing the province if they do not get resolutions to these issues. The deadline is in 48 hours.

I want to thank the minister for facilitating those meetings that we requested in order to try and resolve matters. But it would appear that one of the major

stumbling blocks is an issue I still have not received a satisfactory answer to, and that has to do with the fact that a reasonable request has been to separate the environmental assessments: do one for the Niagara corridor through to the Hamilton airport, which makes sense—there's unanimity on that—and then have a separate EA to separate the two.

We're led to believe that the federal government refuses to allow that to happen. I'm getting conflicting reports about that and I want the minister's assurance that he has explored every opportunity so that we can avoid the lawsuit, which is unnecessary, and still achieve the goals of citizens of Burlington and Halton, who want to ensure that this highway does not carve through the most beautiful escarpment anywhere in North America.

Hon Mr Klees: I want to assure the member that we too want to do whatever we can to ensure that there are no unintended consequences, either to the environment or in any way to this area. We have, as a result of the discussions with representatives from Burlington—and the member should know this—agreed to incorporate a number of additional issues into the environmental assessment. We have agreed for a special study for the Niagara Escarpment to be included in that environmental assessment process.

At the end of the day, whether the city of Burlington decides they want to proceed with legal action on this is, of course, up to them. We would hope that they would understand that it's much better that we work together on this. We want to work with the city of Burlington, all of the stakeholders, to ensure, first of all, that the environmental issues are addressed and that we deal with what is clearly a need for a new corridor through this important area. Economic reasons are there. The member knows—

The Speaker: I'm afraid the member's time is up.

PICKERING NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): A question for the Minister of Energy: your date for the restart of the Pickering A nuclear generating station changes as often Mr Stockwell changes his story about his expense account. OPG said a while ago that Pickering A would be up and running in June. Then it was forced to admit that it wouldn't happen until the end of July. Now the chief nuclear operations officer says that that schedule is "obviously tight." We know what that means. That's code for, "It won't happen in July either." In fact, when I talk to the workers who are working on Pickering A, they say it will be until October before it produces one megawatt of power.

I'm asking you today, will you admit to the people of Ontario that Pickering A nuclear generating station won't be up and running in July either, will it?

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): The direction that this government has given to Ontario Power Generation is to ensure that the plant, both at Pickering B and in the

refurbishment work done to Pickering A, be done in a safe and appropriate manner, that they follow all the environmental and all the regulatory rules that are in place. It's not an area on which we could cut corners, and we're not prepared to do that.

Having said that, I'm the first to acknowledge that this project is both over budget and behind schedule. We have appointed a group of three outstanding individuals who bring a terrific amount of experience to the task to review this initiative and give advice to the government and the people of the province of Ontario.

Mr Hampton: In the words of doublespeak, I think we heard the admission from the minister that it's not going to happen in July either.

You mention your review. That is puzzling as well, because seven months ago the Premier said this review was going to happen right away. It took seven months to name the people who were going to conduct the review, but, surprisingly, we still can't find any terms of reference for this review. You have named the people, but you still haven't spelled out for the public what the terms of reference of the review will be.

This is important for the people of Ontario. People are worried that skyrocketing hydro prices will close down more mills, more mines, more factories and result in more layoffs. People are worried about brownouts or blackouts.

After seven and a half months, when is your Pickering review team going to get its terms of reference? After the election, maybe?

Hon Mr Baird: The three-member panel has already begun its work. It's looking at the reasons and the reasonableness with respect to both the cost and the timeline of the project. They're obviously concerned that they have a substantial mandate to look at all aspects of the project, whether it's management, whether it's contractual issues, procurement issues, engineering issues, relations with contractors, environmental concerns. We want to know both the reasons and the reasonableness with respect to the delay and cost overruns at the project.

MINISTER'S EXPENSES

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): My question is to the Deputy Premier and has to do with the Minister of the Environment's episode. For many people, the key issue is that the minister said one thing, and then the evidence seemed to indicate something quite different. He indicated that a particular reporter made up quotations. We then find that there was actually a recording of it, and the reporter accurately reported Mr Stockwell's comments.

1430

The same reporter asked, "Did you take your family?" The minister said, "I paid my own hotel expenditures. They paid their own way. I paid them personally." We subsequently found out that wasn't the case and that it was actually the riding association.

My question is, is this part of what the Integrity Commissioner will be looking at? Will the Integrity Commissioner be commenting on the quotes of Mr Stockwell?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): I appreciate the question from the member opposite. All I can tell him is that according to the minister and the information I have, the matter has been referred to the Integrity Commissioner. I have no further information.

Mr Phillips: As I say, to many, and certainly to the people I talk with in the public, this is the issue: it's the minister saying one thing and the facts contradicting the minister. That's what I think people want to know.

I ask you again, Minister: if you have not determined whether that is part of the Integrity Commissioner's responsibility, will you, on behalf of the Premier, undertake that you, on behalf of the government, will look at this issue quite separately from the Integrity Commissioner?

Hon Mrs Witmer: At this point in time, the only information I have is the fact that the minister has indicated that he has referred this matter as such to the independent Integrity Commissioner. Obviously, there will be a decision rendered based on that, and then the Minister of the Environment will release that decision publicly.

SARS

Ms Marilyn Mushinski (Scarborough Centre): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, I understand that the federal government made an announcement this week of \$5 million toward research for SARS. This is in addition to some of their previous announcements for SARS, most notably last Friday's announcement of \$13.5 million for Toronto. While this is most welcome, I understand that you and Minister Young raised some very urgent concerns last Friday about a more solid financial commitment from the federal government.

It is my understanding that the real costs of SARS are quite significant and are continuously growing. The ground fight is the most important part of this emergency at this point to ensure that Ontarians stay safe from SARS.

Minister, could you remind us how this government has taken a lead in providing support for this ground fight and about your call for more support from the Liberal government?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I thank the honourable member for the very timely question. Indeed, just last week, pursuant to the resolution that passed in this House and which was opposed by the provincial Liberals, Minister Young and I did call upon the federal government to immediately commit to the people of Ontario by coming through on the resources we need to continue to fight SARS.

We know that there are staggering costs. We are facing those costs as a provincial government, but we need our partner, the federal government. Despite the fact

that the provincial Liberals indicated they did not think this was important by voting against the resolution of this House, we do believe that it is important for the federal government to be part of the solution. Emergency items like masks, gowns, goggles, gloves and other equipment and medicines to treat our patients do have a price, and if the federal government is not part of the solution, it is simply part of the problem.

I can only agree with Art Eggleton when he says that we are no less deserving of that kind of federal assistance than they were in Manitoba or with the ice storm. I agree with Art Eggleton. Why don't the opposition agree with a federal Liberal MP?

Ms Mushinski: Thank you for that response. One would assume that in an emergency such as this, all levels of government would be stepping up to the plate and going beyond existing program supports to help out. As Minister Clement just indicated, action is needed immediately.

I was discouraged to read in the National Post on Saturday that a spokesperson from Minister McCallum's office suggested that "waiting a couple of weeks is not going to break the bank in Ontario." Well, from what Minister Clement has indicated, this issue is of extremely urgent concern.

Why is it that the Liberals' provincial cousins here across the House should be committing to the same campaign for federal support? Frankly, they have not shown the kind of support or leadership that we need in this emergency. Can the minister expand on these concerns?

Hon Mr Clement: Thank you again for the question. I'll say it again: it's time for the federal government to make a strong commitment to our team here in Ontario to overcome SARS, to recognize the situation and to act now—not tomorrow, not next week, not next month, but today. That is the leadership that we expect from the federal government.

I passed along to the deputy leader of the Ontario Liberal Party a letter to be signed by Dalton McGuinty, signed by me already, calling upon the Prime Minister to step up to the plate for the people of Ontario. I ask the honourable deputy leader of the official opposition, have you signed the letter yet? Are you part of the solution, or are you still part of the problem?

DWARF-TOSSING

Ms Sandra Pupatello (Windsor West): My question is for the Minister of Public Safety. Minister, I realize that this is a new issue, and I appreciate your willingness to have this discussion around my private member's bill, which I introduced a little earlier, to ban so-called dwarf-tossing in Ontario. It is banned in other jurisdictions.

It's hard to imagine that we have to address this in this House and in this province, but in fact there is a function happening in my riding this evening that includes dwarf-tossing. My community is upset. They are up in arms. I have received a torrent of phone calls from people who

would dearly like this to stop. I agree with these people. I know that in speaking with the minister just before this question, he and I are of the same mind. I hope that together we can find a way to stop this event.

The minister has expressed that there are issues, and I realize that the bill is controversial and that he isn't in a position to have the private member's bill passed by the end of the day today, where it could receive royal assent and become law. Would the Minister of Public Safety be prepared to review all manners possible to have this event stopped this evening?

Hon Robert W. Runciman (Minister of Public Safety and Security): As the member opposite indicated, I was just made aware of this about half an hour ago, and I certainly share her concern and the concern of her community. I suspect it's a concern that would be shared by most caring Ontarians. This is clearly a very demeaning activity, taking advantage of the less fortunate people in society for profit. Indeed, if there is a way that we can act to stop this activity, short-term and long-term, I'm certainly prepared to look at every possible avenue to do that.

Ms Pupatello: Minister, I want to say that in the past all three parties have been able to work in concert. I've appreciated the support we've received, both from the NDP House leader, the House leader of my own party and certainly the former Attorney General. We understand that the lawyers have looked at my bill so that they can understand where the controversy may lie. May I also tell the minister that there are other jurisdictions around the world that do ban this activity, that it can be done? That it is long-term and something that perhaps we can't do by the end of the day today, I appreciate that.

I also appreciate the opportunity that the minister will have between now and the end of the day today to find a manner to launch an investigation, some kind of probe, and while that investigation is happening, we can stop the event this evening. That is our initial target, and we hope that in the coming days we'll be able to get over the hurdles and see how other jurisdictions have implemented a ban so that we don't have to deal with these kinds of events again.

I agree with the minister that these are the kinds of events that ought not to be happening in this province, and I appreciate the support that we have had from all three parties since 11 am this morning, when we began our attempt to stop the event.

Hon Mr Runciman: I applaud the member. I think she has been exploring all possible avenues to deal with the situation, and she has advised me that she has contacted the Ontario Human Rights Commission and referenced the other jurisdictions. I was given a note that indeed the state of Florida and the country of France have both outlawed this activity, and apparently all of these decisions are being appealed because there are individuals who are arguing that their livelihood is dependent on their ability to participate in this activity.

I have already asked officials in the ministry to review that legislation. I know the member opposite appreciates

that I do not direct the police in terms of their activities, but we are very actively exploring ways that we can have some role in eliminating this kind of activity from Ontario.

1440

HEALTH CARE

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. In my riding of Waterloo-Wellington, access to excellent health care is an absolute priority for my constituents and for me as their member.

That is the message I received last Friday at a barbeque in Linwood, which was organized by the township of Wellesley to raise money to make improvements to the building that will house the office of their new nurse practitioner. The nurse practitioner that the minister announced some time ago is a very welcome addition to health care in that community.

The province's support is appreciated, and the people who live in Wellesley township are certainly doing their part to contribute to improving their health care. However, the people at that event wanted to know that the provincial government will continue to do everything it can to improve access to health care where they need it.

With that support in mind, I want to ask the minister: will he outline what the government is doing and what it plans to do in the future to further improve access to health care, especially in rural Ontario?

Hon Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Of course we are in absolute agreement with the member's point; namely, that quality health care and the economic vitality, if I may say so, of a community begin with accessibility to quality health services when they need them, as close to home as possible. That's got to be a hallmark of our system, and as a consequence it's a top priority for this government.

I can tell the honourable member that we have acknowledged the important role, for instance, that nurse practitioners can play in underserved areas and servicing rural communities. Since 1998, we have introduced well over 200 nurse practitioners in the province, in particular in underserved areas.

We also have an underserved areas program where we offer incentive grants of \$15,000 over four years for general and family practitioners who want to relocate to these communities. We'll also pay for the tuition of medical students who are offering the same. I think it's a very important program—

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

Mr Arnott: I thank the minister for his answer. I'm sure he's aware that the township of Wellesley hopes to be moving forward shortly with further plans to improve access to health care. The township council and staff are working with me and the government of Ontario to establish a health care facility to better serve the health care needs of the people of Wellesley township. Their

plan, which I have endorsed, is to open a community health centre in the township of Wellesley that will operate as a satellite of the Woolwich Community Health Centre.

I want to thank the minister very much for meeting with representatives of the Woolwich Community Health Centre and the township of Wellesley on April 22. I appreciate the fact that my constituents were given an opportunity to meet the minister and provide him with an outline of their proposal. I wholeheartedly support this proposal, and I believe the minister would want to support it as well.

Will the minister provide the needed approval and funding required to proceed with this new facility in Wellesley township?

Interjections.

Hon Mr Clement: I want to assure the honourable members opposite that he has thanked me before today for having the meeting. In fact, it was a great meeting, and I want those in this chamber, and through them the people of Ontario, to know that indeed I and the Ernie Eves government feel very strongly that our family health networks, our family health groups and our community health centres are absolutely critical as first-point care for multidisciplinary teams of health professionals.

In fact, I did have the meeting, to which the honourable member referred, on April 22, and I want to say in this House that their presentation was extremely impressive. They made a very sound case, and of course we're taking a very serious look at the proposal. I don't have an announcement to make today in this chamber, but I want to tell the honourable member that I believe his advocacy and the excellent program that was brought to my attention can help us move forward when it comes to primary care in his community and make the right decisions on behalf of his community, as we are seeking to do for the people of Ontario.

LABOUR UNIONS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a question to the Minister of Labour. Your government has given bosses across Ontario the green light to intimidate, harass, attack and threaten workers who exercise their basic right to form a union.

Today reporters here at Queen's Park heard about a vicious assault on a young man named Cory Mitic. Stand up, Cory. Cory's arm was broken because he was distributing flyers to workers about their legal right to form a union at Matrix Packaging.

You see, Matrix Packaging doesn't want a union, so they used hired goons to beat to beat up young Cory, and they have fired, threatened and intimidated workers who have even dared to talk union.

Minister, your government is the one who ripped all the protections for workers from the Labour Relations Act. You let this happen. What are you going to do about it now?

Hon Brad Clark (Minister of Labour): First off, every member in this House would share my concern and the government's concern whenever there's any violence in the workplace. But I take great exception to what the member opposite is stating in terms of what we're enforcing and what we're not enforcing.

The law states, under the Labour Relations Act, that no employer shall refuse employment, impose any condition in a contract, or seek by threat of dismissal, to dissuade an employee from seeking to become a member of a trade union, or to exercise any other rights under the Labour Relations Act. It further states that the Labour Relations Board may authorize a labour relations officer to inquire into any complaint about any contravention of the act and order a remedy under the act. That is the law.

For you to come into this place and tell us that we're not standing up for workers rights is preposterous. There have been, in this government, in the last two years, 927 certifications of unions one year ago, and last year, 686. For you to state that there are no unions being certified, for you to state that we're not willing to stand up for workers in this place is absolutely political—

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): The minister's time is up.

Mr Kormos: Minister, what I'm tell you is that it's boss thugs who beat the hell out of Cory and broke his arm and roughed up a young woman who was with him at that same information picket. What I'm telling you is that it's your government's approach to labour relations that's been a gift to every thug and hooligan who makes money in this province busting unions.

In Chatham, Don Milner, father of two, was run over and seriously injured on a picket line at Navistar by a truck full of scabs—your scabs. In Toronto, APA Precision recruited two gang members who posed as workers at the plant, then made threats, including death threats, to discourage workers from voting union. And Cory Mitic is here today with a broken arm because your government has thrown out the welcome mat for scabs, union busters, hired goons and other thugs who earn their pay by busting unions and breaking up union drives—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister, I'll make those decisions, and quit yelling at the Speaker or I'll throw you out. Sorry, I interrupted the member for Niagara Centre.

Failure of sound system.

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

Hon Mr Clark: It's not unusual for the member opposite to bring in these accusations and then find out after the fact that he's completely wrong. Not too long ago, he stood in this House and said that this government was forcing employees to work overtime hours when in fact it was our employment standard officers who went to the company and said, "You can't do that."

We enforce the law. The law is very clear here. Employers cannot do what you are claiming they did. The individual in this particular situation has gone to the police. The police are investigating the alleged crime. The unions themselves are using the law and going to the

labour relations board. That's where this belongs. It doesn't belong on the floor of this House with your pathetic political posturing for advantages because an election is coming. It belongs before the labour relations board. That's where it belongs.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a question for the Deputy Premier. Over the past several months your government has been engaged in a virtual orgy of self-gratulatory, blatantly partisan advertising that, I think, anybody in this province would recognize as being that. You have sent glossy pamphlets with a partisan government message to every household in Ontario. You're advertising on television, on radio, in newspapers, in magazines, with a 30-page glossy insert in Maclean's magazine. You have huge signs on the highway with "Building Ontario Together: Ernie Eves, Premier."

You have, in other words, been abusing the taxpayers of this province and abusing public office and, some people might suggest, potentially cheating in an upcoming election.

Minister, I ask you this question. I provided for you this morning—

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the honourable member is accusing the government of potentially trying to cheat in an election campaign. I think that's unparliamentary and you should ask him to withdraw.

1450

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): I would ask the member to kindly watch his language.

Mr Bradley: I will watch my language. To the member, I think I said that I have had people saying to me that that is the case. I did not say it. Anyway, my question—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Come to order. We're down to the last few minutes. I'm not going to put up with it in the last minutes. If you want to be booted out, let me know now. We'll throw you out of here. We're down to the last minutes and I'm not going to put up with it. Go ahead, the member for St Catharines.

Mr Bradley: I ask the Deputy Premier, who's been a long-time member of this House, why on earth would you and your colleagues not support the bill I brought before the Legislature this morning that would take this kind of advertising out of the hands of governments—in other words, partisan governments—and give it to an independent source, which in this case is the Provincial Auditor, to vet that advertising to ensure all information provided by government is indeed non-partisan and not self-congratulatory? It's a great opportunity. Why would you not support that?

Hon Elizabeth Witmer (Deputy Premier, Minister of Education): I thank the member for the question. I'm

going to refer it to the Chair of Management Board, who's responsible for advertising.

Hon David H. Tsubouchi (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Minister of Culture): I will put some context on this first. The average spending per year while the Liberal government was in power was \$80.1 million. The average spending per year for the NDP was \$70.1 million. The average spending per year for the PCs is \$63.9 million. The Liberals are the leader in this area.

I will say to the member over there that part of his bill he wants to introduce is to not have the images of ministers in advertising. However, that's a little bit disingenuous because certainly when he was the Minister for the Environment, he made sure his picture appeared on advertisements. So I guess it's, "Do as I say, not as I do."

LEGISLATIVE INTERNS

The Speaker (Hon Gary Carr): Some members will know it is the last day for our fine group of interns. They will actually be here, but they will not be here during the final weeks; they will be in other activities. On behalf of all the members, I want to thank the interns for their fine work. I'm sure we'll see many of them back in other capacities, as we always have with that fine internship program.

VISITOR

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): I'm pleased to recognize the presence in the gallery, all the way from Windsor, Ontario, of Mark Reimer, who is with us today.

I'd also like to table with the Clerk the terms of reference for the Pickering A review.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): Pursuant to standing order 55, here is the business of the House for next week:

Monday afternoon we will debate the great bill on the Ontario Energy Board reform, Bill 23. That's a great bill that Mike Fogarty worked on. Monday evening we will continue debate on Bill 53.

Tuesday afternoon we will again debate Bill 53. Tuesday evening we will debate Bill 23, the great Ontario Energy Board reform bill.

Wednesday afternoon, what will we debate? Bill 23, the energy board reform bill.

Thursday morning, during private members' public business, we will discuss ballot item 15, standing in the name of Mr Beaubien, and ballot item 16, standing in the name of Mr Cordiano. Thursday afternoon's business is to be announced.

PETITIONS

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr James J. Bradley (St Catharines): I have a petition that reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Eves government has increased the fees paid by seniors and the most vulnerable living in long-term-care facilities by 15%, or \$7.02 per diem, effective August 1, 2002; and

“Whereas this fee increase will cost seniors and our most vulnerable more than \$200 a month; and

“Whereas this increase is 11.1% above the rent increase guidelines for tenants in the province of Ontario and;

“Whereas the increase in the government’s own contribution to raise the level of long-term-care services this year is less than \$2 per resident per day; and

“Whereas according to the government’s own funded study, Ontario ranks last amongst comparable jurisdictions”—last—“in the amount of time provided to a resident for nursing and personal care; and

“Whereas the long-term-care funding partnership has been based on government accepting the responsibility to fund the care and services that residents need; and

“Whereas government needs to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$750 million over the next three years to raise the level of service for Ontario’s long-term-care residents to those in Saskatchewan in 1999; and

“Whereas this province has been built by seniors who should be able to live out their lives with dignity, respect and in comfort in this province;

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

“We demand that Premier Eves reduce his 15% fee increase on seniors and the most vulnerable living in long-term-care facilities and increase provincial government support for nursing and personal care to adequate levels.”

I affix my signature. I’m in complete agreement.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This petition is entitled “Scrap the Long-Term-Care Fee Increase.” It reads:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Conservative government increased fees paid by Ontario seniors and other vulnerable people living in long-term-care facilities by 15%, or \$213 a month, instead of providing adequate government funding for long-term care; and

“Whereas the Conservative government has therefore shifted the cost of long-term care on to the backs of the frail elderly and their families; and

“Whereas this increase is 11.1% above the rent increase guidelines for tenants in the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas in 1996 Ontario abandoned its minimum requirement of 2.25 hours of nursing care per nursing home resident; and

“Whereas the government’s own contribution to raise the level of long-term-care services this year is less than \$2 per resident per day; and

“Whereas according to the government’s own study, government cutbacks have resulted in Ontario seniors receiving just 14 minutes a day of care from a registered nurse—less than half the time given to residents in Saskatchewan; and

“Whereas the report also found that Ontario residents receive the least nursing, bathing and general care of nine other comparable locations;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Join the Ontario New Democratic Party in demanding the Conservative government eliminate the 15% fee increase for residents of long-term-care facilities, increase the number of nursing care hours for each resident to a minimum of 3.5 hours per day, and provide stable, increased funding to ensure quality care is there for Ontario residents of long-term-care facilities.”

I completely support this petition and will sign it.

HOME CARE

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

“Whereas well-managed and adequately funded home health 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 for 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 community are paid 26 cents a kilometre, with driving time considered ‘hours worked’;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“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 will affix my signature to this petition, because I am in full agreement.

1500

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This petition reads:

“Whereas the Progressive Conservative government promised in 1995 not to cut classroom spending, but has already cut at least \$1 billion from our schools and is now closing many classrooms completely; and

“Whereas international language weekend classes are a needed part of learning for many students in our area; and

“Whereas the Education Act, specifically regulation 285(5), mandates provision of these programs where demand exists; and

“Whereas the Conservative government funding formula is forcing the Toronto District School Board to cancel these Saturday classes for groups who want this programming;

“Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to instruct the Minister of Education to restore meaningful and flexible funding to the Toronto school boards, to ensure that they are able to continue to accommodate these Saturday international languages classes.”

I support this petition. It affects many students in my riding, and I will sign it.

HIGHWAY 407

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario “To Freeze 407 Tolls and Stop Highway Robbery.”

“Whereas the 407 toll highway was financed by the Ontario taxpayer and is owned by the Ontario taxpayer, but leased to an international consortium” with Al Leach as one of the directors “for 99 years; and

“Whereas since Highway 407 has been leased there have been five toll increases in 40 months as high as 300%, including the most recent 12.6% increase coming February 1, 2003, and an outrageous 24% jump levied on motorists without a transponder; and

“Whereas it is totally unfair that commuters will have to pay up to \$4,500 per year in extra tolls to get to work and truckers are charged up to 38 cents per kilometre; and

“Whereas the secret contract signed by the Eves government gives the international operators carte blanche to raise tolls as high as they wish; and

“Whereas the Harris-Eves government promised a cap on toll increases when the highway was leased; and

“Whereas the Eves government has just passed legislation freezing hydro rates to protect consumers;

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

“That the province of Ontario freeze Highway 407 toll rates immediately until complete and comprehensive protections are put in place to protect consumers and stop the highway robbery.”

I fully support the 407 commuters. I’ll affix my name to this petition.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have another petition on long-term-care fee increases. It reads:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Conservative government increased fees paid by Ontario seniors and other vulnerable people living in long-term-care facilities by 15%, or \$213 a month, instead of providing adequate government funding for long-term care; and

“Whereas the Conservative government has therefore shifted the cost of long-term care on to the backs of the frail elderly and their families; and

“Whereas this increase is 11.1% above the rent increase guidelines for tenants in the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas in 1996 Ontario abandoned its minimum requirement of 2.25 hours of nursing care per nursing home resident; and

“Whereas the government’s own contribution to raise the level of long-term-care services this year is less than \$2 per resident per day; and

“Whereas according to the government’s own study, government cutbacks have resulted in Ontario seniors receiving just 14 minutes a day of care from a registered nurse—less than half the time given to residents in Saskatchewan; and

“Whereas the report also found that Ontario residents receive the least nursing, bathing and general care of nine other comparable locations;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Join the Ontario New Democratic Party in demanding the Conservative government eliminate the 15% fee increase for residents of long-term-care facilities, increase the number of nursing care hours for each resident to a minimum of 3.5 hours per day, and provide stable, increased funding to ensure quality care is there for Ontario residents of long-term-care facilities.”

I agree with this petition and I will sign it.

ALUMINUM SMELTER

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

“Regarding Cleanup of the Abandoned Smelter Site in Georgina.

“Whereas the abandoned aluminum smelter located on Warden Avenue in the town of Georgina has been

deemed to have heavy metals exceeding the Ministry of the Environment guidelines; and

“Whereas the site is adjacent to a wetland that leads into the Maskinonge River feeding into Lake Simcoe;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Ministry of the Environment to conduct a full environmental assessment of this site followed by a cleanup of the full smelter site.”

I affix my signature as I'm in complete agreement.

TRADITION CHINESE MEDICINE AND ACUPUNCTURE

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in support of the regulation of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture.

“Whereas traditional Chinese medicine, TCM, including acupuncture, has been practised successfully for over 5,000 years and has improved the health of billions of people worldwide with an emphasis on prevention and treating the cause of illness and not just the symptoms; and

“Whereas there are thousands of unregulated individuals practising acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine in Ontario without any regulations, standards of care or professional training requirements; and

“Whereas the failure of the provincial government to protect consumers by regulating TCM/acupuncture places Ontarians at risk because any person can now practise TCM and acupuncture without any qualifications or standards whatsoever; and

“Whereas TCM/acupuncture is regulated in over 40 states in the US and in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and these jurisdictions have passed legislation to regulate practitioners of TCM/acupuncture in order to provide safe, effective and high standards of care to the general public; and

“Whereas hundreds of thousands of Ontarians have experienced the benefits of TCM/acupuncture and are culturally linked to traditional Chinese medicine, given the diverse origins of so many Ontarians; and

“Whereas we spend over \$2 billion a month in Ontario on western medical treatment and virtually nothing on preventive, complementary or alternative medical practices such as TCM that not only prevent illness and promote wellness, but also save taxpayers billions of dollars in drug costs and hospital stays;

“We, the undersigned, urge the provincial government of Ontario and all MPPs to pass legislation as soon as possible based on the British Columbia model to allow for the regulation of TCM/acupuncture and establish a college of TCM/acupuncture of Ontario, and set standards of care and training qualifications for practitioners in Ontario so that all Ontarians can safely enjoy all the benefits of TCM/acupuncture from highly qualified and trained practitioners.”

I fully support this petition and I'll affix my name to it.

LONG-TERM CARE

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

“Whereas the Eves government has increased the fees paid by seniors and the most vulnerable living in long-term-care facilities by 15%, or \$7.02 per day, effective August 1, 2002;

“Whereas this fee increase will cost seniors and our most vulnerable more than \$200 a month; and

“Whereas the increase is 11.1% above the rent increase guidelines for tenants in the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas the increase in the government's own contribution to raise the level of long-term-care services this year is less than \$2 per resident per day;

“Whereas, according to the government's own funded study, Ontario ranks last among comparable jurisdictions in the amount of time provided to a resident for nursing and personal care; and

“Whereas the long-term-care funding partnership has been based on government accepting the responsibility to fund the care and services that residents need; and

“Whereas the government needs to increase long-term-care operating funding by \$750 million over the next three years to raise the level of service for Ontario's long-term-care residents to those in Saskatchewan in 1999; and

Whereas this province has been built by seniors, who should be able to live out their lives with dignity, respect and in comfort in this province;

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

“Demand that Premier Eves reduce his 15% fee increase on seniors and the most vulnerable living in long-term-care facilities and increase provincial government support for nursing and personal care to adequate levels.”

I will affix my signature to this petition as I am in full agreement.

1510

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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)

Resuming the debate adjourned on June 10, 2003, on the motion for second reading of Bill 53, An Act respecting the equity in education tax credit.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bert Johnson): The Chair recognizes the deputy House leader and Minister of Energy.

Hon John R. Baird (Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs): And the Minister responsible for francophone affairs. Monsieur le Président, l'ordre du gouvernement G53.

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Orléans-Carleton on a point of order.

Hon Mr Baird: Nepean-Carleton, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Nepean; my error. I'll get better as the day goes on.

Hon Mr Baird: The government deferred its leadoff time the last time this debate was held. I was wondering if I could ask for unanimous consent to go now to the government's leadoff 60-minute speech.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there consent? It is agreed.

The Chair recognizes the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Thank you, Speaker, and I appreciate people agreeing for us to go ahead with this debate. We're debating Bill 53, the Right Choices for Equity in Education Act, also commonly known as the education tax credit act. I'll be sharing my time with MPP Frank Klees, member for Oak Ridges, and MPP Raminder Gill, member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale.

It's been over eight years now that I've been speaking to so many parents who want a better arrangement to send their children to independent schools. They've told me they want their children educated in their own culture and in their own religion. However, they find the cost of sending their children to such independent schools prohibitive. In my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, these people are friends and neighbours. I know these people and have had many conversations, at the door or in backyards, with people who skimp and sacrifice so that they may be able to provide a spiritually based education for their kids. You know, these parents pay twice—they pay through their taxes and through tuition fees—to get their children the kind of education that they feel is in the best interests of the family and their children.

Across Ontario there are over 700 independent schools. There are seven schools in my riding. Of the 2.1 million students currently—

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I don't believe we have a quorum for this debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Would you like me to check and find out for sure?

Ms Churley: Yes, Mr Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Could you see if there is a quorum present, please?

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

The Deputy Speaker ordered the bells rung.

Deputy Clerk: A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant.

Mr Barrett: I was talking about the 700 independent schools across the province. That represents 100,000 students enrolled in independent denominational and

nondenominational schools. A lot of these students are in Oxford county, my neighbouring county, and I will say that that's 100,000 students out of 2.1 million currently enrolled in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools. These independent schools include Jewish schools, Muslim schools, Hindu schools and Christian-based schools, and I'm thinking of the Mennonite schools throughout my riding. I think of the Jarvis district Christian school just up the road from my farm. A number of years ago, my daughter attended a Montessori school. We think of Waldorf schools and innovative teaching schools, and those schools that provide specific instructions for students with certain disabilities.

Parents and students at these schools, in my opinion, both need and deserve a more fair footing when it comes to government funding for their children's education. In 2002, parents of students at independent schools were reimbursed 10% of the first \$7,000 of tuition fees. That provided a maximum tax credit of \$700 per child. The legislation we're debating this afternoon would 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 may better respond to a child's special needs. The parents of students in independent schools would see a maximum tax credit of \$3,500 per child when this credit program is fully implemented. With respect to children of kindergarten age, I'll point out that the maximum eligible tuition fee is \$350 a month, \$3,500 annually. This would result in a maximum tax credit of \$1,750 per child once this is fully implemented.

In this year's budget, we proposed legislation to fulfill the remaining steps of the tax credit phase-in. This would entrench the schedule to provide parents with greater certainty in coming years. This year's throne speech made a commitment to work with parents who have children in independent schools to ensure that they can measure their children's progress in core subjects. This legislation, The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act, will place the original schedule for delivery of the graduated equity back on track. It will restore true education choice to thousands of parents and students across Ontario who are interested in attending these independent schools.

To the members present and those watching the parliamentary channel, we're asking for support for the equity in education tax credit to acknowledge that one size does not fit all and to give parents true choice as to where they want to send their kids for schooling. We're talking about true choice, as opposed to, in a sense, the forced options of the past that have forced parents without access to the resources to the necessary tuition money to send their school-age children to institutions that may well reflect neither their values nor their beliefs.

As an MPP, I have received hundreds of letters over the past several years from parents—I represent a rural riding—who want a better arrangement to send their chil-

dren to an independent school and letters from parents who don't find their children's education needs adequately reflected in our public system. In fact, I visited a number of these schools, including the Christian reform, the school in Jarvis and the Mennonite schools in my area to talk to teachers and parents and to get a first-hand look at the educational structure provided at these independent institutions. What I heard from parents and teachers was a bit of an eye-opener. These are very hard-working people. Essentially, they're really trying to ensure the best for their children. I've been told time and time again that they want their children educated in their own culture and religion, but again, they find the cost prohibitive and quite onerous.

I do want to point out that with respect to money, this credit is not about helping rich parents send their children to expensive independent schools. Rather, it is aimed at low- and middle-income families, families that are seeking choice.

1520

I wish to refer to Elaine Hopkins, executive director of the Ontario Federation of Independent Schools. She's indicated that students at over 95% of the independent schools are from middle-class families. They're facing tuition fees between \$4,000 and \$9,000 a year. These kinds of fees at those levels essentially put independent schooling out of reach of people in the low- and middle-income categories when they're faced with such a daunting cost. In the past, they have had little real choice other than to sign off or sign up for another year at a public school. Through this tax credit, we're attempting to reel in this price tag and place educational choice right back in the laps of parents, where it belongs.

Having said that, I would also like to mention that the equity in education tax credit in no way diminishes our government's commitment to a quality publicly funded system. In fact, we remain in firm support of publicly funded education and have upheld that commitment since 1995. In 1995, you will recall, we were spending \$12.9 billion a year. In the coming school year, our government will be investing \$15.3 billion, and this rises to \$16.2 billion in the 2005-06 school year. That's \$16.2 billion.

The equity in education tax credit does provide parents with choice, but this legislation will also provide them with greater certainty. Concerns about the government paying this tax credit, about government and society funding this and the concern that this would be a credit for wealthy people, are baseless and unfounded. While opposition rhetoric has suggested the wealthy may be encouraged to pull their children from publicly funded schools, resulting in a two-tier education system, history has shown that this is simply not the case. When both British Columbia and Manitoba introduced programs to support parental choice, there was no significant increase in the independent schools' share of the general school population.

Ontario's public system and Ontario's Catholic system continue to offer high-quality education that meets the needs of most families. There's no reason to believe this will change as a result of supporting choice for parents.

I refer to a recent Statistics Canada report entitled Trends in the Use of Private Education. It states, "Across Canada, the proportion of students in private schools has increased by one percentage point, from 4.6% to 5.6%." Here in Ontario specifically, the proportion has also increased by one percentage point. Ontario still remains below the national average, with only 4.3% of its children attending private school in 1998-99. I compare that 4.3% to the 5.6% national statistic I just referred to.

I do wish to reiterate that this tax credit will help lower- and middle-income parents to exercise choice and to provide education for their children in a manner that's consistent with their cultural and religious beliefs, ever bearing in mind, however, that a strong public education system for our children has always been a top priority of both the Mike Harris government and the Ernie Eves government. Higher standards, more rigorous curriculum and standardized testing are hallmarks of our government to ensure children are learning what they need to achieve, learning what they need for their potential to succeed in the future.

To be more specific, Premier Eves has increased resources for textbooks and has expanded programs like early reading and early math. We've provided school boards with multi-year funding commitments to support better planning and more accountability to taxpayers and to parents, and we support long-term collective agreements for teachers.

Our commitment to a strong public education system is clear. Just as clear, however, is our commitment here to give parents education funding fairness and real choice when it comes to where their children should be educated.

I do realize that there are those on the other side of the House who do not support the concept that parents should have a right to choose where their children are educated, and that there are those who would attempt to remove support for families choosing to school their children according to their religious and cultural beliefs.

On this side of the Legislature, we believe that by offering families more choices and respecting their religious and cultural makeup, we are continuing to invest in the future of our great province, allowing and enabling our families and their communities to develop and share their unique strengths and diversities.

Our position on funding private and private religious schools remains unchanged. We are committed to providing an excellent public education system that's open to all students regardless of religious or cultural background. While we recognize the right of parents to choose alternate forms of education for their children, Ontario does remain committed to the existing publicly funded, universally accessible public education system and will continue to uphold our constitutional obligation to fund both public and Roman Catholic schools.

For parents to benefit from the tax credit, the independent schools their children attend will be required to provide parents with a statement of information describing their academic programs, the achievements expected and the professional credentials of their

teachers. The schools will also be required to conduct criminal background checks on all teachers and others who will be coming or who do come in contact regularly with pupils.

We'll 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.

Regulations under the Income Tax Act establish further eligibility criteria for this tax credit. Under these regulations, eligible tuition fees will, for example, exclude tuition fees offset by scholarships or bursaries and fees paid for items such as meals, computers, books, clothing, travel and sports equipment, if not normally included in the tuition. Eligible tuition fees are reduced to reflect any charitable donations and medical expense tax credits that may be claimed. Also, tuition fees must exclude any amounts eligible for the child care tax credit.

The Income Tax Act also ensures that eligible independent schools must have five students throughout the year, must have their principal places of instruction in Ontario and must conduct criminal history checks of every individual associated with the school—as I mentioned, anyone who would be coming in contact with students.

As well, these schools must annually provide parents and the Minister of Finance with information on legal operating names and addresses, the academic program, student evaluation, teachers' professional credentials and fees.

Again, this act answers the call of parents who want something better than a one-size-fits-all approach to education. One-size-fits-all simply does not work in Ontario, and most definitely does not work with respect to our education system in rural Ontario, and our government understands this.

That's why we have the geographic circumstances grant, for example, which provides additional resources to boards to help with costs of operating small schools in remote areas. The small schools component of this grant, based on pupils per grade, distance from other schools and ratios of principals to schools, is projected to provide \$79 million in 2003-04, while the remote and rural component, based on overall board enrolment, distance from major urban centres and the distance between the board schools, is projected to provide \$128 million.

1530

The present administrative challenges of running small schools have resulted in the very recent announcement of \$50 million for a rural education strategy. We, as parents, as educators, as members of rural communities, have long argued that schools in our communities face circumstances and challenges that are different from those faced by schools in urban areas, especially in light of the crucial role some small schools serve in their particular town. The rural education strategy has been proposed to address those unique challenges faced by our rural schools. As you know, currently Dr James Downie, adviser for the rural education strategy, is wrapping up

consultations aimed at developing a comprehensive strategy to provide support for our small rural schools—schools that are so essential to our smaller communities across the province.

I urge this assembly to pass The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act. Our government's support for equity and choice in education would provide our students with the added tools their families feel they require to succeed. This tax credit really represents respect for the fundamental right to choose what is best for one's children, and in my view it's right, within Ontario and for the people of Ontario.

As I've indicated, a one-size-fits-all approach to education does not do justice to the diversity of our area. It does not do justice to the multicultural reality of Ontario. This tax credit truly will enable our communities to continue to develop and to share their unique strengths.

Hon Frank Klees (Minister of Transportation): I'm pleased to join this debate on Bill 53, The Right Choices for Equity in Education Act. I've been pleased to be engaged in the debate relating to this subject over the last number of years. In fact, I recall I was just elected in 1995 when I had a visit at that time in my constituency office from a gentleman by the name of John Vanasselt, who represents the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. He came to me at that time and spoke to me about the principle of wanting to see the government support independent schools in some form.

I think ideally he would have liked to see, as no doubt many in the independent schools movement would like to see, the government place independent schools on the same level of funding as perhaps the public school system, and the kind of funding that has been extended, as a result of initiatives by this government, I might say, to the separate school system, the Catholic school system in our province.

The rationale for that is very simple when you listen to its proponents, and that is, for every student who isn't in the public system and is in fact in an independent or private school, that is funding the public coffers do not have to extend in support of those students. So while people continue to pay their provincial taxes even though their children are perhaps in an independent school, the argument has been, "We're really paying twice. We're paying once through our income taxes, and that goes to support the public school system, and then we're paying again when we pay the tuition for the independent schools."

I have to say to you that my personal view on this matter is that the independent school system—whether that be a faith-based school system or an independent school system that is based perhaps on a particular curriculum focus—plays a very important role within our communities and within the broader society.

They do so because, with regard to faith-based education, I believe it allows parents to provide some guidance to their children as they are growing up on the very important, fundamental principles of faith, culture and history that they feel is so much a part of who they are, and that is passed along in the course of education.

When we think about it, the reality is that children spend so many hours in the course of a day under the guidance of their schools, often unfortunately so. They often spend more time being subjected to their teachers within their schools than under the guidance of their own parents. So it's particularly important that parents have the opportunity and the choice to send their children to be educated in an environment where not only do they get the academic training but they also have the opportunity to learn something about their culture, their religious base, the principles and the values that they feel to be important.

So this government made that decision to support and extend through a new funding formula equity in education, if you will, to the separate school system, to the Catholic school system. That was the right decision. But having made that decision, I believe it is important that we continue down that road of equity to ensure that parents who want the choice to have their children educated in a faith-based system—whether that be the Jewish system, a Christian school, an Islamic school or others, or, as I said before, a particular academic speciality—that those parents have that choice and that option as well and that they are not disadvantaged as a result of the cost.

Now, opponents—and I say this with all respect, because I know that members opposite, members of the Liberal party and perhaps even of the NDP, struggle with this. I know there are individual Liberal members, honourable members, who have a real difficulty with the position their leader has taken on this. The leader of the Liberal Party, and members of the Liberal Party, have made it very clear that if they are elected they will dismantle this provision that will extend financial support to parents who hold dear that choice to send their children to faith-based educational institutions in this province.

A word of caution, and I say this in all sincerity to people right across this province, that when they consider their options in an upcoming election, whenever that might be, a very important choice for them will be: if I elect to put my X beside the name of a Liberal candidate or an NDP candidate, what I am doing is dismantling a policy that was brought in by the Ontario PCs in this government, by the Eves government.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Klees: The member opposite is now clapping because she thinks that that is a win for her. Again, I say to people in this province: be very careful in this upcoming election. Know that when you elect to put your X beside the name of either an NDP or a Liberal candidate, you are agreeing that people in this province should not have the right to have financial support if they choose to send their children to an independent school, if they choose to send their child to a faith-based educational institution—a very important point. People should not forget that.

1540

I would like to read into the record—because I think this illustrates how people, certainly in my constituency,

think about this very important issue. It speaks to the type, the kind of people we're talking about. One of the fallacies that I hear spoken often is that this particular policy supports the rich, the people who are sending their children to Upper Canada College or to St Andrew's College, and these people are paying tuition in the thousands of dollars—\$10,000, \$15,000, \$20,000 a year—and these are wealthy people, and somehow, through this policy, the government is supporting its rich friends. That's what's being said.

Let me clear the record for people, because that's simply not the case. It's simply not true. I have a letter here from Brent and Jenny Westerik of Richmond Hill, in my constituency. They write, and with your permission I will read this into the record:

“We, Brent and Jenny Westerik, of Richmond Hill, are the parents of two children who attend the Willowdale Christian School, one of Ontario's independent schools. We would like to let you know that we support the tax credit proposal for independent schools. As a middle-income family, earning less than \$60,000 per year, we very much welcome the tax credit and encourage you to support this legislation. We believe that in this country, all citizens should have the freedom to educate their children in the system of their choice, and by offering this tax relief, not just the rich would have this choice. The proposed tax credit will not erode the public school system. Other provinces which provide funding for private/religious/denominational schools still have strong public school systems. Why should Ontario be any different?”

“Thank you for your anticipated support for this proposed legislation.

“God bless you.

“Yours truly,

“Brent and Jenny Westerik” of Richmond Hill.

I'm pleased to read that into the record because it does a number of things. First, it underscores the fact that this is not about providing benefits to the rich in our society. It speaks to the issue that average families, working families—in this particular case, an income level of \$60,000, as they say; certainly not wealthy. But they have made the choice, no doubt with a great deal of financial stress, to spend the additional dollars to send their children to a Christian school. They do so because they believe, first of all, it's in the best interests of their children to do so. They believe that it will add to the education, the quality of education that their children receive. I read the letter because I think it should be a signal to members opposite, who are probably struggling within themselves. I know some of the members particularly struggle within themselves. I know that some of the members struggle within themselves when they see their party, their party whip, no doubt, and their leader calling them in when they see that perhaps there's some waffling happening, and there's some indecision and some wrestling with the principle of, “Should I be doing the right thing for children in this province and for the education system in this province, or do I simply follow

the dictates of the leader of my party? Do I just do what Mr McGuinty is telling me to do for his own reasons, or do I do the right thing?"

I urge them to consider letters like this, because this is just one example of how people think. It happens to be a constituent of mine. I can assure you that there are many constituents in your riding who think exactly that way.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Look in the mirror.

Hon Mr Klees: The member opposite says, "Look in the mirror." You know, I have done that, and I speak to this with some personal experience as well. I made a decision to send my son to an independent school. I did so at my personal cost, because I believed it was in his best interest to pay the additional tuition. I have no regrets about that. I know what it's like at the end of the month when the additional funds could well be used for other things, but as parents you make the decision to make an investment in the life of your child because you believe it's the right thing to do. Many parents across this province are welcoming not only the policy but the fact that through this bill we will accelerate the implementation of the tax credit.

I want to recognize the leadership of a number of individuals within our caucus. With all honesty, there was a great deal of debate around this issue, because there are people on both sides. I see my good friend the Honourable Jim Flaherty in the House, the Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation, I believe. To his credit, he, in many ways, led the charge on this initiative. It was when he was the Minister of Finance that this policy was initially introduced by our government. To his credit, he continued to ensure that this was an issue that was at the forefront of our priorities as a government. We are now here today reassuring people across this province that we are committed to this policy, to the principles that it represents, of equity and of choice for people in this province.

I want to recognize as well the good work of a good friend, someone who is showing a great deal of leadership in our communities, Dr Charles McVety, president of the Canada Christian College. I refer to him because he has certainly taken a leadership role, not only on this issue but on many others, but on this particular issue, was very helpful to us in terms of helping us understand the breadth and depth of support for this policy, and on many occasions provided moral support and encouragement for us to continue to hold steadfast to ensuring that this policy was implemented.

These are individuals representative of people who have seen the importance of this policy and have done their part to ensure its implementation. I've been pleased to be part of that process. My constituents know full well the degree to which I have lent my support. My colleagues and caucus know that I have spoken very consistently over the years about the importance of providing some support. I think the issue of providing this financial support through a tax credit was an innovative way for us to do it. It was a very equitable way for us to provide this support.

1550

I'm going to defer the rest of my time to my colleague who will speak to this. I just want to make one last appeal to all the members of this House, and particularly to members of the Liberal caucus, to rethink their position on this. They have taken the position that if they had the opportunity, they would cancel this, they would do away with this opportunity of equity in choice and financial support for parents, whether they be Christian, Jewish, Muslim or whether they have academic hopes for their children relating to specific academically specialized schools. I ask members opposite to give a very sober second thought to their position on this. To take this away from the people in the province would be most unfair. It would be a step back.

I'm hopeful that the collective wisdom of people in this province will see clearly the choice in the next election. If on no other issue but on this one, I am convinced there will be many people who will make the choice to vote for Ernie Eves continuing as Premier to continue to implement this policy and to strengthen families, to strengthen education through this very important policy initiative.

Thank you, Speaker, for your attentiveness. I look forward to hearing from my colleague, who will build on the comments we have made on this issue. Again, I urge members of the opposition: rethink your position on this. Support us in implementing choices for equity in education.

Mr Raminder Gill (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I too am very pleased to have the opportunity to support the Right Choices for Equity in Education Act. The Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Frank Klees, so eloquently spoke of his passionate support for this bill, and he spoke of the tough choices he made to send his son to an independent school, at a considerable cost. I, too, a number of years ago, when my kids were growing up and going to junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten, made the choice with my wife, who had gone to independent schools—I came from the public school system—that both my daughters should go to independent schools. I'm very pleased to say that my younger one is writing her final exam today—the double cohort, grade 12—and certainly best wishes to her and all the other children who are working hard and progressing well.

It is the policy of our government in terms of even simple policies such as standardized testing—there was a time when kids would keep on passing without really having any measurement of how they compared with other schools, how the teachers' performances compared with other schools. So I was quite pleased to support that as well. It is important to measure the success of the system.

I was elected on June 3, 1999. Soon after that, I was able to meet with certain groups that were proposing there should be funding available to parents who wanted to send their children to independent schools, religious schools, schools of their choice. The presentations they

made made a lot of sense. Of course, even before that I had decided that my kids were going to go to independent schools because I wanted the choice. I was not going to benefit directly from it. Nonetheless, there was the argument they made and the talks they put forward, including the inequity that existed in terms of certain schools being given full funding, but if you wanted to send your children to independent schools, you did not have the same benefit.

For example, the public school system, the Catholic school system and the francophone school system have full funding, and that's great. But if you decided to send your children to Khalsa school, religious school, Punjabi school, Hindu school, Jewish school or Christian school, you did not have that equality of funding. In fact, the United Nations cited us for not doing something right in terms of extending funding only to certain schools and not to all schools.

I was quite pleased when Minister Jim Flaherty, when he was Minister of Finance, brought forward this equality in his budget. I'm very happy to be supporting this. I believe all members, on this side anyway, support this. I know many members on the opposite side support it, but they are going to be very political and may not vote for it.

I was quite amazed the other day. I was at a fund-raising function for an independent school and my Liberal opponent came there. Without even knowing the issue, he said, "We're going to abandon this policy." Of course, the parents were quite upset because this is something they have fought for for a long time. They were not pleased. I'm not sure whether my Liberal opponent knew what he was talking about, but nonetheless, if that's their policy, then the parents of this independent Khalsa school, all 600 of them, are going to have to make a choice. Like Minister Klees said earlier on, when they go to the ballot box to make the choice, then they'll know exactly what Liberals stand for, what the NDP stands for and what benefits we as a government are giving and offering them. I think there's a clear choice.

Our government first introduced this equity in education tax credit in 2001. At that time, we made the very clear point that some parents who wanted to choose where to send their children to school found the cost of doing so very prohibitive. As we said at that time, "While we continue to provide increased funding to our public education system, we believe it is now time to address the concerns of these parents.... We propose to phase in a partial tax credit for parents of children at independent schools. With this measure, Ontario will join other provinces in supporting educational choice."

Premier Ernie Eves reiterated this very notion of choice when he announced on March 20 of this year that our government would accelerate the implementation schedule for this tax credit. In fact, he went a step further and announced that independent schools would be required to provide additional information of interest to parents.

I'd like to quote the Premier: "Parents have told us that the tax credit supports the choices they make when it

comes to the education and future of their children. We are taking the necessary steps to ensure that students and parents are provided with information on their children's progress in core subjects."

1600

The fact is that tax cuts work on a number of levels. First and foremost, they leave people's hard-earned money in their own pockets so they can decide how best to spend, save or invest it, as they so choose.

You might have noticed that I said individual taxpayers know better than the government does what to do with their own money—despite what the opposition people might think, that they know better how to spend people's money. That's not the case with our government. That is the underlying philosophy of all our tax cuts, and it applies to the equity in education tax cut as well.

When we first came to office in 1995, government was in a mess. You know that, Mr Speaker. You were there. The province was spending \$1 million more an hour than it was taking in. Ontario faced a deficit of \$11.3 billion a year. Our government saw that things could be better and did something about it. We have consistently demonstrated our willingness and commitment to balancing the budget, investing in key priorities and managing the province's books responsibly.

Our plan is working and it is producing results. First, the province has seen the creation of more than one million net new jobs since 1995. We continue to see the positive result of this plan. Just last week, our government announced that Ontario job creation had accounted for all the jobs created in Canada in the first five months of 2003, and that is 44,000 full-time and part-time jobs. So Ontario created all the jobs that were created in Canada.

The secret is very simple. Tax cuts create jobs. I think it's good to know. It has been proven. I'd like to say that again: tax cuts create jobs.

I think people at home watching this program realize that, even though initially when we talked about these things, when the province was losing \$11 billion, so-called political pundits or financial gurus said this could not be done. I am sure even some of the people with Conservative values might have thought, "I don't know. It sounds pretty tough to do. You're losing money. You cut more taxes. And you say you're going to create more jobs and have more money to spend on health and education and programs like this, where you're giving tax credits to people to make the choice about what is best for their children?"

I think that's fair. We've seen the kind of astonishing job creation I just talked about in this great province at the same time we have managed to balance the budget and cut taxes. Up until this year, we had cut taxes 208 times. That's after a decade of tax-and-spend governments that always thought they could spend their way to prosperity. What wrong thinking. They thought they were going to spend their way out of recession.

In this year's budget, we have proposed an additional 17 tax cuts, bringing the total to a very impressive 225

tax cuts implemented and proposed in the past eight years. More needs to be done.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): What did the government before us do?

Mr Gill: Of course they increased taxes. They believe in tax and spend. What happened then? The deficit went up as high as \$11.3 billion a year.

Tax cuts work. They create jobs, they attract investment and they help keep Ontario's economy healthy and competitive. Tax cuts are an important part of our government's agenda, but they are only one part of it. Another is debt repayment. As I said earlier, in 1995 the hard-working taxpayers of this province were facing the very real prospect of an annual deficit of \$11.3 billion. That is roughly \$1,000 for every man, woman and child in this province. We recognized and, more important, taxpayers were telling us that this was unsustainable. Every dollar we had to spend on debt repayment was a dollar that could not be spent on a better use. So we took tough, decisive action: we cut wasteful government spending, we cut taxes and we created the right environment for investment and job creation. In doing so, we were able to put in place the right fundamentals to ensure that our government could pay down \$5 billion of the provincial debt, the largest amount any government has ever repaid in the history of this province.

As I said earlier, we balanced the budget five years in a row. It's the first time this has happened in almost a century; in fact, since 1908. A balanced budget means more than just keeping both sides of the ledger in check; it means balancing interests, balancing priorities and balancing needs. As Minister Ecker said in her budget statement, "The decisions a government makes in a budget are never easy. Many competing demands require difficult choices. A keen sense of balance is needed."

During our government's pre-budget consultations—and they were extensive. I know that Minister Ecker consulted far and wide. She went to all the corners of this province and met with many interested parties. She had many meetings with MPPs. I know it was extensive. I don't think this kind of consultation was ever undertaken previously, so I commend her for that.

Because of those focus groups, the minister and the people wanted us to focus on several key things: health care, education, safe and strong communities, and ensuring accountability—this is important—for the dollars we spend on people's behalf. Our government took their advice very seriously. We heeded it in building the 2003 provincial budget.

When my colleague the Minister of Finance delivered that budget, she made a very specific point of talking about what we had heard from individuals, businesses and numerous associations and groups across the province.

To quote Minister Ecker again, she said, "You told me that health care and education are your most important priorities; that your children and grandchildren need high standards and resources in school to succeed; that you require quality health care, when and where you need it, to stay well and get well."

She also said, "You told me that continued tax relief is important not just because it rewards individual initiative by leaving more money in your pocket to spend, save or invest, but because you recognize that lower taxes attract and keep jobs here."

She goes on to say, "You spoke about how our young people need more opportunities for post-secondary education, for skills training and apprenticeships, and about your concerns for your parents' and grandparents' ability to live independently in their own homes.

"You made it clear that strong communities require roads, transit, and safe and clean water."

She goes on to say, "You told me that you wish governments were more accountable for the way they spend your tax dollars because you are often skeptical about whether the results are meeting your priorities."

Those are eloquent words that the minister spoke, and I'm proud to say that in speaking those eloquent words, she speaks not only for herself, not only for the cabinet, but for all members of this government and for millions of taxpayers across the province.

1610

Among those millions of taxpayers are parents who choose to send their children to independent schools. Our government is proud of its historic investment in the public school system—something I will return to shortly. I was quite pleased, as I said earlier, to be present at a cheque presenting ceremony with the Peel board of education, where we made a historic investment of \$950 million, and soon after that on the same day with the Dufferin-Peel school board, where we gave them \$650 million, which in total amounts to more than \$1.5 billion. That's a substantial investment in public school education.

Many of us think of independent schools as primarily offering religious or cultural-based education. This only tells part of the story. Many of the independent schools that qualify for the equity in education tax credit are familiar to members of this House. For example, Montessori and Waldorf schools come immediately to mind. In my own riding, as I said earlier, there is a Khalsa school. Hard-working parents are sending their children to this school because they believe in traditional education. I think it's fair that we—not to the full extent but to a small extent at least—extend those credits to those hard-working parents.

I'm sure after my speech, I've been able to convince all members of this House to pass this in a speedy way.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Ruprecht: Surely we all struggle with this issue of funding and giving tax credits to independent schools. I just want to make two points that convinced me against this issue.

First, we cannot afford to take over \$500 million out of the public system over the next few years. Anyone who knows about school funding and the condition of our schools has to come to that conclusion.

Second, I'm the critic of the Ministry of Citizenship. The ministry has a great responsibility to ensure that

everyone is treated equally. That means our schools are really the heart of our communities. As the heart of our communities, they are more than just centres of learning. They are more than simply providers of a formal education. We learn so much more in our schools than simply formal education.

Kids who are going to public school learn how to get along with each other. They rub shoulders with each other. They will understand other cultures much better. That convinced me more than anything else that we cannot afford to provide every tribe, every organization that's got the finances and the know-how, and separate them from our main system. That would simply mean that children of their own tribe will get to know only each other. They will never learn about the great multicultural country we have as Canadians.

Consequently, I simply say that I only hope you would reconsider this issue and reconsider this special point that our schools are more than simply providers of formal education. It's multiculturalism that made this country great, and I would hope that through multiculturalism we will learn more.

Ms Churley: Here we are again today, debating another tax break that's going to benefit some Tory members. We had two members stand up today, the member for Oak Ridges and the member for Bramalea, and talk about their kids going to private schools. I don't know how many other members of the Tory caucus have kids in private schools. I would argue that it's your responsibility to send your kids to public schools. If you don't like some of things that are happening there, improve upon them. What you've done instead is take \$2 billion out of the public school system, and this is going to take another \$500 million out. Your members are going to benefit; you're going to benefit. Any of your members who have kids in private schools is going to benefit.

On top of getting rid of the surcharge to higher-income earners, you're going to benefit from that as well. Just take a look at some of those tax cuts and see who's really going to benefit.

What this is all about is another election ploy. You talk about being able to stand up and say that the NDP and the Liberals won't support giving tax breaks for private schools. Well, God bless: if people want to send their kids to private schools, let them do it out of their own pocketbook, not by taking more money out of the public school system, which is suffering severely under your government—\$2 billion already taken out. We just had the Rozanski report come out. It talked about the need to invest that \$2 billion back in the public school system. You're going in the opposite direction by taking more money out of an education system that is already in crisis.

You stand here today and talk about putting money back into the pockets of people who want to send their kids to private schools instead of improving the system we have. The worst thing about this is that there's no public accountability. All the private schools have to do

is inform the Ministry of Education that they intend to operate. That's what's happening here.

Hon Ernie Hardeman (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I just want to add my voice of compliment to the three members who spoke to the bill. I think it's so important to recognize that we put this legislation in place to give a little encouragement to parental choice. We hear a lot of comments from across the aisle about the quality and good education our children get in the public system. I want to say that's where my children were educated, and I think they got a wonderful education. But there are a lot of people in my community who believe there is more to education than we are providing in our public system. Because of the type of education we have to give to make sure it addresses the needs of all children, we cannot address some of the cultural and religious concerns some parents have.

People in my community—it's not private schools where they have all the money and they can send these children to private schools; it is middle- to low-income people who are sending their children to primarily Christian schools. I think it's very appropriate that we have a tax regime that helps them do that. I think it's important that we all recognize that this is not about giving these parents the ability to take money that's going to educate children in the public system out of the system. They are paying and continue to pay to have their children educated in the public system. Over and above that, they are paying to have their children educated in a school of their choice, where there is a religious bent to the education. I think it's very appropriate that we help them do it.

During the consultation on this bill, I asked some parents whether they thought we could put the religious part into education in our public system, and if that would serve their needs. The answer coming back was, "No, you can't do that, because a religious education isn't teaching religion in the schools; it is teaching everything in the schools in a religious way." I think this will help them do that.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I remember the then-Minister of Education, Mrs Ecker, saying that extending funding to private schools would result in fragmentation of the education system and undermine the goal of universal access. This was the then Minister of Education, Janet Ecker. When Ernie Eves was running for leader of this party, he said it was outrageous that they would extend funding for private schools. Now they have a different tune.

We've seen what this government means by tax cuts. When they promise a tax cut, they mean a service cut. For eight years, people in Ontario have seen that tax cuts mean service cuts in our hospitals, our schools and our cities. All of a sudden, they've got all this money to throw around for private schools and they've got money for seniors. People say to me, "Why haven't they helped schools and seniors for the last eight years?" Now, on the eve of an election, they're making these promises they can't keep.

Standard and Poor's and the Dominion Bond Rating Service say they've got a \$3-billion hole in the budget. They're going to have to make \$3 billion in cuts. We've had eight years of dismantling, crisis and conflict in our schools across Ontario because of this government's reckless changes that have turned schools upside down and sideways; attacked teachers, parents and students; no textbooks; no basic repairs, no caretakers, no lunchroom supervision. Now all of a sudden they say, "Trust us. We are going to make this better by giving public money for private schools." Is there anybody in Ontario who will trust this gang that couldn't shoot straight—whose leader, Mr Snobelen, is now in Oklahoma riding a horse—with fixing education after what they have done for the last eight years?

1620

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale has two minutes to reply.

Mr Gill: I do appreciate all the members—Davenport, Toronto-Danforth, Oxford, Eglinton-Lawrence—who spoke their points of view. I know that most of them, other than the member from Oxford, seemed to disagree with this particular tax credit. The member from Toronto-Danforth said, "It's another tax cut. How can they do that and spend more money on education and more money on health care?" When I was speaking earlier on, as I started my debate, I did mention that it's been proven over and over. I think I said that twice, just to make sure that people understood that. I'll repeat it: tax cuts create jobs.

Also, I believe the member from Eglinton-Lawrence said, "Well, you know, they make promises and people think they're not going to keep them." This government is the government—promises made, promises kept. It's as simple as that.

Yes, the election is coming up. We don't know when that is going to be. We have until June 3, 2004, so we have another year to go. But the fact of the matter is, the platform, *The Road Ahead*, is already out there. People will have a clear choice. People will have a choice to look at the blue book, the red book, the orange book. They already know which party keeps their promises, and they will see in that that the philosophy of tax cuts is going to continue. And having done that, with the policy of job creation and more taxes coming into the government, we have promised that we'll be reducing the debt by \$5 billion more. There will be more money, as previously stated, for health care, for education, for all the good things Ontario needs.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): I'll be sharing my time with the member for Parkdale-High Park, Mr Speaker.

Just a comment on the member for Gore-Bramalea-Malton. I smile about the "promises made, promises kept." I carry these things around with me. Here are the promises you made in 1999. "We're going to cut property taxes by 20%." You abandoned that one. The Minister of Finance said, "Listen, we're not going to go ahead with that. We've decided we're going to abandon

that." You promised everybody they'd get a 20% cut in the residential education property tax. They got 10% at the last election; then you've abandoned the last 10% of it.

I carry this around too. What's this called? The Official Newsletter of the Ontario PC Party, Questions and Answers: "How can the government justify breaking the Taxpayer Protection Act by delaying tax cuts?" In other words, in your own document you have to sort of say, "Well, we broke that promise. How do we justify it?" Because "To meet our target of a balanced budget, the government delayed tax cuts."

So I just say to the public, be very skeptical when they talk about "promises made, promises kept." Lots of promises in the last election, and you still haven't kept them. The Taxpayer Protection Act—you abandoned it.

But we're here today to debate the private school funding proposal. I would say that perhaps of all the things you're proposing, this one is the one that troubles me the most. I will use, as evidence, documents that the then Minister of Education, Ms Ecker, and the then Premier, Mr Harris, prepared, arguing strenuously against this proposal and did a lot of research on why it was a bad idea and why Ontario should not proceed with this. I'll quote those in a few moments.

By the way, Mr Speaker, I believe we have a one-hour lead now. I'm looking at the clock, which I think says 17 minutes, so I would appreciate it if you'd reset the clock, as they say.

I want to talk about the experience in the area I represent. I represent an area called Scarborough-Agincourt. My wife and I and our four children have lived there since 1965, so almost 40 years. I can tell you that our community has gone through enormous change. We are perhaps the most diverse community in Canada now. I was looking at some of the numbers before I came to the Legislature, and today about 70% of the people in the area I represent are called "visible minority." I don't like that term, but that's how Statistics Canada reports it.

As I say, we're extremely diverse. It has gone through enormous change over the last 40 years, and it has gone through that change with tremendous goodwill; virtually no problems in the community going through that change. In my opinion, the major reason—not by any means the only reason but the major reason, the most important reason—has been our schools, particularly I might say our secondary schools, where young people from a variety of backgrounds come together.

By the way, just on that time, if I might say, I think that's still not the correct time, Mr Speaker. I believe we still have probably 53 minutes left or so. I would appreciate it if the table might look at that time and reset the clock once again. I believe I've only been speaking probably for four or five minutes.

In any event, back to the point I'm making: our community has gone through enormous change with terrific goodwill, and I attribute that heavily to our secondary schools, where our young people, particularly at those challenging ages from 12 to 18 or 19, have come

together and benefited from the experience of working, going to school together and learning from each other.

This plan will fragment our schools. In the area I represent, I believe I'll probably see 10 new secondary schools open up from a variety of languages, religion and ethnicity.

Hon Mr Klees: That's good.

Mr Phillips: Is that good or bad? Mr Klees says it's good. I think that as we look ahead—and also bear this in mind—Ontario will continue to have 120,000 to 150,000 new Canadians coming to Ontario each and every year. There's a little-known study that the Ministry of Finance did, which was quite interesting, and that study indicated that without that level of immigration, our population in Ontario declines. The government did this study two years ago. We will continue to have immigration, and thank goodness for it, at that level, 120,000 to 150,000 each and every year for the foreseeable future. As I say, without it, our population declines. It's in all of our interests to make sure that continues to happen. But it's also in all of our interests to make sure we set a climate that is welcoming of those new citizens, that gives them a full opportunity to adjust as quickly as possible, that ensures that we set a climate for mutually working together.

What did the government say about that just three years ago, about a policy that would fragment our education system, where we would see support for private schools provided? Here's what Ms Ecker said in a strongly worded letter to the federal government.

"We believe that our commitment and resources must continue to focus on preserving and improving the quality of our publicly funded system." This is in response to a proposal by the United Nations Human Rights Commission to force Ontario to provide support for private schools. Ms Ecker at the time sent a strongly worded letter to the federal government saying we're opposed to that.

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"While the government of Ontario recognizes the right of parents to choose alternative forms of education for their children, it continues to have no plans to provide funding to private religious schools or to parents of children who attend such schools. As was set out in the submission to the United Nations Human Rights Commission, extending funding to religious private schools would result in fragmentation of the education system in Ontario and undermine the goal of universal access to education."

That is the now Minister of Finance speaking in a strongly worded letter.

The then Premier sent a letter to my leader saying, "Complying with the UN's demand, as the federal Liberal government would have us do, would remove from our existing public education system at least \$300 million per year, with some estimates as high as"—I believe it is \$500 million. "Obviously, such an action would run directly counter to Ontario's long-standing commitment to public education."

I wanted to get those two things once again on the record, as Mr Klees would say, so that the people of Ontario can recognize that this is what then-Premier Harris and the Minister of Education, Ms Ecker, said.

The government also provided quite a substantial study to support the strong decision to not provide funding for private schools. This is the Ontario government's submission:

"The objectives of the ... education system are the provision of a tuition-free, secular public education, universally accessible to all residents without discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex or physical disability, and the establishment of a public education system which fosters and promotes the values of a pluralist, democratic society, including social cohesion, religious tolerance and understanding.

"If the state party were required to fund private religious schools, this would have a detrimental impact on the public schools and hence the fostering of a tolerant, multicultural, non-discriminatory society in the province. This position of the province of Ontario"—remember, this is the Eves government speaking; this is their submission; this is what they are saying to the rest of the world—"is supported by expert evidence in reports and affidavit form as cited below.

"Public schools are a rational means of fostering social cohesion and respect for religious and other differences. To the extent that the public and common schools are the schools of choice for the great majority of families, these schools may be able to respect group differences while at the same time helping these students to perceive the common concerns....

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

Again, I say to the public, these are the strong arguments used by the government to say that while we support the right of individuals to send their young people to private schools, the funding will not be provided. That was the argument they used less than three years ago.

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

The government goes on to say—and this was the Eves government, remember—"In addition, if public funding were provided for private schools established for the purpose of meeting specific religious needs, it is

difficult to see why public funding would not also be provided to private schools established to provide other specific needs of language or ethnicity or culture. This would have an adverse effect on the viability of the public system, which would become the system serving students not found admissible by any other system. The benefits which society now derives from a public school system would be reduced. Such potential fragmentation of the school system is an expensive and debilitating structure for society.”

It goes on. But the point I’m making is for the public to recognize that these are the arguments that the government, the Eves government, put together—and I support the position they then had—to say, “Listen, anybody should have the right to send their children to any school they want to,” but taking public tax money to support these schools will do all of the things that the government outlined here: fragment our schools, fragment our system. I say to us: Mr Klees is right, this will be an issue in the election. Make no mistake about it. I’m happy that it will be, because it’s a relatively fundamental thing.

I believe the document that you presented three years ago, the one that the then Minister of Education, Mrs Ecker, and the Premier and others had researched, was right. The conclusions that you reached then were right. I realize how sensitive this is. As I say, in the area I represent, I think 10 new secondary schools will open up if this policy proceeds.

Mr Bob Wood (London West): What’s wrong with that?

Mr Phillips: Mr Wood, from London West, says, “What’s wrong with that?” It’s just a difference of opinion. I believe that the research the government did three years ago, after a considerable amount of expense, I assume—as a matter of fact, in the document it talks about the position of the province of Ontario. The position then was to not provide the support: “The position of the province of Ontario is supported by expert evidence in reports” and affidavits. This was not something simply pulled out of the air. A lot of work went into that brief.

I go back to my own strongly held view of the future of this province. I repeat: Ontario will continue to have 120,000 to 150,000 new Canadians coming to it every year. The government has said we need those numbers just to maintain our population. That is what’s going to happen. The government has said if we proceed to fund private schools, it will fragment our system, it will lead to a highly fragmented public education system.

I’ve lived through 40 years in the community I represent, having gone through enormous change, I can assure you, with a minimum of problems in the community. That’s as a result of many things, but the major reason has been our secondary schools, our young people coming together. There’s a school called L’Amoreaux Collegiate Institute in the area I represent, a terrific school. I often go there. I attend all the graduations. Around the meeting hall, there are flags from 83 countries. That represents the birthplaces of the students in

that school—83 different countries. You often hear about the Tamil community—two of the last three valedictorians of that school are from the Tamil community. It’s just a terrifically diverse school. It’s a model for me of how well our young people come together.

My very strong concern is the same concern that Minister Ecker, when she was Minister of Education, expressed to the United Nations: “Extending funding ... would result in fragmentation of the education system in Ontario and undermine the goal of universal access to education.”

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I fully appreciate the depth of feeling on this issue. I’ve met with many of the groups that support this. For them it’s a hugely important issue, one that they feel terribly strongly about. I’ve consistently expressed my view: I think I understand how strongly you feel about this and I understand that you support the extension of funding for private schools.

I have another concern, the same one the government outlined three years ago in its submission to the United Nations, that it will lead inevitably to a fragmentation of our system and the elimination of what I’ve regarded as an enormous asset for us, as we constantly adapt to our changing population, heavily influenced by immigration.

A secondary issue, of course, is that it’s \$500 million, money that will be going into private schools. The government said it’s \$300 million, but that estimate was done on the basis of enrolment of 100,000 students, and I think it’s already at about 115,000 students. So it is heading—

Hon Janet Ecker (Minister of Finance): It’s costed at \$180 million.

Mr Phillips: You’ll have your chance later.

That’s Minister Ecker yelling at me, the same minister who three years ago wrote a strongly worded letter saying, “We’re not going to go ahead with funding for private schools. It’s a bad idea.”

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): As the Minister of Education.

Mr Phillips: That was Minister Ecker then, who was then the Minister of Education, who’s yelling once again here. But you see, she must be aware by now that she’s on record. Her point of view is in black and white.

Minister Ecker, you wrote three years ago that it was a bad idea. You wrote to the federal government telling them that you strongly opposed this. You laid out for the people of Ontario why it was a bad idea.

I’m surprised she would choose to heckle here in the Legislature, particularly when she has flip-flopped on it for all to see. No doubt Mr Klees is right that it will be part of the election. It will be her letter, the then Premier’s letter and the United Nations document prepared by the government of Ontario. As I said, this is quite fundamental to me and I think to the future of Ontario: do we want to ensure that we continue to have a public system that is open to everyone, that brings all of our young people together, where our extremely diverse young people can come together, or do we want to fragment?

I repeat: in the area I represent I know that there will be 10 new secondary schools on the basis of language, religion and ethnicity. I truly worry about that. My concerns, frankly, are very much supported by the document the government prepared. As we look ahead in this province, our future depends on having our young people know how to work well with each other. One of the key ways they've been able to do that is in coming together, particularly in our secondary schools, recognizing that we will continue to see in this province immigration of 120,000 to 150,000. I fully support that, as does the government, and our economic well-being in many respects depends on it. I always say to my friends in the business community, "Listen, if we don't have immigration, we'll never have to build another house in Ontario because our population will begin to decline. We will not have the labour force that will drive our economy. We will not have all the assets that are brought to this country through immigration."

One of our responsibilities is to make sure that we have in place the institutions and programs that allow those new people to feel at home as quickly as possible and to adapt as quickly as possible.

Make no mistake about it, this plan to fund private schools to the tune of \$500 million a year will lead to a significant fragmentation of our education system. Those who advocate on behalf of the funding believe there should be equal funding. This is merely the first step, because the argument in favour of this is to say that they are discriminated against right now. One of the arguments is, "There's a person next door to me getting funded to the tune of \$7,000 or \$8,000 a school. I think I should be equally funded." This is merely the first step down a road, if you follow this road, that will lead, as I said, to a dramatic fragmentation of our school system.

Frankly, Mr Klees, I'm quite happy that it be a campaign issue. You will advocate for it. This is what democracy is all about. You will say, "This is my vision of Ontario," and we will advocate differently. We have two different visions, and the people will decide. For me, it's an important issue that I don't mind debating.

In my own riding there are differences of opinion. As I said, there are at least 10 groups that would like to open their own secondary schools, and they will probably be supporting you. I will be at all candidates' meetings saying, "I have a bit of a different vision of this province and this country." I believe that the area I have represented has benefited enormously from our young people coming together, learning from each other and knowing each other. I use L'Amoreaux Collegiate as a metaphor in my own mind of this enormous diversity. I've watched, by the way, the change. That school changes almost yearly. The kind of students who come there are almost always reflective of the change in immigration patterns in this country. So I'm quite happy that this is an issue for the electorate.

I happen to personally think it is an extremely important issue. I look forward to a healthy debate during the campaign on it, because it's two different visions for

us. You have a vision—at least you have a vision today. By the way, the public should recognize that it is a totally different vision than Ernie Eves and Minister Ecker had down on paper three years ago, presented to the United Nations, saying, "We are not going to proceed with funding for private schools because it's a bad idea that will fragment our education system." That was—

Mr Gregory S. Sorbara (Vaughan-King-Aurora): It still is a bad idea.

Mr Phillips: My colleague says it still is. I believe from the bottom of my heart that it is a fundamentally bad idea.

My colleague from Parkdale is going to speak now.

I fully appreciate the depth of feeling of those who support this and I fully understand their arguments. I would just say to them that I appreciate it but I think there is another issue at stake here and that is, as I say, the fragmentation of our public education system, which to me is crucial. If we proceed down this road, we will look back 10 years from now and say, "That was a fundamental mistake we made." But I'm very happy to debate this on the campaign trail and let the public make the decision.

Mr Kennedy: It is a pleasure to join this debate, partly because this is the only opportunity that we get to make this a debate. The member from Scarborough-Agincourt made many cogent arguments. One of them was agreement with the member from Oak Ridges about having a campaign, a debate, a discussion. Was this subject to a campaign, a debate or a discussion? Frankly, it was. Do you know what Mr Harris, the Premier leading that party at the time, said? He said he wouldn't do it. That's what we heard in the last campaign.

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Suddenly, we have this government party, afraid of their convictions, afraid to put it before the people, afraid to put it out to hearings, afraid to hear what people think about it, sliding this in the back door. Let's wait for the closure motion. Let's wait for it to go clunk when they cut off debate on this, because they—the Minister of Finance, who is sponsoring this, used to be against it, then was against it again last year and now is for it—don't want it to be seen for what it is.

This is the hallmark of a desperate government, now putting itself in the hands of its extreme philosophical element with which some of those members proudly identify. Mr Flaherty was the one to initiate it. He now clearly has the steering device for this particular political party's fortunes, because he would implement this with glee. There are other members there who would say they have some reservations, but they don't express them here today. They would steer public education into the ditch with this particular measure. That's how important this is.

This is the epitome of this government's attitude toward publicly funded education. This is where they've been going. We on this side of the House can demonstrate that this alien idea, this strange concept of a tax credit, can't be found anywhere else in Canada. Only in

two spots in all of North America is this particular funding device being offered.

We can demonstrate that it has already damaged public education in the way it has gotten out there. It is the perfect companion to this government's attitudes and policies toward public education. They have put themselves in this particular circumstance of dragging down the public system, of making it work less effectively.

I want to readily concede that in this particular policy area, the government has been successful. They have had significant success in driving families and children away from public schools and into their private counterparts. The Ministry of Education data show that under this government, from 1995—

Interjection.

Mr Kennedy: It's not something the member from Thornhill wants to hear, because she is hoping this is an election bonanza for her. She hopes this is something that will help her at election time. She knows that in her riding, just as in every riding, there are very eminently reasonable people, like past-Premier Mr Davis, for example, who look at this track record and see 37,000 new children added to the private school system—an increase of 49% under this government—and an increase in the public system that has been cut in half, to 5%. There has been 10 times the growth in private schools in Ontario under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves. That's their legacy, that's their success. And that's with only one year of this particular financial incentive under their belt.

What does that mean in practical terms? Well, in the five years previous to this particular government, only one in 16 new students went to private schools. Now, under their calculated policies, it's one in four. One in four new students is going to private schools because of the success of this government's policy to deconstruct public education. Make no mistake about it, this is just the crowning touch to what they've been up to: to deconstruct public education and chase frustrated families and children away from it, and we'll establish exactly how they've done that.

This is the proof. This is exactly what has happened: an almost 50% increase in enrolment in private schools. At the very same time as the member for London West is trying to defend his government's record, they have closed 440 public schools and opened 225 private schools. That's success. That's what they want. That's the tearing down of the public education system. That's what the members opposite stand for with this particular bill.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. If you want to have a conversation with somebody across the way, go across and talk to them or else leave.

The Chair recognizes the member for Parkdale-High Park.

Mr Kennedy: It is stunning to me that this government isn't standing up here with some backbone and saying, "This is what we want." They want to pull down the public system. They want to strip it down, the way

they are doing today in Toronto and in other places around the province. They are taking away the essential services that people need.

We will clearly establish exactly how it is. This government has an intent. They have, in fact, some success with this particular policy. But it is this debate and the debates that are sure to follow that are going to be the means by which the government really gets a good look at that. The deconstruction of public education is so essential, is so important, that that policy of theirs needs to be exposed. It needs to be brought up in this debate; it needs to be brought up in the campaign; it needs to be brought up in a number of different ways.

The sad part is that the government doesn't have the courage to stand up and say, "This is what we're about," but the facts stand for them. The facts stand in place of their resolve, in place of their courage, in place of their straight talk. They have indeed stripped down public education. Let's look at the underfunding. The current Finance Minister, the former Minister of Education, and successive Ministers of Education have stripped down the public education system, and they've done that in a way that even their own hand-picked, appointed inquiry found that this government, quite apart from annual increases, had taken out \$1.7 billion that had to be replaced just to live up to their own policies—no one else's ambitions for public education. There was \$1.7 billion missing, left out, taken away from the children in public schools in this province, taken away in their textbooks, taken away in their larger classes, taken away in their teaching quality, taken away in their support and taken away in their special education support. All around the province, in every community, we had this government deducting support.

That's what Dr Rozanski found. It's there in black and white. He said that the gap between what boards had to pay and what this government is prepared to fund is the most serious problem, and he said, "Fix it." He said to this government that there's a \$1.7-billion hole as of August 31 of last year. It was so bad that Dr Rozanski said to this government, "Even though you've announced your funding for this year, it doesn't count. You've dug all the students in this province a huge hole, and you've got to start filling it in, even in the current year," and that wasn't even part of his recommendations. The government tries to claim that any money they spend on education is part of fixing the big hole they have for students, but it's not true. The Minister of Finance knows it's not true because the Minister of Finance was the Minister of Education through a number of these years. But they are pretending, her budget pretends and a number of the government's documents pretend that they're responding to Dr Rozanski.

We'll be able to demonstrate conclusively that this government has only committed to 30%—not delivered; promised—of the remedy that Dr Rozanski said was needed for essential public education services. What does that mean? It means that this government gleefully takes away over \$650 from every single student in publicly

funded schools that their own investigator said is needed for their essential education. They do that with equanimity because it's part of their plan; it's part of the outlook. It may not be shared by every single member, but we'll never know that because we won't hear that opinion represented here. There will be nobody standing up for public education on the government side. We've seen that. It took the former Premier to stand up for public education, because that's the only place we could find a Conservative who would do the job that needs to be done on behalf of students in this province.

We look at the turmoil, we look at the approach this government has taken to education: 25 million lost days for students. That compares to one quarter as much—it's four times the level of the two previous combined. This government has invented school turmoil. They have created conditions in which any reasonable parent would say, "Why is my child being subjected to this? I want to support public education but this government keeps picking battles with school boards and teachers. Don't they know how to fix anything?"

Yet we find out as well that the schools are crumbling: \$5 billion, according to the Minister of Finance's former executive assistant in a memorandum, is acknowledged and confirmed by Dr Rozanski—denied then, but confirmed now as the deficit we have in falling-down infrastructure in our schools, the result of the deliberate neglect that this government has subjected our public schools to.

Yet, today in the House this government has the audacity to present us with a bill—a bill they want to pay, a bill for private schools. Let's have a look. How effective is this money going to be? How much social benefit will it deliver? On the one hand they're pulling money out of the public education system and refuse to put it back, even when their own independent investigator says it must be returned. They refuse to make that commitment. You look at their budget plan and you see there isn't a chance they could meet Dr Rozanski's requirements in less than 15 years. That's how little commitment there is to just doing the Band-Aid part of leadership in education, never mind the excellence that is truly required.

1700

What has happened this year with this vanguard, right-wing policy, this idea of a voucher, which you can't find anywhere else in Canada? What has happened with it? Now that it's out there, promoted by this government, what has been the response? Let's look at what happened at Albert College this year. Last year, Albert College charged \$29,000 in tuition. What are they charging this year? It's \$31,000. Appleby College was \$35,100 last year; this year they're going to charge \$36,850. Bayview Glen was charging \$17,100 last year; \$18,126 this year. Branksome Hall was \$16,060 last year; \$18,150 this year. The Country Day School was \$14,700 and is going up to \$15,950. Havergal College was \$15,900 and is going up to \$16,850. Holy Trinity School was \$13,600 and is going up to \$14,300. Toronto French School was \$16,900

and is going up to \$17,750. Trinity College School was \$31,750 and will be \$33,750 next year.

What's the average of those increases? It's \$1,400. There isn't a single benefit in those 10 private schools being delivered to parents or to families. It's all being captured by the elite private schools that this government wants to give public taxpayer dollars to. The tuitions are all going up. In anticipation of the initiative we have here today, they're just charging more. They're taking it right from the government and putting it into their operations. It's funding the private schools with no benefit to anyone. All the arguments being made across the way that there's some equity involved—look at the record. One thing I can guarantee, no matter how short or how long this government dares to make this particular debate, we won't see their figures. We won't see their studies. Why? Because successive Ministers of Education, the one who is currently Minister of Finance and the one who currently holds that title, have said on the record—if you can imagine this. They brought in this policy, they agreed to this policy, they supported this policy as advocates for public education and they didn't complete a single study about the impact of changing the face of education in this province with a public inducement to go to private schools—not one single study.

What kind of government would be that reckless? Only one that knows ahead of time what effect they want to cause. The government is fairly clear, fairly certain. They want to bolster the private school sector. They're very happy to have Albert College have \$2,000 more available to them. They're very pleased to see these increases, because that's what they have in mind, both at the high end—and they hope for some sort of medium end to get the next level of income going to private schools. It's a philosophy with which this party, the Ontario Liberal Party, disagrees entirely. We believe this government, in adopting this radical measure—the idea that we separate out people, those who can afford to buy education for their kids, some maybe even at a desperate level but driven there by the inadequacies that this government has allowed to develop in the public system.

These are families like Diane Allen's. Diane Allen is a parent of a private school student, and here's what she has to say:

"My husband and I stand to benefit from the proposal to grant tax credits to people who send their children to private schools.

"For the past four years, our son has attended a private school, at an annual cost of more than \$12,000 for tuition and books. We are not wealthy people by any means and have had to mortgage our future in order to pay these fees.

"However, we really have no choice. The public school system has been crippled by funding cutbacks since the Progressive Conservative Party came to power and is unable to meet his needs as a learning disabled, attention-deficit student.

"Despite the fact that the tax credits will bring us a bit of financial relief, I am completely opposed to them."

It's interesting that parents like that, parents like Diane Allen, are not the people this government has in mind. They have in mind a different kind of beneficiary, ones they hope they can collect from on voting day, and yet I would say that the value and the belief in the practicality of a functioning public education system is much more widely held than this government suspects. It may be very well disappointed in the cynical manoeuvre that would have them send all these dollars—\$500 million—to private schools at the direct expense of this system.

In the absence of studies from this government—this is a financial measure. Have we seen one study from the Ministry of Finance that tells us how much this is going to cost? No, because they're afraid of it. Why are they afraid of it? The former Minister of Finance, just in advance of his leadership tour when he attempted to become the leader of the Conservative Party, introduced this initiative without any prior warning. He raised this idea. He brought it up and said at the time, even though there had been very dramatic increases in private school enrolments, that there would be zero increases, that there would be no extra cost. There would be no increases at all, Mr Flaherty was on the record as saying.

You hear the minister opposite saying, "Well, it doesn't cost very much." In fact now, if you look in the Canadian Jewish News, you'll see that Mr Flaherty says it will cost \$175 million more. Mr Flaherty has now changed his mind and agrees that on top of the existing cost there will be another \$175 million. Where does that put you? You've got the government estimate of about \$350 million, and then another \$175 million. That's about \$500 million, and that's what Mr Flaherty sees happening.

Hon Mrs Ecker: No, it's not; it's \$300 million. You know that; you were briefed.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Flaherty says there will be a 25% increase in enrolment. He's on the record. He's a little bolder than the present finance minister, the member for Thornhill or any of the members who have spoken so far. They know what's happening. But they knew this already.

Because the diversion of children away from public schools, which has been the effective success—we've got to give them credit. They've managed to engineer a 50% increase in enrolment in private schools even before this was fully underway. They've managed to cut the increase in public school enrolment down to 5% from where it was, 9%. They've managed to have ten times the growth in private schools as in public schools. They've managed to succeed at that, but the 37,000 kids they've diverted have already cost the public system \$280 million in funding. That's what they would have received had they been in those schools. When we look at the 440 public schools this government has closed, there is a very strong implication in all of this. We have them talking about declining enrolment—

Interjections.

Mr Kennedy: The member opposite talks about declining enrolment. How about the 37,000 kids you took out of the public system and put in the private system, by

the way you have discouraged their parents from being there? That is indeed declining enrolment. The member opposite has got it right on. But it's declining enrolment from the declining commitment of this government to education in the public sense. It's declining enthusiasm on the part of these people, and frankly, it's declining effort. It's a lazy approach. Perhaps that's what motivated Mr Davis when he came out and said this is wrong.

Some of the members opposite, and some of them, sadly, in positions of responsibility, have tried to say, "Mr Davis, the former Premier, just happened coincidentally to be talking about vouchers." Well, in any analysis anywhere else—let's try, for example, the 26 US states that put this on the ballot. They called vouchers and tax credits the same thing. They are the same thing. What they are is dangerous. They're dangerous for a whole number of reasons, not the least of which is what they do to public schools, and that is what makes them attractive to this government.

Let's be very clear. This government from time to time has exploited minority religious concerns and has said, "We'll deal with those." Yet every one of the members opposite knows—while there may not be studies, we're pretty sure they have calculated this—that 60% of the students are not in minority religious schools. They know that 75% of the money is going to end up in non-religious, private, secular schools. Why? Because there's already a tax credit for religious schools, as there is for any religious activities, a tax credit from the provincial and the federal government. Because of that, the maximum benefit of this plan, the one we're being asked to approve today in Bill 53, goes to private, secular schools, including the ones I just named, which have hiked their tuition by some \$2,000 or \$1,500—an average, not coincidentally, of \$1,400, the exact benefit this government wants to confer on them.

That is their plan, and they seem to be succeeding with it. But they, I think, stand exposed. I suspect if we'd had an election this might have worked better for them, because they would have done their narrowcasting. They would have sent a wink and a nod to the people they wanted to talk to, to believe they had their interests at heart. They would have said something else to the people out there who are worried, frankly, after eight years of this government bungling education and want to know what's going to happen for their kids.

That's exactly what we have to try to accomplish. People who care about public education have to get involved in this issue now. We need to show people there will be a significant reaction in this province to the idea of undermining public education. We need people to sustain their confidence. We know how hard it will be. There will be people out there looking at their young children and saying, "Do I want them to go through what the Conservatives have put them through? Do we want to lose another 25 million days?" And people will say, "No."

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The interesting thing is, I believe this idea of public education is so strong out there. I have a four-year-old,

and that four-year-old might need the highest level of support in public education, which is an ISA 3, and that might amount to a certain number of dollars. Someone else's child, someone opposite, might need very little support, might need \$1,200 worth of support because they're ready to learn and they've got everything they need. Both of these are hypothetical, but they're not hypothetical in the sense that they exist. This is the point of public education. We pool our challenges and our possibilities.

This government would change that. They would hive off people. They would send people away from public education. They would no longer have us do the things that many, many people in this province work very hard to make possible: equalized opportunity. Make it based on your ability and willingness to work. This government would change that. They would have more and more exclusiveness. They would have more and more separateness, more and more apartness. That's where this is.

Let's look at the measure in question, because some of the members opposite may not have examined it in detail. They may think it's something that it's not. This is a voucher program in every single respect except name. What does it do? Anyone in the province with any qualifications whatsoever, with five children in instruction of any kind can get \$3,500 from this government per child. Anyone. There is no qualification whatsoever on who that person teaching is. None whatsoever. There is no qualification.

To quote from the ministry materials, "When it comes to elementary schools, we don't even visit them." They don't even look at the elementary schools that they propose to send \$3,500 to. They don't go in there. They just put them on their Web site. As many people found out, thanks to the diligence of people like the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, some of these schools go bankrupt, and then who stands up for them? Only opposition members, because the government doesn't deal with it.

They've thrown this at anything; any five students will get this tax credit. Will have they accredited teachers? No, they won't. The government will not make those teachers be accredited. They will stand as the only government in Canada that gives money outside the public system for non-accredited teachers—the only one.

Will they teach the curriculum? They've made a big deal, spent a fair bit of your money, Mr Speaker, everyone's money, on advertising a new curriculum. Does this new curriculum apply in these private schools they want to send your tax dollars into? It doesn't. There's no requirement to carry any kind of curriculum whatsoever; none at all.

Is the government subjecting them to tests? Do they look at what their \$3,500 of taxpayers' money is going to get in these unusual private schools? Because it can be anything; it's not just the ones people may be familiar with. It can be any school. They've thrown them all together. No; no testing. There's no requirement. They have standardized tests and they're not requiring them.

Sadly, the government won't even require the most minimal requirements. For example, they ask for a criminal background check as the only thing in common for what they put as an onus on the public system, and then you don't have to hand that in anywhere. There is nobody who is going to check whether that criminal background check actually found a criminal.

Worse is the fact that when the Robins report came through and this government was responsible for implementing the Robins report, looking at the risks for young children in school settings, they would not accept an amendment to make it apply to private schools.

What is this about? Why on the one hand does this brand of Conservatives act like the Soviet politburo when it comes to trying to run schools? They've taken over school boards in Ottawa, in Hamilton, in Toronto. They're stripping them down. They're taking services away. They kicked seniors out of their programs. They've kicked basketball teams out of the gyms after school. They've removed youth counsellors. They've taken away attendance counsellors. Can you imagine? Here in Toronto they want 28 people to look after the needs of 280,000 students when it comes to not being in school. Just two weeks ago we had a call from a teacher in Scarborough who found a truant student, a 12-year-old, who had been missing from school for 32 days. He went to find him himself on his own time because there was nobody available any more from the Toronto school board to look for students who have gone astray. Yet this government would have that child be lost for good, because they aren't prepared to put the dollars into public education to make sure the basic support services are there.

Mr Phillips: Shame.

Mr Kennedy: It is a shame. It is a choice, though. It is a choice that the people of the province need to be making, not when this government gets the courage for an election, because that could be some time, but right now. They need to get involved in this Bill 53. They need to take whatever opportunity, whatever glimpse of its real agenda this government wants to provide, because they need to know.

There are no standards for this money, and that's bad. It's not a good idea. It's a very poor way to spend government money. Once upon a time they used to sing a different song on the other side, and they used to talk about accountability. But we've learned what that means. It means for everyone else; it doesn't mean for them.

Why would they do this? Why would they have no standards to be met whatsoever? Why would they send this money out in such a reckless fashion? Because they want to engender a certain response. They want to see a private school system set up and fostered in a whole bunch of different ways. If you look at last year, we had 42 new private schools register with this government. That's double the rate of the year before. This government is bringing on private schools.

Mr Wood: That's good news.

Mr Kennedy: I give the member for London West credit. The member says, "Good news." The member for

London West wants to undermine the public education system. He has not put it on the record yet, but at least he is going to speak to that in this House. Most of the other members won't do that. Most of the other members are not proud of the track record that has increased private school enrolment by 50%—10 times the growth in the public system—which has diverted kids from the public system and damaged that system, which has closed schools that provided excellent education in rural settings, in inner cities, in a range of settings in this province. They have accelerated the declining enrolment in those places and sent those parents and communities into a tailspin.

Now, around the time of a putative election, we hear some backtracking. But people know better. They know this government has shut down 440 public schools. They know they've built fewer schools than any other government. We hear different numbers from the government, but at the end of the day we can prove—and I challenge all the members opposite to put your figures down. You have built fewer schools per year than any government in the last 12 years, and you have closed more. That's what you've done.

Hon Mr Klees: That's absolutely wrong.

Mr Kennedy: Well, put them out there. I say to the member opposite, you will not be able to run away from the fact that you have grown the private school system and you intend—and this is another member who might actually admit to this—to grow it even further. That's what this is about. You want to grow the private system and strip down the public education system. You've done that.

Mr Klees, I think, is probably somebody who will be in that cohort of the government that might actually say that publicly. I give him credit for that, because there is at least a basis for debate. But that's not the face the government wants to put on it. They want to send signals to certain people out here. They've taken hostage people who are conscientious objectors in certain religious groups and said, "We want to exploit you; we want to use your concerns to promote this other ideological system." They haven't told all those people exactly how it works. It benefits private secular schools and does it in a way that offers no controls. There is nothing, for example, to control what people are being taught. People can teach anything. No one will know what's being taught with public money.

In this diverse society we have permitted private schools, and we should, but not with government money. This is the new change. This is what the government has put in front of us as their best effort. They weren't up to the challenge of fixing public education, of making that work. They've backed away from that challenge today with this lazy-as-possible common denominator, this last-resort bill that would simply take the underfunding, the turmoil, the reckless attitude they've had toward public education and roll it up in an incentive for people to depart.

I want to say to the public out there, don't fall for this—not just for the bad policy, because we understand

people are seeing through this, but for the idea that you should be discouraged about public education just because of what this government has done. This government does not have the right to set the tone and crush the expectations of two million kids. They have already been derelict in their responsibilities. We have 100,000-plus, about 130,000, curriculum casualties. We have kids out there who have been receiving no assistance whatsoever to do better at things like the literacy test. Again, at the 11th hour, on the way out the door, this government tries to announce something. That is completely and sadly unacceptable. This government cannot ignore its responsibilities and not be held to account, because all the way along that's what this has been about.

This government is not trying to create some new paradigm in schools. They will let anyone collect this money; anyone whatsoever will be able to get it. Look at the standards they ask for, and they basically are saying, "Post your information on the Web site." I've heard the member opposite from time to time say, "The parents will know." That's exactly and precisely their attitude. They would say that around this province it is total laissez-faire. There will be no referee; there will be nobody looking after the public interest; there will be nobody.

As at least one of the members opposite is saying, it will be direct, and it will be directly against public education, because the principle and the philosophy are different. There must be now a working majority in the caucus and the government that's in favour of bringing down public education, promoting the private alternative, and splitting up the sides. They won't find that in the province.

1720

The Deputy Speaker: It is now time for comments and questions.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): You've heard from the rest; in 10 minutes you're going to hear from the best, as Rosario Marchese from the riding of Trinity-Spadina takes the floor as the New Democrats' education critic, as a member of a caucus and a party that is absolutely committed to full public funding of our public, Catholic and colloquially public school systems.

Rosario, raised in a Catholic family, has a close and intimate personal affinity with Catholic education. I know that he has been an advocate for Catholic funding and, more importantly, for the survival of the Catholic school system in the province. One of the concerns that Rosario Marchese has is that this government will do through the back door what politically it wouldn't dare do through the front door to the Catholic funded system. Rosario was there when Catholic teachers were under attack, and he'll be there for Catholic and non-Catholic families in the fight to ensure full funding of a public education system. I'm proud to have Rosario Marchese as a colleague. I'm proud to have Rosario Marchese out there in solidarity with teachers and their unions. He demonstrated that solidarity when Rosario led the fight to protect the right of Catholic teachers to collectively

bargain and when Rosario condemned the corrupt Catholic board for their lockout of teachers who wanted to be at work and wanted to be able to negotiate.

Rosario Marchese, 10 minutes. Then you'll hear a speech.

Hon Tina R. Molinari (Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I am pleased to rise in this debate and make some comments on the speaker from Parkdale-High Park.

I want to start off by saying that no one, absolutely no one, on this side of the House has done anything to undermine public education, and I'm sorry to say that I can't say the same for the other side of the House. When the speaker talked about undermining public education, it's all the fearmongering they do that undermines public education, not our policy.

Feedback from sound system.

Hon Mrs Molinari: What our policy does is it promotes choice for families; it promotes choice for those who choose to send their kids to something other than the publicly funded system. Thornhill is a riding that has a lot of private schools. In Thornhill, as a matter of fact, there are parents who have come to me consistently telling me how important this is to them.

Interjections.

Hon Mrs Molinari: It's not just in Thornhill, but it's other areas in the province. York Centre is another riding; St Paul's, Eglinton-Lawrence. The members should really listen to what those people are saying.

As far as criteria, I was involved in the consultation process that developed the criteria for schools to be eligible for tax credits, so I want to make it clear that there are criteria. The members of the opposition should look at what the criteria are and be assured that they do have to follow the criteria stipulated in order to get the education tax credit.

I want to congratulate the former Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, for introducing the very valuable initiation of this tax credit, and the Minister of Education at the time, Janet Ecker, who was involved in the process. On this side of the House, we don't undermine public education; we support choice.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll remind the members that there is no talking back and forth. The sound that you thought you heard was a freighter coming up University. It's kind of foggy, and it was a foghorn. I just wanted you to know.

The Chair recognizes the member for Eglinton-Lawrence.

Mr Colle: I just want to congratulate the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, Gerry Phillips, and the member for Parkdale-High Park, Gerard Kennedy, for their passionate defence of students and parents who are in our public education system because they've been abandoned by this government, who has put them through eight years of reckless cuts, crises and conflicts. That has been a real shock to the parents who feel that this government has done nothing but negatively impact their children. There's no excuse for them. That's what they've done,

and the record is clear. If you talk to parents, they'll tell you what this government has done to public education and to children. It's shameful, what they've done. It's shameful, what this government did.

The member for Parkdale-High Park mentioned a St James Academy school, which was in my riding at Caledonia and Lawrence. This government allowed the school to be operated by one of the most notorious con artists in this country, who had a criminal record of fraud and deception. It took two years of begging this government to do something to close that down. They wouldn't do it. They let this person take money from parents with disabled-learning children. They wouldn't stop him. This man was stealing money from parents of disabled children. He was operating a school in a warehouse with substandard conditions and this government did nothing to stop St James Academy. That's what the public is afraid of. Will this government tolerate more St James Academies and do nothing while children and their parents are abused by these fly-by-night operators? That's what this government will not protect the parents from.

Hon Jim Flaherty (Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation): There was a time when Liberals believed in a few things. Well, they don't any more. The equity in education tax credit is about diversity in our society. If you believe in diversity in our schools—the Liberals don't believe in diversity. The equity in education tax credit is about parental choice. One would think the Liberals believed in the parents' choice for their families. Liberals don't believe in parental choice in education in Ontario. They believe the state knows better. They believe Big Brother know better than parents in Ontario about how their children should be educated.

The equity in education tax credit stands for equality of opportunity. It's not just rich people who have the choice, rich Liberals in Ontario who can send their children to fancy schools, Mr Phillips and his friends on the other side of the House. There's choice for people who have lots of money in Ontario. Sure, they can send their children to these independent schools that are expensive. But what about middle-class people? What about people who work in this province who, for religious, cultural or other reasons, after they've paid all their public school taxes, want to dig into their own pockets and are prepared to pay more money for their children to have independent education? Liberals don't believe in equality of opportunity.

They do believe in one thing, and that has become quite apparent over the last several years. They believe in big unions, they believe in big spending and they listen to the union leaders. I can tell you that they believe in one thing: subservience to big union leaders in Ontario. Shame; you should believe in parents and the power of parents.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Parkdale-High Park has two minutes to respond.

Mr Kennedy: The red scare is back. The red scare is alive and well in the member for Durham. We now see

where the alien ideas come from. The head author of the alien is here.

The member opposite talks about choice. The choice they want in Ontario is to take their kids to a public school—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. There's no shouting back and forth. If you want to talk to somebody over there, go and talk to them. Otherwise, leave, or I'll help you.

The member for Parkdale-High Park.

1730

Mr Kennedy: It is indeed clear: the choice this government has taken away from parents is to have their kids go to a school, not be worried about the turmoil, not be worried about the cutbacks, not be worried about the things this government has taken away from them. Now they stand exposed. They stand exposed to this gentleman's ideas. Some people will talk about it publicly. They want to undermine public education. All you need to do is pin on your fridge what Mr Flaherty just said. The fearmongering that they talk about—they took over the Toronto board, and 3,000 kids didn't show up. That's fearmongering, but from whom?

What did they do in that board? What have they done to contain apprehension in that board? They have cut service after service after service. They have exploited, as the members opposite have done consistently here, some of the needs that were brought up by the United Nations. They're on one side of the issue, and then they go on the other side of the issue when it's convenient for them. When one of the members opposite had a leadership campaign, he was there. Then the government backed off, and now that they're at a campaign and they need that narrow vote again. They want it back.

Even that constituency has got to ask themselves: how much real conviction is this? How much is this a government that is so politically needy, so desperate, they put themselves in the hands of people that at least half of this caucus, the Bill Davis kinds of people—there are probably not that many left over there—doesn't believe in? The others may believe in it, but they should never be running public education in the province again.

Mr Gill: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I seek unanimous consent of the House to pass third reading of my bill, Bill 2.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed? There is not.

Further debate.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I am happy to have this opportunity to beat up on the government, because it's fun to do, particularly with bills of this—

Mr Kormos: It's easy.

Mr Marchese: And it's easy—particularly with bills of this kind. I have half an hour today, Thursday, 5:30. I'll come back next Monday, hopefully, and I will have yet another half-hour. I drool at the prospect of beating them up again.

Mr Kormos: Drool.

Mr Marchese: I do drool at the prospect. Those of you watching, stay tuned, because what I have to say, quite frankly, is going to be actually very critical of the Conservative government and a bit critical of the Liberals too, because I've got some quotations here that I want to share with you good people watching.

I want to read from the document that the Minister of Finance read to us but a few short days ago.

Mr Kormos: Why?

Mr Marchese: Because it's instructive.

Mr Kormos: Is it helpful?

Mr Marchese: It will be helpful to the Tories.

The Deputy Speaker: I realize you'd like to have a conversation with your House leader, and if you'd like to, go ahead. I'll let the clock run, but it's awfully hard for me to keep others from talking if you're going to talk with him. I would ask that you address your comments through the Chair, please.

Mr Marchese: I thought the issue was for the speaker—me—to be able to keep up with the interruptions, rather than you listening. But, Speaker, please, I enjoy the debate that comes from all sides, any side; I really do. It doesn't interrupt me at all. Anyone can feel free, including the Speaker, to make comments about anything I say at any time, because I like it.

Here's what the Minister of Finance said a couple of days ago: "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." Minister Ecker said, "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." I'm not sure that reads well. "We've created report cards.... We've established standards for the professional development and performance appraisal of teachers in the classroom."

Here's the problem, Minister. When you talk about implementing standardized testing so you can ensure your children are learning, the question I have of you is, why don't you apply the same standard for the private system? Why would you have a double standard, one for the public system and one for the private system? Why would you give my money, that I don't want you to give away, to a private system without any strings attached? How could you and the minister beside you be proud of that?

Hon Mr Flaherty: It's not your money.

Mr Marchese: Minister Flaherty, it's my money.

Hon Mr Flaherty: It's not your money.

Mr Marchese: Minister Flaherty, it's my money.

Hon Mr Flaherty: That's the problem with you people. You think it's your money.

Mr Marchese: Yeah, it is my money. Monsieur Flaherty, Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation, says it's not my money. Well, when you give a tax credit that comes out of consolidated funds, it's my

money and the money of every citizen who pays PST, who pays user fees and who pays income tax. Their money, and my money that I disagree with your sending to private schools, is going to the private schools in ways that are not accountable. You are giving citizens' money away to private schools without any accountability, without any strings attached. We think that's dumb politics and it's dumb policy. Taxpayers—because that's the way you like to refer to citizens—who respect you or like you, I am convinced, do not like to have their money being sent to private schools in ways that are not accountable.

Hon Mr Flaherty: It doesn't go to schools; it goes to parents.

Mr Marchese: I disagree with you, Minister Flaherty, that this money, even if it goes to parents, somehow is not your money or mine. You will not be able to fool the public in any way whatsoever when you try to convince them that somehow this money that comes from government and goes to parents isn't my money or the taxpayers' money or the money of citizens. Following this debate, you're going to have a heck of a time explaining to anyone in your hometown that it's not their money you're using.

Hon Mr Flaherty: No problem at all.

Mr Marchese: I tell you, Minister: you guys are going down, and you're going down fast. It's these kinds of policies that are going to bring you down, and rightfully so.

Minister Ecker, who had to step out for a few moments, but I'm sure will be back, said, "We will also pass regulations," imagine, "to require independent schools to assess student achievement in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics and to share that assessment with parents." How magnanimous, Minister Ecker, that you will now, by regulation, require those independent schools to assess student achievement and share that knowledge with the parents. You're so very kind. I'm sure parents want to know.

What you don't tell them, Minister Ecker, wherever you are, is that they in those private schools—religious and non-denominational—will not have to write the same tests, the same assessments that every grade 3, grade 6, grade 9 and grade 10 student has to write. They are not compelled to do that. What the government requires independent schools to do, and what Minister Flaherty under duress now requires independent schools to do, through regulation, is assess student achievement. It doesn't tell us how; they will just be required to do it somehow. Every student in grade 3, grade 6 and grade 9 has to write a standardized test; there's no way out of it. But Minister Flaherty doesn't see that as a problem. He believes the public system needs to have those standardized tests because, you see, that's rigorous, but in the private system, they don't have to do that. A curious thing. Why would that be the case?

1740

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Member from Northumberland, ask the minister. Explain yourself, Minister. Help me to understand, because I don't. I'm convinced the member from Northumberland understands the argument intellectually. He must be profoundly confused by the contradiction. But perplexed as he might be, he cannot escape the fact that his front benches have forced the member from Northumberland to accept the reality that he's stuck with the fact that Minister Flaherty introduced this when he was the Minister of Finance, and you've got to live with that, whether you like it or not.

Mr Colle: The member from Northumberland has good instincts.

Mr Marchese: He's got good instincts, animal instincts; I know. He knows when an issue like this is going to affect him and affect him dearly.

Member from Northumberland, do the teachers have to be assessed, have to write tests, have to undergo teacher testing, in the same way teachers do in the public system? Member from Northumberland, I ask you, do you know? Do you care? You seem to care, member from Northumberland and Minister Flaherty, that in the public system teachers have to undergo tests, as you call them. There are 14 courses: seven obligatory and seven elective. But teachers in the private system I guess do not have to undergo this rigorous development because, presumably, they are better achievers, better teachers, are in the private system and therefore need not be scrutinized, need no professional development, because they are at the height of their development. Do you understand, member from Northumberland, that we've got a problem?

I'm sure the Minister of Transportation, in his neck of the woods, has a problem he can't deal with because, you see, they are two contradictory positions. In my view, when your government gives away public dollars—my money—without any strings attached, I say to you that is a public wrong. That is policy that is ill-conceived. That is politics that is crass. It is so obvious why you are doing it, and it's crass; not intelligent. When you look at the contradictions, it's indefensible.

There are so many in the private system who do not have the qualifications, and you make no bones about that. It doesn't seem to affect you. In the private system it doesn't matter, I suppose. Many teachers in the private system are unqualified because they are not certified. Many of those teachers and non-teachers do not have to have any professional development or testing. They do not have to have the qualifying test for those teachers who are about to teach. They do not have to write a qualifying test. Students do not have to write the standardized tests in grades 3, 6 and 9. All they are required to do at those schools is simply do some assessments; that's all.

Minister Flaherty, the Minister of Innovation, could not come back to this House with anything innovative to make this bill better. The Minister of Opportunity could not come up with any opportune idea that would help those teachers, who presumably struggle similar to those

in the public system, with any professional development idea that might make me feel good. The Minister of Enterprise—the same person—could not come up with any enterprising idea that could help those parents in the private system come up with some assessment tool that would be rigorous enough, similar to the one public kids have to write, to make parents and those students better, as they claim they're doing with students in the public system.

Minister of Transportation and member from Northumberland, do you see the problems I'm having?

Hon Mr Klees: You're having problems all right.

Mr Marchese: Of course I'm having problems, Minister of Transportation, because I'm trying to—

Hon Mr Klees: Can I make a suggestion?

Mr Marchese: Please.

Hon Mr Klees: Change your position on this.

Mr Marchese: The Minister of Transportation says that if I were to change my position and willingly give my money to private schools, it would make him feel better. I know that.

What I'm trying to tell you is, when you get around in that transportation system you're trying to improve after all these eight years, and you get off at any one of the GO stations, the streetcars, whatever, please talk to a couple of people and say, "Look, we're giving your money away for private kids. How do you feel about that? Do you like it?" Ask them the question, "We're not testing teachers there because we don't have to. Do you like it?" Teachers in the public system have to—I referred to you by your right label. Why are you up and on what point? He's up on some point.

Hon Mr Klees: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would actually request unanimous consent so that I could give an explanation to the honourable member of really how this program works.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there consent? There is no consent.

The Chair recognizes the member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: I am going to explain how the system works, and I've got plenty of time to tell him how it works.

Hon Mr Klees: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think the record should show that it was the honourable member who said no; he really doesn't want to understand.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. The member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: The problem is that your policy's indefensible. Ninety-five per cent of all our children are in public schools. Minister of Innovation, that's diversity. When 95% of our kids are in public schools, that speaks to the richness, the strength, the vitality of diversity in a public system.

Hon Mr Flaherty: Just like the Soviet Union—state schools.

Mr Marchese: I'm not so sure. I'm not sure I'm advocating a position that's way out of whack with Liberals, even, and Tories, even, because I'm convinced

many of your members don't support you in this, by the way. It's hardly a Soviet Union position. By the way, I wasn't a big fan of the Soviet Union. But dare I say, Minister of Innovation, that the policies you have adopted are more Soviet Union-like than anything we New Democrats have ever done. Let me explain how, if you're curious to know. He's not interested, but I will tell him anyway.

When he centralized education financing and took the power away from boards of education, that was Soviet Union centralization of power unlike anything we've ever seen, but perhaps the Minister of Enterprise might not make the connection. But a centralized, planned economy, which was the Soviet Union, and a centralized education system where boards have little power left: that is Soviet Union-like. You appreciate the comparison, Minister?

Hon Mr Flaherty: No, it's very poor, actually.

Mr Marchese: Very poor. Come on, Jim, you don't know what you're talking about. I'm telling you. I gave you a comparison that's as clear as a blue sky on a nice summer day, and you're saying to me that's a poor comparison. Please, come on.

Hon Mr Flaherty: You still want to dictate to parents.

Mr Marchese: I'm dictating? No, what I'm saying to you is this: that diversity is in the public system, that choice is in the public system. I'm saying to you, Jim, Minister of Innovation, if you know parents who want to have choice, let them have their choice and let them pay for their private education.

Hon Mr Flaherty: What if they can't pay?

Mr Marchese: Let the rich pay for their own private schools.

Hon Mr Flaherty: What about middle-class people?

Mr Marchese: Let the middle-class people go. If they want to leave our system and pay for their own private education on their own, not my business, not my problem.

Hon Mr Flaherty: You just said it, "our system."

Mr Marchese: Minister of Innovation, are you abandoning our public school system? Are you saying my public system is just mine, not yours? I thought you were defending the public system. I thought you people were for a strong public system, but you just told me, "my system"—as if it's my public system and not yours. Which of these two systems do you believe in? Do you believe in a public system or do you believe in a private system? Which one do you believe in? You made it very clear to me that the one you believe in is the private one, not the public one. You leave very little room for choice.

1750

He's not listening to me, so I'll talk to the taxpayers, those who like the Minister of Innovation, those who like the Minister of Transportation, those who like the member for Northumberland. I'll talk to those taxpayers. I've got no problem with that. I'd like to talk to them very directly.

Taxpayers—those of you who like to be referred to that way—this government has already given \$50 million

to \$60 million of your money and mine away to private schools. With this year's announcement, he's giving away another 50 or 60 million bucks, and the following year he's going to give away another \$50 million or \$60 million of your money and mine. It's going, yes, to religious systems and to places like Montessori schools and to private schools like Upper Canada College. I often use Upper Canada College, not because I dislike them but because they're close by, very near to us. They're now paying 16,000 bucks to get into those schools.

Do you think, Madame Taxpayer, that \$16,000 per child is a lot? Not a lot? Too much? Do you think, Monsieur Taxpayer, that \$16,000 would go a long way toward helping you pay your rent? Maybe. Do you think that 16,000 bucks could pay your mortgage, perhaps very hefty? Do you think it might be able to pay for your old age and home services that some of you might need? Do you think these rich men and women, who pay \$16,000 per child in tuition fees, need your help, need my help? No, they don't.

The Minister of Innovation is saying to you that when \$60 million of our money goes out every year, it's OK. It's your money, taxpayers, those of you who are Conservative-Alliance types who like to be called taxpayers; \$60 million last year, \$60 million this year is coming out of your little, tiny pockets to go to private schools. Do you like that? I don't.

Hon Mr Flaherty: There is nothing going to private schools. It goes to parents.

Mr Marchese: It goes to subsidize parents, Minister of Innovation. Oh, what a thrill it was for the Minister of Innovation that I should acknowledge that your money and mine is going to parents. Yay.

Applause.

Mr Marchese: Even my friend Carl DeFaria clapped this time around.

Hon Mr Klees: We're proud of you.

Mr Marchese: I know you are. Carl, what riding are you from?

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: Oh well, Minister of Citizenship. They all clap when I say your money is going to parents and not to private schools, as if your money that goes to these parents is not going to the private schools. What a remarkable distinction that the Minister of Innovation makes. Therefore, 60 million bucks that goes to parents is OK, he argues, because it's going to parents who are sending their kids to private schools. He laughs and says, "Ha," and claps and says, "Yay, he got it right."

I appeal to your good sense and good instincts, good taxpayers, for you to come to your own conclusion about giving \$120 million, so far, to parents who send their kids to schools like Upper Canada College, where the tuition fees are 16,000 bucks. The Minister of Innovation says it's OK.

Hon Mr Flaherty: What's the monetary limit?

Mr Marchese: It doesn't matter what the limit is. You know I like it. You keep it coming, Minister of Innovation. Madame Taxpayer, Monsieur le Taxpayer, Mon-

sieur Flaherty says to you, "How much money is going to these parents?" Up to \$3,500 will go to each parent for each student. So far, \$120 million has been taken away from your pockets to give away to parents who will send their little kiddies to places like Upper Canada College, where they spend \$16,000 a year to get there.

Hon Mr Flaherty: What about the Christian, Jewish and Muslim schools? Let's hear about them.

Mr Marchese: You will. I say, 95% of all of our students in Ontario are in the public system that you, Minister of Innovation, respect and love and adore. You and the finance minister next to you, who hasn't been able to come back yet to listen to my speech, love the public system. They love the fact that 95% of our students are in our public system.

At one point, acknowledges the member for Scarborough-Agincourt, that minister said that to give away \$300 million—I believe it was \$300 million, and I forget if Harris said \$500 million. The two of them combined said that to give away \$300 million or \$500 million would be to fragment our public education system.

Hon Doug Galt (Minister without Portfolio): You're doing a fine job.

Mr Marchese: Ciao, ciao, member for Northumberland. Nice to see you. See you later.

Minister of Finance Ecker and the former Premier said that close to \$500 million is going to go away and that if we do that, it will fragment public education. Boy, did they love public education then. Now they lost the fervour, although they still claim to love public education. It's right here at the top of their mind. It's on the front burner, as it were. Always there: ready to test kids in grade 3, grade 6, grade 9, grade 10; unwilling to test kids in the private schools because it just doesn't matter. When you give away your public dollars to the private schools, they can carry it away in wheelbarrows and it doesn't matter, because we don't have to worry about them.

But taxpayers, I tell you, you have to worry about the \$120 million taken out of your pockets and given away to parents who will send them to private schools, denominational and non-denominational. While it is true that the bulk will go to non-denominational schools, much of that money as well, perhaps to a lesser extent, will go to other religious groups.

New Democrats do not support this. We believe, like the Minister of Finance, that to do so is to fragment our system and to fragment our society socially and philosophically. It's a mistake. We are unequivocal about this.

While I agree with the member from Scarborough-Agincourt when he attacks the former Minister of Finance and attacks the former Premier, Liberals have not been too clear on this. I'm sorry to say that. I have some quotes.

My friend Gerard Kennedy—I call him my friend now because we are often at so many meetings debating together.

Mr Kormos: You two guys are really tight.

Mr Marchese: We're tight like this. I quote Gerard when he said in 2001—all these quotes are from 2001. "He contends that funding for religious schools doesn't necessarily mean less money for the public system. Both can be accommodated. When asked how, he says, 'We don't have the answer to that at this time.'"

Mr Kormos: When did he say that?

Mr Marchese: May 5, 2001, *Now* magazine.

Michael Bryant, the Liberal energy critic: "I can't suck and blow on this tax credit. I've got to support this. It's a step in the direction of equity. So I support that."

Mr Kormos: When was that?

Mr Marchese: That was the *Toronto Star*, May 12, 2001.

Even Kathleen Wynne, a Liberal candidate and school trustee, said, "Ontario people of one faith get preferential treatment in the school system." That's June 6, 2001.

Monte Kwinter, the Liberal critic for the Ministry of Innovation: "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." May 5, 2001.

Dalton McGuinty, Liberal leader: "I have said in the past that there is a fairness issue here regarding the funding of independent schools, and that is something that we recognize." *The Toronto Star*, May 16, 2001.

Unlike them, New Democrats are very clear on this. We have been very unequivocal. You will not find a quote from us that says we support tax credits for private schools of any kind. You will not find one—not then, not in the future—from this caucus.

We've run out of time.

The Deputy Speaker: We have tonight. Some other day you'll be able to take up exactly where you left off.

It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 next Monday.

The House adjourned at 1801.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon / L'hon James K. Bartleman

Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Gary Carr

Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks at the Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma-Manitoulin	Brown, Michael A. (L)	Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)
Ancaster-Dundas- Flamborough-Aldershot	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Haliburton-Victoria-Brock Halton	Hodgson, Chris (PC) Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)	Hamilton East / -Est	Agostino, Dominic (L)
Beaches-East York	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Marie (L)
Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Gill, Raminder (PC)	Hamilton West / -Ouest	Christopherson, David (ND)
Brampton Centre / -Centre	Spina, Joseph (PC)	Hastings-Frontenac- Lennox and Addington	Dombrowsky, Leona (L)
Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	Clement, Hon / L'hon Tony (PC) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée	Huron-Bruce	Johns, Hon / L'hon Helen (PC) Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, John (L)
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kitchener Centre / -Centre	Wettlaufer, Wayne (PC)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Hon / L'hon Elizabeth (PC) Deputy Premier, Minister of Education / vice-première ministre, ministre de l'Éducation
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Beaubien, Marcel (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Hon / L'hon Norman W. (PC) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Don Valley East / -Est	Caplan, David (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Hon / L'hon Robert W. (PC) Minister of Public Safety and Security / ministre de la Sécurité et de la Sécurité publique
Don Valley West / -Ouest	Turnbull, Hon / L'hon David (PC) Associate Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation / ministre associé de l'Entreprise, des Débouchés et de l'Innovation	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Cunningham, Hon / L'hon Dianne (PC) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Dufferin-Peel- Wellington-Grey	Eves, Hon / L'hon Ernie (PC) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	London West / -Ouest	Wood, Bob (PC)
Durham	O'Toole, John R. (PC)	London-Fanshawe	Mazzilli, Frank (PC)
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Mike (L)	Markham	Tsubouchi, Hon / L'hon David H. (PC) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet, Minister of Culture / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement, ministre de la Culture
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Steve (L)	Mississauga Centre / -Centre	Sampson, Rob (PC)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Hon / L'hon Tim (PC) Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises		
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L)		
Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Stockwell, Hon / L'hon Chris (PC) Minister of the Environment, government House leader / ministre de l'Environnement, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		
Etobicoke North / -Nord	Hastings, John (PC)		
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Kells, Morley (PC)		
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)		
Guelph-Wellington	Elliott, Hon / L'hon Brenda (PC) Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services / ministre des Services à la collectivité, à la famille et à l'enfance		

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Mississauga East / -Est	DeFaria, Hon / L'hon Carl (PC) Minister of Citizenship, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires civiques, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées	Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Mushinski, Marilyn (PC)
Mississauga South / -Sud	Marland, Margaret (PC)	Scarborough East / -Est	Gilchrist, Steve (PC)
Nepean-Carleton	Baird, Hon / L'hon John R. (PC) Minister of Energy, Minister responsible for francophone affairs, deputy House leader / ministre de l'Énergie, ministre délégué aux Affaires francophones, leader parlementaire adjoint	Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	Newman, Hon / L'hon Dan (PC) Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre associé de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Niagara Centre / -Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Gerry (L)
Niagara Falls	Maves, Bart (PC)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Alvin (L)
Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)	Simcoe North / -Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)
Nipissing	McDonald, AL (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Northumberland	Galt, Hon / L'hon Doug (PC) Minister without Portfolio, chief government whip / ministre sans portefeuille, whip en chef du gouvernement	St Catharines	Bradley, James J. (L)
Oak Ridges	Klees, Hon / L'hon Frank (PC) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports	St Paul's	Bryant, Michael (L)
Oakville	Carr, Hon / L'hon Gary (PC) Speaker / Président	Stoney Creek	Clark, Hon / L'hon Brad (PC) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Oshawa	Ouellette, Hon / L'hon Jerry J. (PC) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	Clearly, John C. (L)
Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Rick (L)
Ottawa-Orléans	Coburn, Hon / L'hon Brian (PC) Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs	Thornhill	Molinari, Hon / L'hon Tina R. (PC) Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre associée des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Dalton (L) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	McLeod, Lyn (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Guzzo, Garry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Boyer, Claudette (Ind)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, David (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Hon / L'hon Ernie (PC) Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre associé des Affaires municipales et du Logement	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Gerard (L)	Timmins-Baie James	Smitherman, George (L)
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Johnson, Bert (PC)	Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Peterborough	Stewart, R. Gary (PC)	Toronto-Danforth	Sorbara, Greg (L)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Ecker, Hon / L'hon Janet (PC) Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances	Trinity-Spadina	Arnott, Ted (PC)
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Flaherty, Hon / L'hon Jim (PC) Minister of Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation / ministre de l'Entreprise, des Débouchés et de l'Innovation
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Conway, Sean G. (L)	Waterloo-Wellington	Young, Hon / L'hon David (PC) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Pupatello, Sandra (L)
Sault Ste Marie	Martin, Tony (ND)	Willowdale	Duncan, Dwight (L)
		Windsor West / -Ouest	Kwinter, Monte (L)
		Windsor-St Clair	Munro, Julia (PC)
		York Centre / -Centre	Cordiano, Joseph (L)
		York North / -Nord	Sergio, Mario (L)
		York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	
		York West / -Ouest	
		Mississauga West / -Ouest	Vacant

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Estimates / Budgets des dépenses

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Alvin Curling
Gilles Bisson, Ted Chudleigh, Alvin Curling,
Gerard Kennedy, Frank Mazzilli, Norm Miller,
John R. O'Toole, Steve Peters
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Finance and economic affairs /
Finances et affaires économiques**

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David Christopherson, Monte Kwinter,
John O'Toole, Gerry Phillips,
Rob Sampson, Joseph Spina
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Chair / Président: Steve Gilchrist
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Norm Miller
Marilyn Churley, Mike Colle,
Garfield Dunlop, Steve Gilchrist, Dave Levac,
Norm Miller, R. Gary Stewart, Wayne Wettlaufer
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Government agencies / Organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: James J. Bradley
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Michael Gravelle
James J. Bradley, Leona Dombrowsky, Michael Gravelle,
Bert Johnson, Tony Martin, Frank Mazzilli,
Wayne Wettlaufer, Bob Wood
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

Justice and Social Policy / Justice et affaires sociales

Chair / Présidente: Toby Barrett
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: AL McDonald
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Garry J. Guzzo, Ernie Hardeman,
Peter Kormos, AL McDonald, Lyn McLeod
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

Legislative Assembly / Assemblée législative

Chair / Présidente: Margaret Marland
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Julia Munro
Caroline Di Cocco, Jean-Marc Lalonde,
Margaret Marland, Bart Maves,
Julia Munro, Marilyn Mushinski,
Michael Prue, Joseph N. Tascona
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

Public accounts / Comptes publics

Chair / Président: John Gerretsen
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Bruce Crozier
Bruce Crozier, Garfield Dunlop,
John Gerretsen, Raminder Gill,
John Hastings, Shelley Martel,
AL McDonald, Richard Patten,
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Rosario Marchese
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Garfield Dunlop
Gilles Bisson, Claudette Boyer, Garfield Dunlop,
Raminder Gill, Pat Hoy, Morley Kells, Rosario Marchese, Ted
McMeekin, Bill Murdoch, Wayne Wettlaufer
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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