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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 8 December 2003

Lundi 8 décembre 2003

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 8 December 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 8 décembre 2003

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RURAL EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I rise this afternoon to make a few comments about the Simcoe County District School Board. In particular, I'd like to congratulate Ms Diane Bell, who was recently elected chairperson of the board. As well, I would like to congratulate Ms Debra Edwards, who was elected vice-chair of the board. Both of these women are especially committed to the quality of education in the county of Simcoe.

I'd also like to thank them for their commitment to small and rural schools. In the last Parliament, under the Harris-Eves government, 10 rural schools in my riding of Simcoe North received funding under the portable replacement program.

As the new Liberal government implements the remaining recommendations of the Rozanski report, rural Ontario will watch very closely to see if small and rural schools are funded fairly and equitably. In the last provincial election, the Liberals campaigned in Simcoe North by completely fearmongering the public, saying that Simcoe county schoolchildren were underfunded by a minimum of \$1,000 per child.

I now ask Minister Kennedy to immediately keep the Liberals' promise to raise funding by \$1,000 per child and have the Simcoe County District School Board and the Simcoe Muskoka school board receive an additional \$70 million approximately in the grant allocations in the budget year 2004-05. It is one thing to campaign on promises; it is obviously another to deliver. Simcoe county parents, teachers and students look forward to one promise the Liberals won't break.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): It is my privilege to be here representing the riding of Sault Ste Marie. It is the first time a Liberal member has had this opportunity from our city since 1937. I'm truly honoured, and also proud, to be part of a new Liberal government that has been on the job since day one. We've already put forward an aggressive plan for change to address the

tremendous mismanagement of this province by the past Conservative government.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge your acclamation to the Chair of this House. It is clearly a reflection of the confidence members have in your ability to be fair and impartial.

I want to tell you that I have tremendous enthusiasm for our government's abilities to meet the needs and challenges we face in this province today. I am saying that because, without a doubt, the last time in the past 25 years the riding of Sault Ste Marie received significant investment and had economic growth was under the Peterson Liberal government. During the recent election, our party was the only party that took the needs of northern Ontario seriously and clearly outlined our plans in a document called True North.

Northerners once again have a renewed hope for their economic and social future and that conditions will improve, because our new Premier also takes the needs of northern Ontario seriously. It is my privilege to be part of a government that truly respects the interests of all Ontarians.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I rise in the House today to draw attention to another Liberal broken promise. During the recent election campaign, the Liberal education critic, Gerard Kennedy, promised residents of my constituency of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford that, if elected, his government would get a school built on Cheltenham Drive in Barrie "right away."

The now Minister of Education made these comments to parents and to the media. He committed to helping the parents of Barrie and we have yet to hear from him since he has become the minister. It has been almost two months since Minister Kennedy was sworn in as education minister, yet he has failed to live up to the promises he made to my constituents. Not one phone call, not one letter, not one indication from him that he is working to keep his promise to build a school on Cheltenham Drive "right away."

What we have here is another Liberal who says anything to get elected and then once in office does something completely different or forgets his commitments. I stand here today to urge the Minister of Education to keep his commitment to the parents and students of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. On behalf of my constituents, I am asking the honourable minister to keep his word. Sit down with parents and myself, Mr Minister, and tell us

when we can expect the school on Cheltenham Drive to be built. When can we expect our students to be placed in real classrooms, rather than being bussed halfway across the city? We look forward to hearing from you.

TEACHERS

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I would like to use this occasion to say thank you to the teachers of Ontario. For the last eight years they have been vilified and attacked. During those eight years, they continued with the highest degree of professionalism. They continued to teach because of their love for teaching.

We have seen extracurricular activities flourish. We have seen teachers undertake tasks without the resources that they should have had available to them. We've seen special education underfunded for eight years. We've seen the lack of textbooks. Yet the teachers came to do what they love to do, which is to teach, and for any extra load put on them, they bore that burden.

Now, together, we can move forward, but we would not be in this position had the teachers maintained the quality of education that they have to this point. Dalton McGuinty, Gerard Kennedy and the Ontario Liberals believe there is no reason that we cannot have the best education system in the world. So to the teachers of Ontario, I say thank you, and I also pledge that, together, we will move forward to deliver the quality of education for the students. Students are and will continue to be number one to the Ontario Liberals.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I direct my statement today to the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. I asked the minister on behalf of the people of the village of Baxter, a small village located in my riding in the township of Essa, to locate an LCBO agency store in that community.

Visitors to rural Ontario—small town, small village Ontario—and the people who live there and the businesses that are currently operating in Baxter, for example, really need this type of presence and this type of service in their community. It prevents people from going outside of the village to do their shopping. In this case, the residents of Baxter have to go to Angus or Alliston or to Barrie to receive LCBO services. For some people, that's not such a great idea, to be on the road receiving these services and driving long distances. In fact, we have the support of the local OPP for this request.

During our time in office, we had a program to revitalize rural and small-town Ontario and villages, and we were able to establish in my riding LCBO agency stores in Minesing, Anten Mills, Singhampton, Feversham, Craigleith and Beeton. Every one of them has been a great success. Liquor store sales have gone up. Therefore, the Treasurer makes more money, and the convenience is second to none to people in these com-

munities. It helps save and revitalize these small towns and villages. Once again, I ask the minister to consider putting an agency store in the village of Baxter.

1340

CARLO PARIBELLO

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise today to share with the members of this House an extraordinary accomplishment of a constituent of Brampton Centre. Dr Carlo Paribello has been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal from Canada's Governor General. This award recognizes an activity, performed in a highly professional manner, of a very high standard, that brings benefit or honour to Canada. Dr Paribello, who runs a practice in my riding, was honoured for his work in creating the Fragile X Research Foundation of Canada, which he co-founded with his wife, Barbara, in 1997.

Fragile X is the most commonly genetically inherited form of mental impairment and developmental disability. It affects one in 2,000 males and one in 4,000 females. The Fragile X Research Foundation is run entirely by volunteers, professionals and parents of children affected by this disorder. By trying to speed up the progress toward effective treatments for Fragile X, Dr Paribello and the members of his organization are leading the way toward finding a cure.

I want to recognize and take this opportunity to thank Dr Paribello and his organization for his service, dedication and leadership in our community. He is an inspiration to the people of my Brampton Centre riding and serves as an example for all Ontarians.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): The media in Niagara were abuzz this weekend with the shocking news that the Dalton McGuinty government is slamming the brakes on a mid-peninsula corridor. We all know the importance of this highway for trade, tourism and development in southwestern Niagara, in fact in all of the peninsula, and Haldimand county as well. I'm rather puzzled why the McGuinty government would slam the brakes on what could be the most important project in a generation in the Niagara peninsula.

I know there are some members of the Liberal team—the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot, their candidate in the Kitchener-Waterloo area, among many others—who are questioning the need for a mid-peninsula corridor. We've been there. We've done that. The demonstration is very clear that we needed that highway yesterday, not in an additional three, four or five years from now, as the Liberal government plans to do.

I have to question too how this plays into their greenbelt strategy. It's a commendable idea to help preserve the tender fruit lands in the Niagara peninsula, but they should know the mid-peninsula corridor is an environmental solution. It helps with their greenbelt strategy. If

you want to take the pressure off the tender fruit lands in Niagara, the only way to do so is to build that mid-peninsula corridor expeditiously.

I call on my friends and colleagues across the floor to speak to the Minister of Transportation and say, "Let's move to the next step and get that highway built," to help with economic development and help preserve that green space they claim that they actually care about.

HIGHWAY 3 BYPASS

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): On November 25, I asked a question in this House regarding the Highway 3 bypass. It's rather ironic that the Conservatives saw it as a hardball question. An independent member, on the other hand, saw it as a softball question.

Let me tell you about Highway 3 and the bypass. It's been the site of a number of fatal accidents. Speeding is common, and it's an important border link that our exporters use to ship goods to the United States.

I rose on a question in the House to nail down the status of expanding that highway. I didn't do it to please the government, the Conservatives or an independent member. I asked the question because it's important to the people of Essex. I determined the question. The minister, in reply, said, "Yes. We will improve safety on Highway 3, examining safety concerns that will identify any necessary improvements such as widening Highway 3." The minister went on to say, "I'll work with him"—meaning me—"and we'll work with the people in your region to make sure the improvements to Highway 3 take place."

I think that those are the kinds of questions we should ask and that should be answered. I'm quite satisfied that I'm the one to determine whether the question was answered appropriately.

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I'm very pleased to stand in my place today and congratulate two promising young Ontario people for their outstanding initiative and leadership. I want to speak to two young students from Thornhill who spent their own \$15 post a new Web site called "premier" unparliamentary word ".com." Apparently, it's become—

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): What's the unparliamentary word?

Mr Baird: I can't say the unparliamentary word, but it rhymes with "fire."

Mr Hudak: It rhymes with "fire."

Mr Baird: It's causing quite a sensation at Queen's Park. "Kasra Nejatian, 21, and Kia Nejatian, 15, launched the site a few weeks ago to expose Premier Dalton McGuinty's flip-flops and broken promises. They got 1,200 hits within their first four days" of their Web site, and they've had offers of financial assistance to keep up the site.

While one of these students used to be a member of the Conservative Party, they've done this totally independently, on their own, and it's quite interesting. They have 100 people who have subscribed to "www.premier" unparliamentary word ".com," including—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Let me check on the clock. You were so excited that the clock ran out on you. Thank you very much.

Mr Baird: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'll give you some discretion on the time. Complete it quickly for me.

Mr Baird: We have Premier Dalton McGuinty's own staff subscribing to "premier" unparliamentary word ".com." It does rhyme with "fire," as the member from Niagara said. The great thing is that they can now look at the Web site, look at the list of broken promises, and decide which promise they want to break next.

Congratulations to these two outstanding students, and for those of you who want to subscribe, it's "www.premier" unparliamentary word which rhymes with "fire" ".com."

QUESTION PERIOD

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This morning, the NDP member for Niagara Centre raised a red flag, warning about big problems here at Queen's Park. Dalton McGuinty fears tough questions. He's ducking hardball questions by stacking question period with softballs from his trained seals in the backbenches. Now question period is duller than Gigli, and just as enlightening.

Why is Dalton McGuinty afraid? Because take away those softballs, and our broken-promise Premier might have to face some uncomfortable questions. Take hydro. He could be asked: If you think it's time to depoliticize hydro, why are you sizing up the OPG CEO's office for John Manley? Where's your plan for energy conservation and efficiency? Will you waste more money on the white elephant Pickering? Why is it that after promising public power during the election, your energy minister says you might sell off a nuclear plant?

I say to Dalton McGuinty that playing games with public accountability is bad news for good government. Mr McGuinty, live up to your promise to make government more effective, responsive and accountable to the people. Stop the softball questions and face the hardball questions Ontarians want answered.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The members are aware that no props must be displayed in the House, and that was very deliberate. I would not tolerate that in the future. If I spot it, I will not recognize you the next time.

VISITORS

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to recognize some distinguished guests in the east

gallery. The Ontario regional chief, Charles Fox, is here representing 136 First Nations in this province. He is joined by a senior policy adviser to the Ontario regional chief, Kimberly Whetung.

It is my pleasure also to acknowledge, in the east gallery, a great democratic renewal pioneer and a former committee clerk of this House, Professor Graham White.

1350

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PUBLIC SECTOR SALARY DISCLOSURE AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA DIVULGATION DES TRAITEMENTS DANS LE SECTEUR PUBLIC

Mr Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 15, An Act to amend the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 15, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur la divulgation des traitements dans le secteur public.

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

Government House leader?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I'll have a ministerial statement.

ONTARIO HERITAGE DAY ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LE JOUR DU PATRIMOINE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr Brownell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 16, An Act to proclaim Ontario Heritage Day and to amend other Acts to include Ontario Heritage Day as a holiday / Projet de loi 16, Loi proclamant le Jour du patrimoine de l'Ontario et modifiant d'autres lois en vue de l'ajouter comme jour férié.

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

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): It gives me pleasure to introduce this bill, a time to recognize our province's First Nations people, a time to recognize the rich heritages of the anglophone and francophone communities and the diverse heritages that have been seen in our province in the last little while with the new Canadians. I'm really excited about this. I've had a long association with history and heritage in my community, and I look forward to moving this through the House.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): One century and more than 30 years ago—

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I understand that we're supposed to have copies of ministers' statements some time before. This government likes to hand them out at the very last moment because they're concerned that we might have some kind of constructive response.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Are the statements being presented to the—

Mr Sterling: I haven't got it.

The Speaker: It's noted. The critic for the Attorney General states he hasn't got it. Order.

Have you got the statement yet? Minister, have you had the statements delivered to the critic?

Interjection.

The Speaker: I'm trying to obtain a copy for you.

May I ask, is this the only minister's statement we have?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): No, we have one other.

The Speaker: Would you mind going to the next minister's statement, then, and we'll take it on the second round.

Hon Mr Duncan: The McGuinty government is continuing to follow—

Hon Mr Bryant: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The clock is at 17 minutes. Can we reset the clock?

The Speaker: If we had the documents in the critic's hands, we would not have this situation now. Let's proceed.

Hon Mr Bryant: Would it be appropriate to proceed?

The Speaker: You may proceed.

Hon Mr Bryant: All right, here we go.

One century and more than 30 years ago, our nation—

Mr Sterling: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Could I have an English copy of this statement? I've been given a French copy of this statement.

The Speaker: I'm going to ask that you revert to the second statement.

ONTARIO HYDRO GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The McGuinty government is continuing to follow through on its commitments to the people of Ontario who have chosen change. We're acting decisively to deliver on our positive change agenda and,

in the process, inspiring hope and optimism for the future.

We're doing things differently than our predecessors and taking government in a new direction to improve the way it works for the people of Ontario.

One very important change we are committed to is ensuring that the government of Ontario is responsible, transparent and accountable—a government that works for the people of Ontario.

We're committed to improving the value Ontarians get for the dollars they invest in public services. As outlined in the speech from the throne, the McGuinty government believes transparency and accountability are, indeed, the best safeguards of public service.

Ontarians understand more than ever that the seamless and cost-efficient generation, transmission and distribution of electrical power are integral to our economy and our standard of living. It is crucial that Ontario's electricity system be run efficiently and that it is managed in the best interests of the public.

Given the critical role OPG and Hydro One play in people's lives, it is important that we ensure that both of these publicly owned companies operate with transparency and accountability. We believe that Ontarians have the right to access information about the activity of these two crucial public utilities.

To that end, the bill introduced today proposes amendments to the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act and would make the act applicable to Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation as well as to each of their subsidiaries. If the bill is passed by the assembly, these corporations would be required to annually disclose the amount of salaries and benefits paid to their employees who earn \$100,000 or more in the previous year, and this would be retroactive. Disclosure for the years 1999 through 2003 would be required by March 31, 2004, if the bill receives royal assent prior to March 1, 2004; otherwise, disclosure would be required within one month of the bill receiving royal assent.

A regulation has also been made, pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This regulation would ensure that all the records of Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation and their respective subsidiaries are subject to the provisions of the act.

This will ensure that the same rules apply to OPG and Hydro One as to other crown agencies and corporations and to publicly funded organizations already subject to this act.

We're cleaning up the mess left by the former government and working hard to fix what's broken. We believe that improved transparency and accountability at OPG and Hydro One will lead to better use of public funds. The previous government kept the public in the dark by not allowing them the right to access information from these organizations. Mr Speaker, we are only now, as we begin our term in government, learning what went wrong at these companies, and you can be sure that we will take every step possible to make things right.

Today's proposed legislation and announced regulatory provision would require Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation to be held accountable to Ontarians for the salaries paid to senior executives and professional employees. It would also ensure that the people of Ontario will be able to obtain information that is important for them to have in the interest of gaining a clear understanding of decisions undertaken that affect them.

Ontario Power Generation, for instance, is a publicly owned company that has, for several years, been making decisions without the benefit of public scrutiny. Is it a surprise, then, that the people are distrustful and angry, considering the massive delays and cost overruns at Pickering A? The people of Ontario need to be able to access information about important publicly owned companies, so that they may determine for themselves whether decisions are fair, prudent and in the public's best interests. After all, let us not forget that it is the people of Ontario who pay these companies' bills.

The McGuinty government will ensure that provincially held assets such as Hydro One and OPG are managed in the best interests of the public. By making Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, this government intends to make sure that these companies' decision-making and operations will become both transparent and accountable to the citizens of Ontario. We're changing the direction from the previous government. We're going to begin to clean up their mess.

1400

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): One century and more than 30 years ago, a nation, a confederation, was born. Members of Parliament came together to debate and eventually proclaim the democratic system of responsible government that is now Canada's and that of all our provinces. The year was 1867.

In many ways, there have been few changes to our old 1867 democratic system. Voting still involves slips of paper and a ballot box. Provincial elections are called whenever the government decides they will be called. Parliamentary rules of conduct and the electoral system that puts us in these seats still very much resemble those of the 19th-century British Parliament. So the time has come to bring our 19th-century traditions in line with 21st-century Ontario. It's time to renew our democracy, for a change.

Today marks an important day in Ontario, one on which this democratic institution seeks to better itself so that everyone can better share in their government to the utmost. To do this, we must ensure that our democracy is more relevant and accessible to people. To do this, we must give people more and better opportunities to participate in government so that we can have a govern-

ment that works for Ontarians, for a change. This government will take bold, positive and historic steps to strengthen our democracy so we can improve our government and the way it serves people.

Two steps:

Step one is to get our own House in order. Already, the Premier has made an unprecedented change in how government works, dramatically expanding the role of government caucus members in policy-making on the very cabinet committees that determine what proposals come to cabinet for debate and decision. Under a McGuinty government, the job of government caucus members is not simply to take the message of the government home to the people but to take the message of the people home to the government before they make decisions.

Next, we want MPPs to be free to represent the views of their constituents and not simply parrot the views of their party on every single occasion. It is time to change the traditional practice of toeing the line on every single debate, on every single vote and on every single bill that enters this Legislature, and we will do that.

The great parliamentary assistant for democratic renewal, the member for Sarnia-Lambton, Caroline Di Cocco, will work with the government House leader and his counterparts to make any necessary changes to the standing orders that will assist MPPs, permit MPPs and enable MPPs to represent their constituents in this Legislature.

Next, we will introduce a bill that, if passed, would require cabinet ministers to attend at least two thirds of all question periods over a government's term in office.

Next, we will take steps to ensure that the days of shell games and secrecy when it comes to the government's finances will be gone. The people deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent, so that they can have confidence in their democratic system. We will introduce a bill that, if passed, would make government and its spending partners more accountable financially by expanding the Provincial Auditor's ability to ensure taxpayers' dollars are spent wisely and to improve on transparency in the entire public sector.

Next, the operations of publicly owned Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation will once again be open to public scrutiny through a regulation that will permit them to be subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Next, a new sunshine bill will be introduced; if passed, it will require public disclosure of the salaries of Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation employees earning more than \$100,000. We're going to open up Hydro One and OPG and let the sunshine in.

Next, we will introduce a bill that, if passed, would end the practice of wasting millions of dollars on partisan advertising. Those days will be over.

That's all step one.

Step two of our plan is to strengthen our democracy to reach out to Ontarians and engage them in what will be the most ambitious renewal process Ontario has ever

seen. We will seek out the best possible innovative tools to update our democracy. We will explore Internet and telephone voting; transparent and effective limits on money in politics; an open debate on the winner-take-all electoral system; and fixed election dates. Use every possible innovative tool we can to get young people more involved in our democracy.

For our democracy to be strong in the future, young Ontarians, tomorrow's leaders, have got to become engaged in the democratic process today, and they are not. We know that they are estranged from the democratic process. We know that they find politics and government to be foreign. So we will work with the Minister of Education to ensure that young people are engaged as fully as possible in our democratic process.

The Democratic Renewal Secretariat, the first of its kind in this province, will be the engine that drives this democratic renewal process, and the fuel will be public input from Ontarians.

As my friend the member for Niagara Centre, Mr Kormos, often says, I'm almost done. It is the untapped power of the people that inspires us. Ontarians put us in these seats in this great House, and this government is not willing to say to the people of Ontario that they only need to check into their democracy once every four years, during an election—no way. These proposals will make it possible for Ontarians to engage in our democracy as never before, so we can improve the way in which government does its job and so that we can improve the way in which government delivers vital public services to the people. It is time for positive change in government through a democracy changed by the people and for the people. I thank you, Speaker.

1410

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I'd like to respond to the Minister of Energy's comments. He's been in the media a lot in the last few days, talking about the situation with Ontario Hydro and its new companies, OPG in particular. I find it interesting that the minister has indicated that he wants these disclosures to be retroactive to 1999. I found that interesting.

I asked myself why 1999 would be the specific year. For example, there's some information that Ontarians would like to know that dates back to 1997, when Ontario Hydro, through the independent integrated performance assessment, the IIPA, determined that there had been about a 10- or 12-year period of neglect for all of Ontario's nuclear facilities at a time when both the Liberals and the NDP were running this province. That scathing report, quite frankly, necessitated one of the most difficult decisions any hydro utility has ever had to make: They shut down 10 out of 20 nuclear plants in this province, the largest shutdown of nuclear facilities in history anywhere in the world. No one's had to face this challenge.

In March 1998, Ron Osborne was brought into this huge challenge. Again, we're not going back to 1998 to determine what we needed to do to fix the nuclear mess that had been created in this province and necessitated one of the largest overhauls of nuclear plants in global history.

I ask my colleague opposite to what extent his review and exposure is stale-dated to 1999 and doesn't go back. It does, however, capture July 1999, when the Atomic Energy Control Board, to the surprise of most of this province, determined that there had to be an environmental assessment done on all these sites, which added two years to the completion date. So we can thank our federal regulatory agency. However, in the interests of public safety, the right decisions were made.

Now we are being told that full disclosure—it is not a lot of news; persons making over \$100,000 is something our government introduced early in its mandate. The top five executives at OPG and Hydro One are required, under the Ontario Securities Commission, to disclose public salaries. I would hope as well that you're looking at the salaries at local distribution companies being fully disclosed. As a taxpayer of Burlington, I'd like to know what all the executives are earning in the local distribution company that I allegedly own. Also, perhaps this desire to be fully open with the public might include how the IMO arrives at the spot price for energy. This is where much of the profiteering will occur, and we'd like you to apply the same principles to that, sir, and not simply to people's salaries.

Finally, we've noticed that you have replaced the staff with another public servant, Richard Dicerni. In the spirit of Eleanor Clitheroe, we would hope you're also disclosing the additional pensions that are provided by taxpayers to these individuals who are assuming corporate responsibilities for our public hydro system.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Our caucus looks forward to working constructively to try to come forward with better mechanisms for this institution. But the record of this government, so far, denies us from coming to the conclusion that they have any real intent to do so.

They've taken over many of the MPPs' offices in this precinct—13—with ministers' staff, Premier's staff and bureaucrats; in the throne speech they offered that they are going to gerrymander the boundaries of our electoral districts in the north and in the rest of Ontario; they have done many petty things, including not giving the NDP party status in spite of their 15% election support; and they have divided the opposition with regard to where they sit in the Legislature.

We only hope this government shows greater generosity with regard to this debate, because it's important that we improve this institution and democracy in Ontario. But they haven't shown very much so far.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I ask for unanimous consent to respond on behalf of New Democrats.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member for Kenora-Rainy River has requested unanimous consent for a response of five minutes. Do I have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr Hampton: I first want to respond to the Minister of Energy. I want to say to the people of Ontario, what we're seeing here today is actually an effort by the new Liberal government to rewrite a bit of their own political history. It was not that many years ago, when the Conservatives introduced the electricity competition act, which they were very clear was going to have the result of selling off Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One, that every single Liberal in this House voted for it. Did you not understand what that would mean? Did you not understand, if you take Ontario's hydro system and turn it over to the Enrons and the Brascans, that the salaries can go out of sight, that the expense accounts can go on and on and that the bonuses and the bonus on top of the bonus can all happen? Didn't you Liberals understand what you were voting for then?

When someone named Mike Harris, in December 2001, said very clearly that the government's intention was not only to sell off Ontario Power Generation but also to sell off the transmission system, Hydro One, who was it who said that very day, outside this Legislature, that the Liberal Party agreed that both Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One, the transmission system, should be sold? Didn't you understand at the time what that would mean for hydro prices and hydro rates and the salaries and the bonuses and the expense accounts? You voted for that. You gave speeches supporting it. Dalton McGuinty appeared on radio station after radio station, saying it was a good idea. Now you want to pretend that you had clean hands, that somehow you're not implicated in this.

What's even more outrageous is that Liberals supported that move to privatize this most essential service at the very time that the Enron scandal was unfolding in the United States, at the very time that it was becoming clear that private corporations like Enron and some of the other American private electricity giants were ripping off the people of California for not billions of dollars a year, not \$10 billion but by multiples of \$10 billion. You voted for it. Now you want to pretend that somehow you have clean hands, that you're virtuous. Shame on you. Shame on you for trying to fool the people of Ontario. What's happened is just as much your policy, your direction, as it was Conservative policy and Conservative direction.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to reserve just a couple of moments for what this

government calls “democratic renewal” and what I’m going to call “fluff,” because that’s what it is.

The essence of a parliamentary democracy is this: Government, which is the cabinet, makes the decisions—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could I ask the members not to present any plaques or books or so in the House.

The member for Kenora-Rainy River.

Mr Hampton: It’s a good book, Speaker. I hope more Liberals read it.

The essence of parliamentary democracy is that the government gets to make the decisions, but those decisions have to be tested here in the Legislature, tested by means of debate and question.

My colleagues and I have been engaged in a battle to ensure that question period actually asks the questions that people want answered. What do we hear over here from the media? They tell us that question period isn’t even interesting any more. Why? Because Liberal backbenchers stand up and ask fluff questions that have been handed to them by a cabinet minister who already has the prewritten answer. That’s what democracy has been reduced to under your democratic reform.

If this government truly wants to see responsible government, accountable government, ensure that New Democrats are able to stand in this House and ask the tough questions, the tough questions that will hold you accountable, the tough questions that will force you to respond to what the people out there are asking. Put an end to the fluff questions that are being asked by Liberal backbenchers that avoid the difficult issues when you already have the pre-written answers.

DEFERRED VOTES

APPOINTMENT OF HOUSE OFFICERS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We have a deferred vote on the motion by Mr Bradley that Bruce Crozier, member for the electoral district of Essex, be appointed Deputy Speaker and Chair of the committee of the whole House; that Ted Arnott, member for the electoral district of Waterloo-Wellington, be appointed First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House; and that Joseph Tascona, member for the electoral district of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, be appointed Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House.

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

The division bells rang from 1421 to 1426.

The Speaker: Order. Will members please take their seats.

Mr Bradley has moved that Bruce Crozier, member for the electoral district of Essex, be appointed—

Interjection: Dispense.

Interjection: No.

The Speaker:—Deputy Speaker and Chair of the committee of the whole House; that Ted Arnott, member for the electoral district of Waterloo—

Interjections.

The Speaker:—I thought the members asked me to read it. I’d like some silence during that time—that Ted Arnott, member for the electoral district of Waterloo-Wellington, be appointed First Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House; and that Joseph Tascona, member for the electoral district of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, be appointed Second Deputy Chair of the committee of the whole House.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time to be recognized by the Clerk as they are counted.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Parsons, Ernie
Arnott, Ted	Fonseca, Peter	Patten, Richard
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Peters, Steve
Baird, John R.	Gravelle, Michael	Peterson, Tim
Bartolucci, Rick	Hardeman, Ernie	Phillips, Gerry
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hudak, Tim	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jackson, Cameron	Racco, Mario G.
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramsay, David
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kennedy, Gerard	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Sorbara, Greg
Cordiano, Joseph	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sterling, Norman W.
Craitor, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Tascona, Joseph N.
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Miller, Norm	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Wilson, Jim
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duncan, Dwight	Munro, Julia	Wong, Tony C.
Dunlop, Garfield	Murdoch, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Eves, Ernie	Oraziotti, David	Yakubuski, John
Flaherty, Jim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise to be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	
Hampton, Howard	Martel, Shelley	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 87; the nays are 7.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: You know New Democrats have grave concerns about the legality of this manner of choosing a Deputy Speaker. We’re asking you to arrange for an election of a Deputy Speaker, in compliance with section 28 of the Legislative Assembly Act, at the earliest opportunity so as not to have this Legislature operating—

The Speaker: The member is aware that this has just been ruled on and just been passed. That's not a point of order.

VISITORS

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to recognize the Marymount Academy political science class from Sudbury and their two teachers, Mr Tim Russell and Ms Massimiliano. Welcome to Toronto.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to introduce some very special guests in the members' gallery east, representatives of Kruger Inc, new owners of the Longlac Wood Industries facility in my riding of Thunder Bay-Superior North. We have Mr Jean-François Merrette, vice-president of operations; Mr Jean Majeau, vice-president of corporate affairs; and Mr Michel Lessard, the woodlands manager. We welcome you. Thank you for being here today.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Point of order.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): One minute. I'm not quite sure where the point of order is coming from. So you do have a voice?

Ms Churley: Mr Speaker, you couldn't hear me. He has a louder voice, so he was trying to get your attention for me.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I'd ask those in your area to be a little softer and maybe I could hear.

You have a point of order, member from Toronto-Danforth?

Ms Churley: I do have a point of order, Mr Speaker; yes indeed I do. In the spirit of democratic renewal, as announced by the Attorney General in the government today, I ask for unanimous consent that our leader, the leader of the New Democratic Party, be able to ask two lead questions today, two real hardball questions.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Unanimous consent seems to be not there. Order.

UPTOWN THEATRE

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): Mr Speaker, I understand I have unanimous consent to make a statement to this House.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You ask for unanimous consent for—

Hon Mr Bentley: To make a statement on the collapse of the Uptown Theatre.

The Speaker: The collapse—

Hon Mr Bentley: Of the Uptown Theatre, which happened this morning.

The Speaker: The Minister of Labour is asking for unanimous consent for the collapse of the Uptown Theatre. You have a limit to that of five minutes.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): If I can help the minister, we'd be prepared to consent to him making a statement and time for responses from both the Conservatives and New Democrats.

The Speaker: What I'm hearing now is that the minister needs unanimous consent for each party to have a five-minute response. Is that what I'm hearing?

Interjections.

The Speaker: There is unanimous consent for five minutes. If you want to take two minutes to do that, that's also fine with me.

Hon Mr Bentley: This morning, at approximately 10:30, the rear portion of the Uptown Theatre in downtown Toronto collapsed, causing damage to neighbouring buildings. One person has died. On behalf of the Premier and all members of this House, I want to offer our most sincere condolences to friends and family.

Preliminary reports indicate that 14 people have been injured and taken to hospital. Emergency workers are continuing efforts to remove one other person from the scene. Like people throughout the province, we hope and pray for this person's safe return.

Emergency services arrived quickly on the scene this morning. They have been doing an admirable job in difficult circumstances. The Minister of Community Safety has advised me that an OPP canine unit is assisting in rescue efforts and that the Ontario fire marshal's office has contacted Toronto Fire Services to offer their assistance.

The Ministry of Labour has dispatched construction inspectors and a construction engineer to assist in any way they can. As soon as possible, the ministry will begin determining the cause of this tragic accident.

Let us continue offering our most fervent support to emergency workers, affected families and those who have been injured. Again, our condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): On behalf of our party, we join the Minister of Labour and the government in expressing our sincere condolences to the family and friends of the deceased. Our prayers and wishes go out to the injured and those who are missing.

As well, we certainly want to express our appreciation to those who are working so hard on the rescue efforts, the emergency workers involved, and we hope and pray that the tragedy of this event will be minimized.

I would just conclude by again offering our condolences to the family and friends and our wishes that all will be well.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): We heard tragically on the news today that one person has died; we have heard that 12 people have been sent to hospital and that one person was missing. That was the news as of 1:30 this afternoon. Among the 12 who have gone to hospital are three children, ages 8, 10 and 11. One can only imagine the horror that those children experienced in the minutes as the walls came crashing down.

This morning I just happened to walk by that location not once, but twice, on my way to Bloor and Yonge Streets. All seemed at peace and very quiet at an old Toronto landmark. We watched later this morning on television. Councillor Kyle Rae was present at the scene and was on a telephone, speaking to the owner of the building, a Mr Muzzo, who did not, at least through Kyle Rae's lips, appear to be very satisfied with the demolition as it was taking place yesterday and was extremely unhappy, one can imagine, with what happened today. Also on the scene was the new mayor, David Miller.

We in the New Democratic Party want to say first of all how very proud we were of the firefighters, the police, the ambulance services, all of the emergency personnel who were on the scene, who helped to recognize the 13 people and who conveyed them safely to the hospital.

We send our condolences to the family of the man who was killed. We in the New Democratic Party also want to give our assurance to this House, to this Legislature, that all members from all parties need to do whatever is necessary to get to the bottom, to understand what happened today and to make sure such tragedies never happen again.

The Speaker: It's really a sad day.

ORAL QUESTIONS

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. It is about Liberal promises, and therefore broken promises. We have this convenient list of 231 promises—more and more promises broken every day.

These specific promises are in your own party's policy platform, on pages 17 to 19. You might want to have a look at those. You promised, "We will protect the greenspace that surrounds our cities, forever." You also promised "real protection for the Oak Ridges moraine" and that you will add important new areas, such as the Dufferin-Rouge agricultural preserve, Bronte Creek Provincial Park and two thirds of provincially owned Seaton lands. Your leader, Premier McGuinty, wrote on September 5 to the Rouge Duffins Greenspace Coalition promising to protect, and I quote, "all the lands in the Duffins-Rouge agricultural preserve," and more than that, "to place a moratorium on zoning changes from rural to urban on all lands within the potential greenbelt area."

My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: Are you prepared to state today in this House that you will keep each and every one of these commitments to the people of Ontario without equivocation, without reservation?

1440

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors): As you

know, we have already protected a very significant amount of the Oak Ridges moraine by, in effect, making sure there are 900 fewer houses built on the moraine than you were prepared to do; by making sure that a park will be developed there, in which the developers are going to contribute \$3.5 million; and by making sure that the corridor for wildlife is going to be a lot larger than certainly you would have done. As you indicated many times before, we are going to introduce greenbelt legislation that will, in effect, protect over 600,000 acres of land in this area, to make sure that is protected for generations to come. As well, we are going to make sure that amendments are going to be made to the Planning Act to bring planning decisions back to the local level.

Mr Flaherty: We know that the minister and his government broke a promise with respect to the Oak Ridges moraine. I think they did that within a week or 10 days of becoming the government. I'm asking now, though, about the preserve, the permanent—it's called permanent for a reason, I hope—agricultural preserve in Pickering. You and your government, seeking the support of voters in Ontario, promised you would protect the Golden Horseshoe greenbelt and specifically 100% of the permanent agricultural preserve in Pickering. There's reason for concern. I can tell you there's concern in Durham region and there's concern throughout Ontario, because the candidate who was elected, the former mayor of Pickering, now the MPP for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, took a different position. He took the position that he wanted to renege on the agreement and promoted a growth management study—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question?

Mr Flaherty:—that the developers paid \$625,000 to fund. My question is, will you promise—well, forget "promise," because it's not of a great deal of value. Will you commit, guaranteed by your resignation, that you will preserve in its entirety the permanent agricultural reserve in Pickering?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: I can only reiterate once again that the greenbelt legislation we will be introducing will protect, in an environmental fashion, more acreage in this province than has ever been done before.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Over 600,000 acres will be protected, so that environmentally crucial areas will be there for generations to come, something you did not do. You told us in the House one day that the moraine was protected, and at the same time you made a deal with the developers that, in effect, would allow them to build another 6,000 units. We will live up to the commitments we have given.

Mr Flaherty: No commitment there to the people of Pickering or Durham region, or to the people of Ontario.

Here's another promise, number 47—there are many here. This is a good one: "We will ensure that all developers play by the rules." There's promise number 47. What's the deal? What deal did you make on the Oak Ridges moraine? What deal did you cut with those developers? Is it like the deal that was made in Pickering:

\$625,000 worth of mortgages to these developers in Pickering? What deal did you make? When are you going to tell us what rules you made with these developers? Keep your promise. Make the developers play by the rules. What rules have you broken with the developers already?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: We know one thing for sure: The deal that we made was a heck of a lot better than the bad deal that you made. Under our arrangements, more of the corridor is going to be preserved for the generations to come. We're going to see a parkland developed in the Oak Ridges moraine that everyone can be proud of and use. The developers are going to commit \$3.5 million to that. That's what we did, which is a heck of a lot better than you ever did for the environment.

GASOLINE TAX

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I have a question to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal with respect to his transit initiative through the gas tax. Minister, increasingly Ontarians are concerned about your growing string of broken promises and what it's going to mean to their pocketbooks. Specifically, they're very concerned about an increase that is pending on the Ontario gas tax to pay for your initiatives. Can you guarantee the House today that you're not increasing the Ontario gas tax?

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): That's correct. It will be an allocation of the existing gas tax.

Mr Hudak: Forgive me if I ask more specifically, because I want to make sure that we understand exactly what the minister is saying. Minister, I want you to guarantee to the House today that you will not be increasing the Ontario gas tax in the upcoming economic statement or any future budget.

Hon Mr Caplan: It's interesting. Unlike the other party, this government is going to dedicate a portion of the existing gas tax. In the last election, in their election platform, they proposed to raise the gasoline tax. Ontarians rejected that approach. They approved dedication of a portion of the existing gasoline tax to support public transit. That is what a Dalton McGuinty government is going to do.

Mr Hudak: Frankly, that's not good enough, because you did not answer my question directly. I recall Dalton McGuinty saying very clearly, "I will not raise your taxes," yet one of the first bills he brought into the Legislature was the biggest tax increase in the history of the province of Ontario.

Dalton McGuinty asked us to read his lips: "No new taxes." I'm asking you very simply: Can you absolutely, clearly guarantee that you will not be increasing the Ontario gas tax in the upcoming economic statement or any future budgets? Can we expect a big increase in the Ontario gas tax?

Hon Mr Caplan: The answer simply is no. Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberal Party committed to sharing a portion of the existing gasoline tax with our

municipal partners, unlike members of the Progressive Conservative Party, who wanted to raise gasoline taxes. The voters in Ontario rejected that approach in favour of the approach of the McGuinty government, which was to share a portion of the gasoline tax. I don't understand why the member opposite has any difficulty understanding that very simple concept.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): This is to the minister responsible for democratic renewal. Minister, why is your government insisting that a government member, a Liberal member, chair the standing committee on government agencies, which reviews all government appointees?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I thank the member for his question. If the member has some specific concerns that he'd like to raise with us, then we'd be happy to consider them. Otherwise, perhaps what I will do—I will hear your concerns. So you can speak it directly, it's probably more appropriate in the supplementary if I direct you to the House leader, but I'm all ears.

Mr Sterling: I think it's self-evident what the concern is. This government appoints the people, and now they want the person who's responsible for running this particular committee to be from their own backbenches. This is unheard of. They talk about democratic renewal, and yet they're willing to play games with the appointment process. They want to review their own. They want to slip things by this Legislative Assembly.

Hon Mr Bryant: Nothing could be further from the truth. I'll refer this to the House leader.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): We have proposed a number of changes to the standing orders that we think will benefit the proper functioning of this House. With respect to government appointments, the official opposition have the number of members on the committee that they're entitled to under the regulations. We believe that it's the proper way to go forward. We believe that the proper scrutiny of those appointments will be considered.

My colleague will be considering changes to what appointments can be looked at and exercised later on. That's the other thing they did agree, in exchange for two Deputy Speakers, which they've never had before. These things were negotiated among the two parties.

1450

LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Health. There have been reports in the Toronto Star about the abhorrent conditions in some long-term-care facilities. For example, Natalie, a mother of 10, died from gangrenous bedsores. This is unacceptable. Our seniors are not getting the care they deserve

and need. Some 65,000 seniors and their families depend on long-term-care services in Ontario. This is catastrophic. People who have worked very hard for this province are now being forgotten and ignored. We owe our seniors more than this. We owe them dignity.

Minister, why did the previous government rob so many of our seniors of their dignity?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Earlier today I had the opportunity, in a shared radio broadcast out of Hamilton, to say thank you to the daughter of Natalie Babineau for allowing the Toronto Star in a very significantly researched exposé to demonstrate some of the underlying conditions in our long-term-care facilities. I made the commitment yesterday in an interview and again today to that family that the actions of this government will be to enhance the quality and dignity of the lives of those people, our seniors, who spend their final days in our province's nursing homes. I don't think this is a partisan matter. I think it's one that challenges all of us as MPPs to play a bigger role as advocates, to take a look inside these facilities that operate in all our ridings across the province. Over the course of the next very short while, we'll be moving forward with an action plan that will give real hope and improve the quality of the circumstances of our seniors who are living in these facilities.

Mrs Sandals: Minister, you have promised a revolution in long-term care. You have been quoted as saying that you will tackle these problems with missionary zeal. But clearly, there remains much to be done. What actions will you take to fix our long-term-care system?

Hon Mr Smitherman: It seems that the idea that you can proceed on this matter in a non-partisan way is lost on the member from Burlington, who decides that the appropriate response is to laugh at the idea. You laughed.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member opposite knows full well that that was not any comment related to what you were saying. I was having a conversation with the member from St Catharines, and St Catharines alone. That was a cheap shot, but apparently not too cheap for you.

Hon Mr Smitherman: We have an opportunity, with respect to our long-term-care facilities, to introduce a new era of accountability, to bring transparency to the process, to make sure that complaints are addressed in a fashion which is transparent for the families that made them and for the facilities around which the complaints are made.

I've directed my ministry to provide me with an action plan within 30 days. That's about their priorities. I've also asked my parliamentary assistant, the member from Nipissing, to engage in a very extensive consultation, not just a stakeholder consultation, but a community consultation that looks for the opportunities we have to re-engage the community in these institutions. It seems very clear to me that the lives of our seniors will be enhanced dramatically, especially if we're successful at shining a big light on those operations and re-engaging the community. I ask all members to play a role in helping to make that happen in their ridings.

HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. Toronto's hotel operators have had a very difficult year with SARS, hydro and other challenges. These hotel operators are now requesting that you and your government support the tourist industry by allowing them to add a levy on hotel rooms. Minister, are you considering allowing a new levy on hotel rooms in Toronto?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): I have to ask the former ministers what page the answer is on in the briefing book.

There is no question that the Toronto hotel association and others in larger communities are contemplating, of their own volition, trying to develop a volunteer levy which would be used for marketing purposes for tourism. You're quite right. You have identified a major problem that I know my predecessors are aware of, and that problem is that we want to get people back into Ontario for tourism purposes, and our marketing is far less in terms of the amount that we allocate for it than, for instance, cities like Chicago, Montreal, Quebec City and others. I am aware that the organizations that represent hotels in Toronto, for instance, are endeavouring to get together to have a volunteer levy, to use the money for that purpose and to generate even more economic activity for this province, something I think you would want to see happen.

Mr Tascona: Being an experienced minister from the past, I'm looking for a response to that question. Either you are going to allow this levy as a government, thereby raising taxes, or you're not going to allow it. Which is it?

Minister, can you reassure this Legislature that before you act to increase hotel taxes you will abide by the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act, which your leader signed a pledge to, and hold a referendum? Yes or no?

Hon Mr Bradley: I can tell the member that, in fact, I will be consulting widely—and wisely—with the tourism industry. I know my predecessors did so, and I know they heard from the tourism industry. I think there are three predecessors in the House at the present time—there might even be more—but all of them said that we need the funds to be able to compete, I guess is the best word, with others in getting people coming to the province of Ontario.

I'm all ears in terms of hearing what they have to propose. When they propose that to me and to the government, I'll be happy to share my response with the member. But I think it would be premature at this time for me to make any comment on that until such time as I have received such a proposal. I know the member would agree with that.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): My question is for the Minister of Energy. This past

Thursday, the committee chaired by Jake Epp released a report that detailed the failings of the previous government in the energy sector. Among other things, neither the government nor their political appointees at Ontario Power Generation exercised the necessary oversight over the Pickering A rebuild project. We all know too well that the board approved some 11 cost increases and 13 delays over the course of four years.

Minister, how could the previous government have allowed this to go on?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): To my colleague, the situation at OPG had degenerated into what can only be determined as a horrible mess. Number one, the previous government, beginning in 1999, announced that the cost associated with refurbishing all four units at Pickering A would be \$1.1 billion. We all know the facts now: that in fact to do all four it's going to be between \$3 billion and \$4 billion, something that was not made known to the public by the previous government; 13 increases in extensions and time to completion, 11 increases in the costs associated with that, all kept under wraps by the government for four years. We've been left with a mess. We're changing the direction. The McGuinty government is going to move forward.

Given his representation of the people of Pickering, I say to my colleague, whom I've already had the opportunity to discuss this issue with, that we're going to move forward, change the direction of the previous government, make sure there's openness, accountability and transparency and that OPG works for the ratepayers and taxpayers of this great province.

1500

Mr Arthurs: You indicated that the government was elected to change the direction of government. The Epp report showed us that the previous government had little interest in letting the people of the province know the real state of the rebuild at Pickering A. On top of that, the record of the previous government shows that they didn't want the people of Ontario to know anything about what happened at OPG and Hydro One. Contracts and salaries weren't disclosed, cost overruns and delays were hidden and the taxpayers of the province ended up funding yachts and trips to Europe. Can you tell me what the Ministry of Energy is doing to ensure openness and accountability in Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One so something like this never happens again?

Hon Mr Duncan: Earlier today I introduced a bill that would provide salary disclosure with respect to senior officials at OPG and Hydro One. I should tell the Conservative members who don't know this and need to do their homework a little bit more before they speak in the House that, in fact, there is no gap. Those things were open until your government changed them in 1999. We've closed the gap on that.

The same applies with respect to freedom of information and protection of privacy. It's time to shed light on OPG. The previous government stonewalled, refused to answer questions and hid them from the full scope of

public and media review. When they say they commissioned the report, it was four years and \$4 billion later, I say with no respect, because you made a mess of it. There's no explaining it to anyone. It was your appointees who ran it; it was your friends who were in charge. You kept the light turned away from it. We're turning the light on. We're changing the direction of this province. I say to the members opposite, you mismanaged this in a way that's never been equalled in the history of Ontario.

ELECTORAL REPRESENTATION

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I have another question for the minister responsible for democratic renewal. Do you believe in the basic tenet of our democratic institution that members are elected representation by population?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): This is a very important part of what we have to look at so that people can have full confidence in our democratic system. We have the same old 1867 system. Some parts of it we want to keep; some parts we want to look at. We've made a commitment to take this issue to the people. We're not afraid to ask the people about the way in which our electoral system is going to unfold. We're not afraid to talk to the people about how we ought to renew democracy. It is absolutely critical that we get everybody, young people in particular, who has become estranged from our democracy and our governmental process back into the centre of politics and government. That is something we're willing to do; that is something we're going to do. Today marks the beginning of that exercise.

Mr Sterling: I'm very happy that there is going to be considerable consultation. As you know, the federal boundaries commission has decided that the next time through we're going to have 106 ridings in Ontario, as opposed to 103. That means reducing from 11 to 10 ridings in the north. I would have hoped that this government and this minister, in putting forward this view that we're going to have consultations, would make a decision with regard to the boundaries of future ridings on the basis of those consultations. Are you willing to now withdraw from your throne speech commitment to allow more representation in the north than in the rest of the province of Ontario?

Hon Mr Bryant: I say to the member that we've made a commitment to consult. We are going to consider all the implications. As the member knows, there are constitutional implications as well. There are limits as to what a government can do. Our commitments to renew democracy are there to give people more confidence in democracy. I can say to you that we will be proceeding with these particular reforms, especially the electoral reforms and especially ensuring that we have full and appropriate representation in the north, in a way in which people can have confidence in their democracy.

When we do that, we will be looking for input from all members of this House and looking for input from across Ontario. Yes, we're going to be looking for input from northern Ontario too. We want to make sure that we have an electoral and parliamentary system that is not only consistent with the old traditions but deals with the reality that people have lost, to a large extent, a level of confidence in democracy. We're going to bring it back.

HYDRO GENERATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Energy.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'm assuming you've asked for unanimous consent.

Mr Hampton: I'm not sure. If you don't want us to ask a question, say so.

The Speaker: The member for Kenora-Rainy River knows the procedure. You have to ask for unanimous consent before, and I am expecting that from you.

Mr Hampton: Mr Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to ask a question on behalf of New Democrats.

The Speaker: Do I have unanimous consent from the House? Agreed.

The member for Kenora-Rainy River.

Mr Hampton: Speaker, I guess this is what "democratic renewal" means in Ontario.

My question is for the Minister of Energy. You introduced a bill today, and you are trying to pretend to the people that this is somehow going to be earth-shattering. It's called the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Amendment Act. You say it's going to do unique things with respect to Ontario Power Generation.

My question is this: Notwithstanding this fluffy bill you've introduced today, what is your policy going to be with respect to Pickering? Are you going to put more money into restoring the Pickering A nuclear generating stations—estimated cost, \$4 billion? Are you going to build new nuclear facilities in the province—estimated cost again in the billions of dollars? You owe it to the people of Ontario. If they read your platform document during the election, they'd have no idea what your electricity policy is.

What is your electricity policy for Ontario? What are you going to build? What are you not going to build? Is it going to be public? Is it going to be private? What's your electricity policy for the hydro consumers of Ontario?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): First of all, we think it is important to have disclosure. In fact, you argued for that before. I don't think it's fluff at all, to respond to that. It's very important in terms of salary, but also in terms of freedom-of-information requests. In order for the people to participate in a full debate about the future range of electricity options, we think they should have access to that information.

Later this week we'll be announcing some appointments to a blue chip task force that will look at those

options. I'm not going to answer today, pending more study of that particular question, study which I believe is important, and I think you would too. I remember Darlington, for instance, in the early 1990s, with money getting pumped into that by your government. You continued to allow nuclear in this province in the five years you had.

So, (1) we believe that full disclosure of salaries and information is important from both OPG and Hydro One, and (2) we believe the people of this province need to be part of a consultation that will determine the electricity future of this province, one that has been left on its knees and is weakened to the point where we're all very concerned about it.

Mr Hampton: The question was, what is this government's hydroelectricity policy? Are you going to put more money into Pickering? Are you going to build other nukes? What are you going to do with the coal-fired plants? People in Ontario have no idea what your electricity policy is, other than that you want to blame everything on the Conservatives. It seems to me that when they were there, they wanted to blame everything on someone too. The question is, what's your policy? And don't tell us that your bill introduced today somehow adds something.

You can find out what the executives over at OPG are getting paid simply by going to the Web site. For example, in 2002, Ron Osborne was paid almost \$2.5 million; Graham Brown, the director and chief operating officer, \$1.6 million. Your bill doesn't add anything. So quit trying to pretend that you're creating electricity policy over there by introducing this fluff legislation.

What is your electricity policy? The people of Ontario need to know before you continue to make the same mistakes the Conservatives made.

Hon Mr Duncan: We have begun to address the mistakes the Conservatives made: (1) we've lifted the cap; (2) we are providing new legislation and regulatory protection to make sure all Ontarians have access and an opportunity to have information regarding these important decisions. I think it is important.

It's a first step. We acknowledge that. We can't undo the five years of mismanagement your government brought, and the eight years of mismanagement this government brought, in one day. We've moved quickly.

When one talks about lack of clarity and policy on these things, I was reading this book, *Public Power*, which I got in the bin at the bookstore the other day:

"There may be practical reasons to allow some degree of privately owned generation that can contribute to our province's environmental well-being within a regulated public power system.

"I am not ideologically opposed to private power any more than I am opposed to private restaurants, clothing or car dealerships."

That wasn't Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher; that was Howie Hampton.

1510

HIGHWAY SAFETY

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Your recent announcement regarding a signed agreement between Ontario and France to recognize drivers' licences as equivalent is indeed good news for Ontario drivers who move to France. However, for years US drivers have been recklessly speeding on Ontario roads through the community of Chatham-Kent Essex, knowing they are unlikely to face the consequences of their actions. Can you please tell this House what this government is doing to hold these drivers accountable for threatening the safety on Ontario roads?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the honourable member for this important question, and I also want to thank him for improving road safety throughout his region.

I agree that we need to do everything possible to hold drivers accountable for their unsafe driving actions, whether those drivers are from Ontario or from outside the region. That's why my ministry has entered into conviction exchange agreements with other US states. Currently, agreements are in place with Michigan and New York. These agreements help make our roads safer and act as a deterrent, because they enable us to record convictions and apply demerit points and licence suspensions.

Our government will do everything we possibly can to protect the motoring public and to improve road safety in Ontario.

Mr Hoy: I'm pleased to hear that holding drivers from other jurisdictions accountable for their actions is indeed a priority for this government. Fines can also be a strong deterrent for these irresponsible drivers. Many fines, however, go uncollected.

Chatham-Kent took over operation of the provincial offences court in May 2000. There is nearly \$600,000 in unpaid traffic fines issued to US residents for driving infractions while in the municipality. This, of course, is lost revenue for the municipality. Can you tell us how this government will be moving forward to enable Chatham-Kent and all of Ontario to collect these outstanding fines?

Hon Mr Takhar: As I indicated before, holding accountable drivers whose habits are unsafe is indeed a priority for us. I understand that the collection of fines from out-of-province drivers requires the mutual consent of both provinces. Despite our best efforts to contact each and every US state and engage them in negotiating such agreements, to date none have agreed.

I want to point out that last week I had the chance to meet with the director of transportation for Michigan. We have agreed to meet on a regular basis, and I will raise those issues with him. We will do everything possible to make sure we can collect those fines.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is to the Minister of Finance. For the past few weeks we've heard a great deal of concern from all Liberals in the House, and in particular from the Minister of Finance, about the finances of this province, about the bottom line. Because he is so concerned about the bottom line and about the finances of this province, I'm going to ask him a very simple question: When are you going to repay the \$35,000 in severance pay that you took from the public purse in this province?

The Speaker: That question is out of order. If you have another question—

Mr Wilson: I think the honourable member—

The Speaker: One more time: Do you have a question?

Mr Wilson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe this question is in order. He is the finance minister. He's the guardian of the public purse—

The Speaker: Order. New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I warned the member about three times about the direction of his question. He refused to take another direction. Now he wants a new direction. New question.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): My question is directed to the Honourable Minister of Education. Minister, last week you—

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I sat in this House last session when the same question was asked of the leader—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I've already ruled on that and I don't need to go back to that again.

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In accordance with standing rule 36(a), I think you will note that questions are allowed to be directed to a minister. The component of the question—standing order 36 stated that it had to be referring to the minister's ministry—was removed from that point in the standing orders. This is in compliance with standing rule 36(a) which states that you are allowed to question ministers. I would ask you to rule on that.

The Speaker: I've listened carefully and I did not see any relevance to the minister's ministry. If the member wishes now to redirect the question in a different way, with something that is relevant to the minister's portfolio, I will allow it.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I will not challenge your ruling at all, or address your ruling, because it's non-debatable. I would like to ask—I think we can do anything in this House with unanimous consent, if all members agree. The Minister of Finance has indicated that he would like to take the question.

The Speaker: I'll take your point of order. I cannot hear over the member from Niagara Centre. If he would be quiet a bit, I'd be able to hear the point of order.

Mr Baird: The Minister of Finance has certainly indicated that he would like to take the question and I'd like to ask for unanimous consent for Mr Wilson to put the question to the Minister of Finance.

The Speaker: Did I hear unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Mr Wilson: Mr Speaker, on a point of order—

The Speaker: Is it the same point of order going on again?

Mr Wilson: Going on what you've just advised the House, that perhaps I can ask my question to another minister. Perhaps you could guide me as to who would be appropriate to ask that question to. It certainly is—

The Speaker: Order. Let me just be very plain and clear here. There is only one Speaker in the House, and that's me. I don't need a lot of speakers telling me—I can of course have some help from time to time, but, please, if you have a question you want to put to another minister, but it's not the same question—it's out—I'm prepared to hear it.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I ask for unanimous consent to allow the member to put his question again to the Minister of Finance, with a supplementary.

The Speaker: I hear a point of order for the member from Simcoe-Grey to put his question to the minister. It's under unanimous consent. Do I have unanimous consent for this? I heard a no.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Let's take a five-minute recess until we all cool down.

The House recessed from 1520 to 1525.

The Speaker: Member from Simcoe-Grey, I'm going to ask you to ask a different question than you were asking. I'm giving you this opportunity.

Mr Wilson: I would ask the Minister of Finance if he thinks it's appropriate that people leave this place, receive a pension, come back not too many years later and do not repay that severance to the people of Ontario. The same question was asked just a few months ago by Mr Smitherman, as a member of the opposition, to our leader at the time, Premier Ernie Eves.

He did the honourable thing and repaid his severance, and I'm just wondering if, as a matter of policy, the government feels—

The Speaker: Order. The minister is not here.

Mr Baird: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It was indicated to us in the opposition that the Minister of Finance would be here for question period today. Perhaps we could adjourn for five minutes and they could find him.

The Speaker: New question.

ENGLISH CLASSES

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): My question is directed to the honourable Minister of Education. The other day, you visited a school in Mississauga—

Interjection.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): On the same point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to apologize to you and the House for being a little bit late after the recess. If the member wants to put the question again, with your consent, I would be perfectly happy to answer.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'm going to rule this way: The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale has a question.

Mr Kular: My question is to the Minister of Education. The other day you visited a school in Mississauga and announced that you would be allocating \$120 million in new funding for schools.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Would it be appropriate in your eyes if I ask a similar question to the Chair of Management Board of Cabinet? Since the finance minister is not responsible for the finances of this province, perhaps the Chair of Management Board is.

The Speaker: I'll allow the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale to ask a question, and then I'll come back to you for a question.

1530

Mr Kular: My question is for the honourable Minister of Education. The other day you visited a school in Mississauga and announced that you would be allocating \$120 million in new funding for schools. This is great news for Ontario students, many of whom are immigrants from countries where English is not the first language. These new students need extra help to learn English, and ESL classes are an important part of their regular school program. How much of this money are you committing to help these new students?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): There is no question on our part that the effort last week was a necessary one. Yes, it was hard money to come by in-year, but these are children in particular difficulty. When we saw that children with English as second language were actually scoring half as well as those without English as a second language as a challenge, we felt it was urgent enough that we would act in this school year to ensure they had a chance.

When I say "half as well," 23% of those students don't write the literacy and numeracy tests at all. These are students that we recognize were falling behind unless they received the help that recognized the new Ontario we have. We have these new needs. They were getting lower support after the provincial takeover of education finances than they did when school boards supported themselves. It's absolutely essential that we have that support available in the classroom so they learn the language of instruction and can overcome that barrier and be productive, fully contributing members of society here in Ontario today.

Mr Kular: As an immigrant myself, I know from first-hand experience the language and cultural barriers these new Canadians face. Approximately 60% of the new immigrants Canada accepts each year settle in Ontario. Many of them come to my own riding of Bramalea-

Gore-Malton-Springdale and the surrounding greater Toronto area. How will this money benefit the students in my riding of Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale?

Hon Mr Kennedy: There is no question that this riding happens to be one of the fast-growing ones in the province. We are lucky that those areas are being populated by people from other countries, who sometimes have the small additional challenge—it's small if we deal with it—of needing to acquire English as a second language.

Almost 20% of the \$17 million directed specifically for English as a second language is actually going to the two boards in Peel. It's going there because the people are there, because that is the new Ontario of people who with just a little bit of assistance are going to overcome that barrier. They're going to be better students, they're going to be better citizens and they're going to be better employees and employers in this province if they get it.

The previous government, unfortunately, faced with a recommendation by the Rozanski commission, said that zero is what these children could get. That has put these kids behind. It is simply something to get started on, which, in its absence, would mean these kids would be further behind. We don't accept that. We believe that in Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale every child has the same access to their future. This will help them do that.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Perhaps I'll ask my question to the acting Premier of the day, and I would remind the Premier of the day that on May 21, 2002, the now-Minister of Health, Mr Smitherman, asked our leader, then-Premier Eves, if he would repay the severance he received from the taxpayers of Ontario when he left this House and then came back to be Premier and take his place in this House. I say to the acting Premier today that it was clearly Liberal Party policy in opposition on May 21 last year that it was the right thing, the honourable thing, the appropriate thing to pay back his severance upon returning to this House. So I ask the acting Premier if the policy has changed. Do you still believe that the honourable and right thing to do is to have Mr Sorbara pay back the \$35,000 he took from the public purse in severance payment?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I'll refer that to the Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'm glad to hear that my friend from Simcoe-Grey has finally got his question.

Let's first of all deal with policy. There is no policy right now in the Legislative Assembly for the repayment of severance for returning members, but there is a policy within the OPS, and the time frame within the OPS is two years.

In the circumstances of my friend from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey, here's what happened: He resigned his seat in mid-term, did Mr Eves. Within 13 months, he caused two by-elections to be held, at a very high cost to

the taxpayers. He returned to Parliament in the same session of Parliament, 13 months later, and he did the right thing by returning his severance.

In my own circumstances, at the end of the Parliament in 1995, I retired from politics. Six years later, I was re-elected in a by-election. Every year that I serve in this Legislature, I receive \$40,000 less than you and all other members because the entire value of my pension is clawed back.

Mr Wilson: Clearly, the Liberals had a policy a year ago that said that people who took a severance from the public purse and came back to this House should repay that. They berated our leader, Mr Eves, for some time, until he revealed that the morning he was sworn in as Premier, he paid back the \$78,000 in severance. He did the honourable thing, he did the right thing and he did the thing that helps deal with the concerns that the finance minister says he has about the finances in this province.

I say to the honourable members over there—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Wilson: Will you do the honourable thing, will you do the right thing and pay back the \$35,000 in severance pay? Mr Eves did the right thing; it's time you did the right thing. After all, you're responsible for the finances in this province.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I say to my friend from Simcoe-Grey that under the legislation they passed, the Balanced Budget Act, it provides that governments must bring in a balanced budget. If they don't, all the cabinet ministers in that executive council are required to pay back 25% of their salaries. When I see all of those ministers writing cheques to Her Majesty the Queen, I'll reconsider.

I want to tell my friend from Simcoe-Grey that my friend from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey received a payout on his previous pension of somewhere around \$1 million. In contrast to that, every year that I sit in this Parliament, I receive \$40,000 less than him and all of the members because of the clawback of my pension. That is right, and I accept that without qualification.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Many of the residents of my riding of Mississauga East are small business owners. These people work hard each day to provide for themselves and their families and do not have the benefit of income protection. For many of these small business owners, increased competition from large corporations and major events such as SARS and the blackout have caused financial difficulties.

The current government is facing a \$5.6-billion deficit that it has inherited from the previous government. Our Fiscal Responsibility Act will go a long way in addressing this deficit. Minister, my question to you is, what will this bill mean to small business owners in my community and across the province?

1540

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'm delighted to get that question from my friend from Mississauga East.

During the course of the campaign, we knocked on the doors of many of those small businesses. When we wrote the terms of Bill 2, the Fiscal Responsibility Act, we had small business in mind. In fact, one measure in there will change the threshold for the minimum tax rate of 5.5% to \$400,000, from \$320,000. That alone will have a positive tax impact on some 3,000 small businesses across the province, many of them in the riding of Mississauga East. I say to my friend, who is both a small business person himself and an Olympian athlete, that the interest of small business is going to be right at the centre of our attention as we prepare our budget in the spring of next year.

Mr Fonseca: I'm so glad to hear that you recognize the difficult situation of small business owners across this province. It's important that we ensure the well-being of these small businesses as they play an integral part and role in our communities in which they operate, as well as the economic well-being of our province as a whole. Small businesses especially have been adversely affected by the financial mismanagement of the former Conservative government. Large deficits like the one the previous government left behind affected small businesses disproportionately. Minister, can you tell me what you plan to do to deal with this mess?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Small business people in Ontario know that if they ran their businesses like the previous government ran the province, they would no longer be in business. Within a few days, I will be bringing to this House the full economic statement which will set out the steps we're going to take to begin the reconstruction of Ontario's finances.

What small business people need in this province is a system where public services are at the very highest quality and the tax system takes into consideration the requirements of small businesses. Those two points will be central to the work that we do, not only over the course of the fall but throughout our first mandate in government.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Going back to the Minister of Finance, because we're not happy with his response related to severance: If he looks back and reads the minutes from Hansard, he might understand why we're less than satisfied with his response. Mr Smitherman said not very long ago, when talking about the severance of our leader, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander." That's the language Mr Smitherman used, and you're refusing to repay your severance. The minister can give all sorts of explanations and rationales, but the reality is that his party took a very different position when they were sitting on this side of the aisle. We're asking him to maintain that position, do

the right thing, stand up today and indicate that he will repay his severance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): It's passing strange to hear that question at this time from my friend for Leeds-Grenville who, two months and six days ago today, was elected to the Ontario Legislature. Two months ago he asked the people of Leeds-Grenville for a mandate to sit in this Parliament, and already he is speculating about giving up that mandate to run for another level of government. When he resigns from this Parliament, is he going to accept the severance that is due to him?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): It goes to the central credibility of this government. This minister is the one responsible for the public purse. He'll set the tone. He will send the message out to every public servant and every group coming for money. It's very simple. Will you stand in your place, do the right thing and pay back the \$35,000? He can even take out his pen and write the cheque out to himself, to the Minister of Finance. Will he do the honourable thing? Will he send the right message and lead by example?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I do not need any lectures on credibility from the member for Nepean-Carleton. There is a member who, in his former capacity as energy minister, helped throw this province into a deep energy crisis.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from Nepean-Carleton says, "Do the honourable thing." I think if my friend from Nepean-Carleton had the courage to admit it, he would admit in this House that this is a rather sleazy, uncalled-for attack on my integrity, and I simply do not accept it.

The Speaker: Petitions.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Petitions.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Petitions? Orders of the day.

Interjection: What about petitions?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): We've gone to orders of the day.

The Speaker: I shouted "petitions" three times and no one stood up. We have an agenda here, and as we go through, I'd like members to be much more orderly. The disorderliness has cost us some time, not even hearing me shouting it three times. I will go back to petitions.

PETITIONS

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government insists there is going to be a \$5.6-deficit;

“Whereas the government campaigned on a ‘fully costed plan’ that accounted for a \$2-billion deficit;

“Whereas the government campaigned on ‘fully costed plan’ that included a \$1-billion contingency fund;

“Whereas the government campaigned on a ‘fully costed plan’ which included over 230 promises;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the provincial government to take the responsible approach and immediately apply to the projected deficit the \$3 billion the government said they had set aside. We believe this will substantially increase Ontario’s ability to balance the books during the current fiscal year and solve the financial dilemma faced by the government.”

I affix my signature to this.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the government has chosen to give free bailouts to the Toronto District School Board and other school boards;

“Whereas the government believes it is appropriate to ignore the laws and allow school boards to run deficits;

“Whereas the government attempted to satisfy the demands of their union friends rather than demand fiscal accountability within the education system;

“Whereas the government’s new education funding has been almost completely allotted to the Toronto area in order to satisfy the demands of their Toronto-based Liberal ministers and promise-breaking colleagues;

“Whereas the government’s new education funding is really just smoke and mirrors for a mass bailout of the Toronto District School Board;

“Whereas this government has chosen to raise the taxes of those who send their children to independent religious schools only to turn around and hand more money to the Catholic school boards;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the provincial government to: stop covering for the school boards and allow real fiscal accountability and responsibility to take shape within our province’s education system. Stop bending to the demands of your union friends and make some tough decisions. Stop increasing the taxes of those who want to send their children to a religious school that is not in line with Premier McGuinty’s faith.”

I’ll sign that petition.

1550

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I’m pleased to stand in my place to present petitions from the good people of the former town of Ancaster, some 2,564 strong who have petitioned with about 83% of those approached signing the petition, which reads as follows:

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we voters living within the boundaries of what was formerly known as the town of Ancaster are dissatisfied with the form and the results of amalgamation into the ‘new’ city of Hamilton (for example, reduced services and increased municipal taxes); and

“Whereas we do not accept the authoritarian methods used to establish our current system of municipal government; and

“Whereas, in the Wentworth citizens’ referendum held in 1997, an overwhelming majority”—of some 96%—“of those who participated expressed pointed opposition to the amalgamation; and

“Whereas we consider it our democratic right to determine how we are governed;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: to cause the holding of a binding referendum by means of which it would be possible to re-establish our municipality, historically known as the great town of Ancaster.”

SENIORS’ PROPERTY TAX CREDIT

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty has announced plans to scrap the Ontario Home Property Tax Relief for Seniors Act, eliminating this tax break for renters and owners; and

“Whereas this tax relief would help Ontario seniors remain in their own apartments and houses, and assist them to meet rising costs; and

“Whereas this tax relief program would provide \$450 million in net benefits for 945,000 senior households;

“We, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario support Ontario seniors and help them remain in their own homes by maintaining the PCs’ Ontario home property tax relief for seniors program and rejecting any proposal to take this tax break away from our senior citizens.”

OPTOMETRISTS

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly that reads as follows:

“Whereas the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario will be considering a private member’s bill that aims to amend the Optometry Act to give optometrists the authority to prescribe therapeutic pharmaceutical agents for the treatment of certain eye diseases; and

“Whereas optometrists are highly trained and equipped with the knowledge and specialized instrumentation needed to effectively diagnose and treat certain eye problems; and

“Whereas extending the authority to prescribe TPAs to optometrists will help relieve the demands on ophthalmologists and physicians, who currently have the ex-

clusive domain for prescribing TPAs to optometry patients; and

“Whereas the bill introduced by New Democrat Peter Kormos (MPP—Niagara Centre) will ensure that patients receive prompt, timely, one-stop care where appropriate;

“Therefore, we support the bill proposing an amendment to the Optometry Act to give optometrists the authority to prescribe therapeutic pharmaceutical agents for the treatment of certain eye diseases and we encourage the government of Ontario to ensure speedy passage of the bill.”

I agree with the petitioners and I’ve affixed my signature to this.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government insists there is going to be a deficit higher than \$5.6 billion;

“Whereas this government is using old-style politics to demonize the past government at the expense of Ontario taxpayers;

“Whereas this government is using an inflated bogus deficit as a means to justify raising taxes on seniors, homeowners, job-creating businesses and families;

“Whereas this government is using an inflated bogus deficit as a means to justify their plan to further hurt seniors by raising the cost of their prescription drugs; and

“Whereas this government is using an inflated bogus deficit as a means to justify breaking even more promises;

“We, the undersigned, call upon the provincial government to stop playing dirty politics and start working for the taxpayers of this province.”

I agree with this petition and I’m proud to affix my name to it.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

“Whereas Dalton McGuinty, our newly elected Premier, has publicly pledged to move quickly to re-establish local democracy when it comes to public education in Ontario; and

“Whereas Mr McGuinty has publicly asked that ‘cuts and school closures’ should be ‘set aside’ and that ‘that business’ should be left for the incoming, duly elected trustees; and

“Whereas Mr Gerard Kennedy, our newly elected Minister of Education, has stated publicly that school boards aren’t operating as closed shops any more; and

“Whereas there is universal support for the school amongst its staff, parent, and student body and the community at large; and

“Whereas Prince of Wales Public School in Barrie is the oldest continuously operating school in Simcoe county; and

“Whereas Prince of Wales Public School has been providing the community with quality education for more than 125 years; and

“Whereas the impact of the closure of Prince of Wales would be devastating on the whole of the downtown core, and most especially the urban neighbourhood which the school serves;

“Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, demand that the Dalton McGuinty government live up to its commitment and ensure that community schools are not forced to close and that specifically the Liberal government will immediately halt the closure of Prince of Wales Public School in Barrie.”

I support it and affix my signature.

SMALL BUSINESS TAX RELIEF

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas business tax cuts have helped fuel the strongest economic and job growth ever seen in Canada; and

“Whereas corporate income taxes on small businesses that create most of our new jobs have been scheduled to be reduced to 5% in 2004 and 4% in 2005; and

“Whereas the corporate income tax rate for manufacturing and processing firms has been scheduled to be cut to 10% for 2004, 9% in 2005 and 8% in 2006; and

“Whereas the general corporate income tax rate has been scheduled to be 11% for 2004, 9.5% for 2005 and 8% for 2006; and

“Whereas the capital tax on employers is on the road to be cut by 10% in 2004, with a plan to scrap it entirely;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario as follows:

“That the government of Ontario stay the course and maintain the scheduled tax reductions for job-creating businesses.”

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

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“Whereas the impact of the closure of Prince of Wales would be devastating on the whole of the downtown core, and most especially the urban neighbourhood which the school serves;

“Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, demand that the Dalton McGuinty government live up to its commitment and ensure that community schools are not forced to close and that specifically the Liberal government will immediately halt the closure of Prince of Wales Public School in Barrie.”

I support the petition and I affix my signature.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): “Whereas Dalton McGuinty, our newly elected Premier, has publicly pledged to move quickly to re-establish local democracy when it comes to public education in Ontario; and

“Whereas Mr McGuinty has publicly asked that ‘cuts and school closures’ should be ‘set aside’ and that ‘that business’ should be left for the incoming, duly elected trustees; and

“Whereas Mr Gerard Kennedy, our newly elected Minister of Education, has stated publicly that school boards aren’t operating as closed shops any more; and

“Whereas there is universal support for the school amongst its staff, parent, and student body and the community at large; and

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“Whereas the impact of the closure of Prince of Wales would be devastating on the whole of the downtown core, and most especially the urban neighbourhood which the school serves;

“Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, demand that the Dalton McGuinty government live up to its commitment and ensure that community schools are not forced to close and that, specifically, the Liberal government will immediately halt the closure of Prince of Wales Public School in Barrie.”

I’ve signed that petition and agree with it.

1600

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA GESTION RESPONSABLE DES FINANCES

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 27, 2003, on the motion for second reading of Bill 2, An Act

respecting fiscal responsibility/ Projet de loi 2, Loi concernant la gestion responsable des finances.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Further debate.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I’m very pleased to rise today and speak with respect to An Act respecting fiscal responsibility.

When we went out to the people of our various communities during the election campaign, we talked about and expressed our commitment to build an Ontario that would offer better jobs and a higher quality of life for all Ontarians. We talked about our commitment that we, as a province, achieve our potential. The commitment we made to the people of this province was that we would run a tight ship, build North America’s best workforce, build an innovative economy and build a truly global Ontario.

It’s a pleasure to rise and speak to this legislation because Bill 2, if passed, will keep a number of our government’s key commitments to cancel several irresponsible tax giveaways as part of the new government’s plan to tackle the \$5.6-billion deficit. This legislation is an important step toward meeting one of our core commitments: getting our fiscal house in order. We made that commitment because it’s the very foundation of everything we want for Ontarians and everything we know Ontarians want for themselves. These include excellence in public education, improved health care, stronger communities and a prosperous economy.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2003, proposes to do a number of things, and I want to highlight those various elements that we will be dealing with under this act.

We’re going to roll back the latest portion of the tax giveaway to corporations. We know it is important to maintain a competitive corporate tax rate while ensuring Ontarians’ capacity to provide quality public services. The general corporate income tax rate would increase to 14% and the manufacturing and processing tax rate would increase to 12%, effective January 1, 2004.

We also know that we need a strong economy, and as was discussed earlier today, we need to work with small business to ensure that they are profitable across the province. To help entrepreneurs and small business owners grow and flourish, small business with income below \$400,000 would benefit from a lower small business tax rate, which would remain at 5.5% for 2004 and subsequent years.

We’ve also committed to eliminating the seniors’ education property tax credit. This will help ensure good schools for Ontario’s children. Our commitment in Bill 2 will, if repealed, end current entitlements for seniors. Cancelling this measure would require consequential amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Municipal Act.

I want to talk about the importance of seniors to our various communities, in particular my own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. I had an opportunity during the last campaign to knock on doors and speak to seniors about why they were committed to paying their education

property tax. It had everything to do with their grandchildren. I think we can each think about our own grandparents, about the consequences of tax cuts on our education system and how each of our grandparents hope that we will do better than the last generation as we go on to various schools. I can think of grandmothers whom I've talked to on Norseman Avenue, for example, who raise: "I want to pay my education property tax because I want to make sure that my grandchild, who is in grade 1, who is in grade 2, will have a small class size, will be able to learn."

The other thing this act commits to is the elimination of the tax giveaway for private schools—again, a strong indication of our commitment to the public education system and the need to keep that money in our public education system.

These are just some of the highlights that we will undertake through this legislation to move toward our key commitment of getting our fiscal house in order.

I think what we heard from people during the last election was the importance of getting that fiscal house in order, because living within our means is not an end in itself; it is rather a means to an end. It is the foundation upon which we will build the future of this province.

If we're honest about, and I think the people of this province were very honest about, the consequence of corporate taxation and irresponsible tax cuts, the consequences of those tax cuts to the people of my community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore were extreme. We had an opportunity during the election to speak to people about the consequences of those tax cuts. What they said was, "I don't want an extra dollar in my pocket. What I want to know is that we have sound public services; that my children's class is not overcrowded; that my grandmother will be able to find a caring long-term-care facility; that if I need a family doctor, I will be able to have one; that we won't pollute our air with coal-fired generating facilities; that our water won't be polluted."

What we saw in the last election was the rejection of an approach over the past number of years that we only cared about ourselves. I spoke to many people in my own community, Etobicoke-Lakeshore up on the Kingsway, who said, "I am pleased to pay my taxes if I know that I am getting value for my tax dollar."

Coming with fiscal responsibility is the important step we are taking in making sure we do give value for tax dollars. I know it will be difficult for people across the province to accept that we do need to turn a corner. We do need to ensure that we give value for taxes. Over the past week we were saddened, disappointed and unfortunately not surprised by the report of the Provincial Auditor that was in essence a brutal indictment of the past government and their failures in giving value for those tax dollars. Ontarians know that we need to do better across the province.

What we have been left with, as we turned the corner and changed the direction of this government, is two deficits: a \$5.6-billion fiscal deficit and a massive public safety deficit. We've seen mismanagement. We've seen

monies misspent. With that history in place, I can understand the people in my community who approach us and say, "You must not waste my tax money. You must not waste my tax dollars." We are saying to the people across the province and in my own riding, "We are not going to waste your tax dollars. We know that we need to do better across this province and we are going to give you value for those dollars."

We're also going to do good and important things under this legislation such as increasing the tobacco tax. Smoking kills young people, old people, people across this province in the thousands. There are four times more deaths associated with smoking than from car accidents, suicide and AIDS. We need to make sure that young people don't start smoking. That is another sound component of this legislation.

Part of getting our fiscal house in order is to ensure that we build the future of this province on a base of rock rather than a base of sand. Although we didn't create the deficit that we are in, this is the first positive step: that we move forward, that we change directions. We didn't create the problem. We are going to fix it.

It's a responsible approach to governing. It's one that will give taxpayers value for the taxes that they entrust to the government to spend wisely. It is one that will better our province as we move forward in years to come. You don't build a better Ontario by wasting money, absolutely you don't. You don't build a better Ontario by crippling our education system, by cutting the funds available to our health care system, by not ensuring that our seniors have proper care, by polluting our air, by destroying our water system. Those are all important things that the people across this province have chosen in the last election that we reinvest in, that public infrastructure.

This is a first step to give people the straight goods, to move forward and to make sure that we as a province protect those future investments and that we have both a strong fiscal house in order and that we also have a very strong public infrastructure. I look forward to bringing that type of development across the province and in my own riding in Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

1610

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to make a few comments about the speech made by the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore. It was interesting how often she referred to seniors in her comments today. Certainly she's not hearing what I'm hearing. The seniors' tax credit was extremely important, particularly to a lot of low-income seniors living in my riding, in Simcoe county. I'm not talking about people who drive fancy cars or anything like that. I'm talking about people who have a hard time making ends meet as it is. They were certainly looking forward to the tax credit. In fact, in a lot of these cases it's not just a matter of giving them money back for the children's education, it's that a lot of families have to be very careful. They have to help support seniors as they age and they need some support. I can name numerous families like that. In

the last couple of weeks, since Mr McGuinty's plan came out and the largest tax hike in history, Bill 2, there's no question; I've heard from many of my constituents who are extremely concerned about the loss of this income as a tax credit.

Based on that, plus the fact that we also hear rumbblings from across—and we can't really get a direct answer out of the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Health, but we understand also now that you're looking at dabbling with the seniors' drug benefit plan. I think it's a disgrace to even bring it up at this point, but they are planning on doing this.

It will be interesting to hear comments back on that. I look forward to further debate this afternoon.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I wanted to begin by saying that it's interesting—probably one thing I agree with is that there have been enormous, deep and very significant cuts to health, to education and to community services. The dilemma is—

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): There are going to be more.

Ms Martel: —that there are going to be a whole lot more. I'm wondering why the member had nothing to say about that, because I have heard this government now use a \$4-billion figure repeatedly in terms of the cuts that are going to have to be made to deal with the deficit that they pretend they knew nothing about, even though their own finance critic was down in estimates in a very public way in June talking about a \$5-billion risk, a \$5-billion deficit.

There have been enormous cuts. It has had a huge impact on children, a huge impact on seniors and nursing homes, a huge impact on people's ability to access health care, and guess what? Those problems are going to get a whole lot worse, because the \$4 billion that this government is talking about cutting is going to come from those very same budgets. Those are the biggest budgets in the province of Ontario. You can't cut much more from the environment; the Conservatives did that for us. You can't cut much more from a whole host of community services, because the Conservatives did that for us too. If you're looking for \$4 billion, you're going back to the biggest budgets in the province, and those are the very areas where we've seen significant cuts and very serious impacts on Ontarians.

I'd be interested in hearing from the member, as she talks on the one hand about the significant cuts, what she thinks she and her party are going to do next in having to look for \$4 billion more worth of cuts. Because as much as they'd like to have said, and they did say in the past, that there was all kinds of government waste, the fact is most ministries have been cut to the bone. Most ministries have, like the Ministry of the Environment, and we saw the example of that in Walkerton. Another \$4 billion in cuts? People out there better get ready. You haven't seen anything yet in terms of the cuts to education and health care.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I had the opportunity to listen to the comments of my colleague

from Etobicoke-Lakeshore from the lobby, because we broadcast these things all over the building and all over the province, and I think she was right on in her comments. We're going to be voting on this bill at second reading later today, and I just want to tell my friends, as the member and minister responsible for presenting and moving this bill, that it's an extremely important piece of legislation which allows us to begin to get this province's financial house back in order.

No one who has ever sat as Minister of Finance or Treasurer in Ontario delights in taking measures that have the effect of raising taxes. But the fact is that the tax measures the previous government took debased the revenues of this province so severely that, as former Provincial Auditor Erik Peters said, we were no longer living within our means. The previous government created very serious financial problems for this government and therefore for the people of Ontario.

So this bill does exactly what we committed to do during the election campaign: It rolls back the tax cuts for large corporations that the previous government had put in place. That's extremely important. I've heard from corporations across Ontario that they understand these measures are necessary. They too realize that it is fundamental to their success that this province is on a sound financial footing.

I thank my friend from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for participating in the debate and making the comments she made.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the honourable member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore's comments about this tax bill.

I hope all the members opposite on the government side realize that it is the largest tax hike in the history of Ontario, some \$4 billion. There are two particular taxes in here that disturb me, and one is the increase of the corporation tax back to 2002 levels. I have a feeling you're going to find out in a few months—you can probably ride the coattails of the growing US economy for a few more months, because of the enormous tax cuts introduced there by George Bush, and create a few jobs in the province or at least stabilize the situation.

One thing that disturbed me during the campaign, in Simcoe-Grey anyway, was that the Liberal candidate, on behalf of the Liberal Party, never seemed to have any economic plan for how to keep the great economic miracle going that both Mike Harris and Ernie Eves created when we were in government. A key part of that was corporate tax cuts. If you do your research today, in the five jurisdictions we have to compete with on a day-to-day basis, we are still out of whack, all in taxes, all in business and corporate taxes. We're still out of whack. In fact, CNN last night pointed out Ontario and Canadian jurisdictions as still being out of whack. They actually said on CNN that obviously Canada doesn't get it, and they were talking about our province in particular, with respect to the tremendous success they're having with tax cuts south of the border.

As I said during the campaign, if taxes weren't so bloody high in this province, then I wouldn't be advo-

cating cutting them—at some point you can't cut them beyond what's reasonable. The fact of the matter is, there's going to be the usual tax-and-spend Liberals, the usual creating a false deficit. We had several months left to deal with the deficit that we knew was there. You're not going to do anything about the deficit. You're just going to keep increasing taxes, and you'll eventually kill jobs in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore has two minutes in summary.

Ms Broten: I'm pleased to respond to my friends opposite. Certainly it is clear that we need to get our fiscal house in order and to turn away from the dark days over the last eight years where the people of this province were given a false sense of what the fiscal house and the fiscal circumstance of this province were.

No one rushes to pay their taxes. Obviously, no one says, "Yay, I get to pay my taxes." But do you know what they do say? "Thank goodness there's a good school for my kids. Thank goodness our hospital system is working. Thank goodness the air is clean and I get to walk outside and breathe it. Thank goodness we now have a government in place that doesn't believe that turning on the tap and drinking some water and dying as a result of it is an acceptable thing in 2003."

The fact of the matter remains that we have inherited a \$5.6-billion deficit. But we remain as committed as we were during the election campaign to making sure Ontario is once again a society where we have a strong public infrastructure.

1620

With respect to corporations, I can tell my friend opposite, as someone who joins this House having left Bay and King, I think I have an understanding of the corporations in this province. They locate in our province because we have a good health care system, because we have a strong education system, because the infrastructure in our province gives high quality of life for the people who work for them. So what we need to do is make sure that people get value for their taxes. This legislation is an important first step to move us on our way to getting our fiscal house in order. We are committed to doing that. We're going to turn the corner. We're going to get Ontario back on a strong fiscal foundation to ensure that we can once again rebuild a public infrastructure that has been destroyed over the last eight years.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Wilson: I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate about what they call the Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2003. I call it the largest tax hike in Ontario's history. It certainly is some \$4 billion worth of taxes introduced here which I think will eventually kill the economy and set us back many years in terms of the economic recovery that occurred over the past few years. In the eight years we were in office we created over a million net new jobs and really turned around what was becoming an economic backwater through a lot of hard work and a lot of tough decisions and made it once again the economic engine of Canada.

I mentioned the Corporations Tax Act, in which this bill will increase corporate taxes back to what they were last year. The eyes of a lot of people I'm sure just glaze over and they say, "So what?" Corporations aren't bricks and mortar; they're people. They are people who invest in our small businesses and our corporations large and small. That will mean less economic activity, less opportunity to hire more people. I believe, and I have always believed—one of the reasons I'm a Conservative—that the greatest dignity that you can give a human being is the dignity of a job, the dignity not to have to rely on the state but to be able to rely on one's own resources, the resources of the community, a thriving community; to be able to raise a family in a responsible and self-sufficient manner without having to rely on handouts. Of course, the state is there for those who find themselves in unhappy situations. That's why we're happy to pay our taxes, but we are happy to pay our taxes at a reasonable amount that ensures that our neighbour has the same opportunity for employment that we have, that ensures that the tax regime isn't so high that everybody stops hiring new employees because as the payroll taxes go up, the corporate taxes go up.

It's easy to say you are going to raise them, but at the end of the day we need to see an economic plan for this province. I know the Minister of Finance will be bringing out a statement soon. I have a feeling that will be more of the blame game. I'm sure he's going to add to the already fictitious deficit that he's racked up with the help of Mr Peters. I'm sure that'll just get worse and that will actually be the story of that day. Old tricks seem to come around and around in this place.

The second tax that is a true tax hike is the seniors' tax credit we had passed which, for the average senior in Simcoe-Grey, was about \$600 per senior household; on average about \$475 across the province. If that had taken effect, the forms would have gone out on January 1, just a few weeks away. That was there to try to give seniors an equal hand up to other people who received income tax cuts.

As I explained during the campaign, during seven or eight all-candidates' meetings in my riding, by that time in their lives seniors usually have a lower income stream coming into the house; therefore they didn't benefit as much from our previous income-tax-based cuts. We wanted to make sure that they received a benefit directly, so we called it the seniors' education property tax cut. We could have called it anything. It was a way to get, on average, \$475 into the pockets of seniors in this province who desperately need it. The price of drugs is going up. The government of course will do what other governments have all had to do, and that is probably limit access to the drug plan because it is growing exponentially and there is no way this province or any province in this country can afford to keep up with that. So when you deal with that, mark my words: You're going to have to do something about it. The price of health care is already 47%—47 cents on every dollar that comes in is earmarked for health care in this province and more and more people will have to pay out of pocket.

Our seniors are not the great, big, rich, fat cats that some people like to say. I've heard debate in this House in the last two weeks—unfortunately I was at home with pneumonia, but I did see it on television—that our seniors are better off than any other seniors in the history of this province. Maybe that's true in some regard, but it's not true in the riding of Simcoe-Grey. The average income for seniors per household is about \$35,000. I don't consider that rich. Many of them live in trailer camps, in mobile home communities, which are very nice and well-kept, but I think many of these seniors would have preferred to keep the family home or would have preferred perhaps a little boost in their income to help them through these times. It was an attempt by us to try and get some money in seniors' pockets. Of course, the Liberals are wiping that out.

The Liberals are also getting rid of the equity in education tax credit through this legislation, which means that the independent schools, like the ones in my riding, and the parents who work so hard to send their children to those independent schools because they believe their children are going to get an excellent education in those schools—and in a free and a democratic society they should have the right to do that. We should fully fund public education, separate and public and French, but we should also respect those parents who want to send their children to independent schools.

I think it's just fundamentally unfair that those parents today pay two taxes. They fully pay their school tax through their property taxes, because they have to by law, and then they pay, in addition, for their children to go to an independent school, like the schools in my riding: the Pretty River Academy, an elementary and secondary school in Collingwood; Silvercrest Christian School, an elementary school in Wasaga Beach; the Alliston Community Christian School, which is an elementary school in Alliston; Thor College, which is a very prestigious institute in Thornton in my riding, containing both elementary and secondary school students; Little House Montessori School, an elementary school in Collingwood; Elizabeth Simcoe Private School, an elementary and secondary school in Utopia in my riding; the Sheila Morrison School, which probably leads them all for the history of independent schools, outside of the Christian schools in this province. It began with dealing with difficult children. The only good placement where they probably had a hope of acquiring the skills needed in life and acquiring the employment skills they're going to need later in life was the Sheila Morrison School. She started it many decades ago and it is a terrific independent school located in Utopia in my riding, and indeed is a model for many, many other schools and programs to get young people back on the right track and give them the skills they need to succeed in life.

St Paul's Evangelical Christian School, which contains both elementary and secondary school students in Minesing in my riding—all of those hundreds and thousands of parents won't be able to receive the little boost we were going to give them with the equity in education tax credit.

Again, for those people who attended all-candidates' meetings and screamed the bejesus—they were all Liberals, screaming at me—I simply don't believe that you should have to pay two taxes. I'm a Catholic in this province, and I can tell you, for the first 25 years of my life, my family paid two taxes, and it's no darn fun. You had to pay your public school tax. You had to pay your separate school tax up to grade 12, and Bill Davis extended it one year. Of course, we lost government in 1985 because of that. That was the issue. In simple fairness, Quebec fully funded both its public and separate school systems, so there never was this debate. Chintzy Ontario decided to stop short one year, Grade 13. In 1985, we corrected that.

Mike Harris historically corrected funding in all of the province during his time in office, during our time in office over the last eight years. We fully fund now every student in the province the same per pupil, per head. Whether you live in Timmins or James Bay, North Bay, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Collingwood or Alliston, you're worth the same amount of money per pupil in your school board, forced on you by the Ontario government.

Yes, Toronto is mad at us, because we are taking a couple of hundred million dollars a year out of Toronto's lucrative industrial and commercial tax base to pay for schools in Simcoe county, to pay for equal and equitable funding in Thunder Bay and North Bay. I'm the former minister of the north, and there's one thing we were very, very proud of in terms of the equity in funding formula that we brought forward.

I regret, in this piece of legislation, that seniors won't get a little boost up. I regret that the equity in education tax credit is being dissolved. I regret that \$4 billion worth of new taxes, the largest tax hike in Ontario history, is being thrust upon the people of Ontario just before Christmas. Of course, they won't feel the effect of most of these taxes for many months to come.

1630

Finally, I regret that the Minister of Finance won't pay back his severance—\$35,000. It's not going to hurt him very much personally, from what I understand. He goes on to blab about \$40,000 worth of pension he doesn't get. There's no one in this House other than Ted Arnott and I who suffered more with the cancellation of the gold-plated MPP pension plan. We got nothing. I was elected in 1990 and 1995, and one of the first bills we passed was the elimination of the gold-plated pension plan, which said that after 15 years you got 75% of your best three years' salary. As a minister of the crown, that would have been about \$78,000 the rest of my life. I don't get one penny. We made that bill retroactive to the day before we were elected in 1995, so I got nothing for 1990 to 1995. Ted Arnott and I, being the age that we are on this side of the House, would have been pensioned out two years from now at 42 years of age, but we don't get our \$78,000 a year. We don't get anything. My accountant tells me that if I live to be 73, I gave up \$2.7 million worth of pension.

So don't give me this crap. I get nothing the day I leave. You've got something from the days you were

here in the past. The rules changed, Greg. The fact of the matter is that you should pay back your severance. It's the honourable thing to do. You were given that money because they thought you were gone. When you come back, you should pay it back. I really, really believe that—

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind the member that you not refer to someone by name and that you direct your comments through the Speaker.

Mr Wilson: I apologize for that, Mr Speaker. The fact of the matter is that when the Liberals were on this side of the House, they had one set of rules. They have another set of rules now, and that bothers me as much as anything.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: This is about it in terms of speaking participation in this bill, because this government has time-allocated almost every bill that's before the House. They proceeded to time-allocate before even the Tories ever dared do it. Boy, did the Liberals used to rail—and rightly so—when the Tories would impose guillotine motions to cut off debate.

Let's see what we've got. We've got Bills 2, 4, 5, all of them significant, substantive bills. Debate's finished, with but one day of public hearings, because the second day surely is going to have to be devoted to clause-by-clause. Here's a government that talks about reforming democracy. It's going to need reforming by the time they're finished with it. They've shut the door on democracy, time-allocated three bills, two substantive motions; committee hearings of but one day for public participation. Shame on you guys. The Tories didn't even stoop that low. And an omnibus time allocation bill? Unheard of in this chamber. Why? In the name of a three-month vacation, so that being here but two days before this government, these Liberals, here at Queen's Park introduced a motion that would give them a three-month vacation through the months of January, February and March.

Let me tell you, I hear some whining coming from the background. The Liberals' favourite whine is, "What do you mean? We only got three months' vacation? We should have four." Well, I suppose next time, if you want four months instead of three months, move a motion that says four months' vacation.

I've never seen a government come here and sit but two days before they vote themselves a three-month vacation. I've got people down where I come from—down in Niagara Centre, Welland, Thorold, Pelham, south St Catharines, Port Colborne, Thorold south, Niagara Falls, north St Catharines, Port Dalhousie—who are worried about how they're going to pay their electricity bills this winter with the cap removed, how they're going to pay their natural gas utility bills this winter, and the Liberals are only worried about making sure they get three months' vacation.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I rise to contribute a response.

First of all, I find it intriguing to listen to a former minister of a Conservative government lecture this Legis-

lature and this province about fiscal responsibility. It is absolutely absurd.

We just received a report on OPG. The member who just spoke was a former energy minister, one of the many responsible for what has become probably the boondoggle of all boondoggles in Ontario's history. It is a mess. It is fiscally out of control. Basically, they appointed a bunch of political hacks to run this, and now we have seen the mess we're in. So to get a lecture from a government that said, "We have balanced the budget"—and now we find out that we're in a significant deficit situation in the province of Ontario. Every day the Minister of Finance finds out a new surprise, a new boondoggle that this government has left behind.

What we are doing is, we're following through on our commitments. We talked about our priorities during the election. We didn't go to the people of Ontario with any sort of misinformed view of what the province would be like. We have said we will deal with the seniors' tax credit. We said we would cancel the private school tax credit and the corporate tax credit and raise tobacco taxes. It was a question of priorities. The previous government's priorities continue to be corporate tax cuts for their rich friends. We believe that it's more important to invest our money in health care, education, clean air and clean water, but significantly now we also have to deal with the mess that has been left behind by this government.

To get a lecture from a Conservative member, and particularly a former minister, is absolutely ludicrous because in eight years of unprecedented economic growth you have managed to mess up the economy of this province, the deficit of this province and the fiscal situation of this province like no government has in the history of Ontario. You should be ashamed of yourselves. Don't be lecturing us.

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): We are dealing with a bill respecting fiscal responsibility. I would suggest that it should be called "the bill forwarded by the grinch who stole Christmas." That grinch happens to be the Premier of Ontario, newly elected, who has caused great hardship to seniors in this province, many of whom are waiting, have been counting on this to make this a Christmas and make their year less difficult than it presently is. That has been yanked away from them, and they will suffer because of it. The Liberals on the other side of the House and the government will have to abide by that suffering.

They say it's all in the name of a deficit—a phony deficit. Yet they can find money to spend when they want to. The old Ottawa-Toronto axis is back in business. All of a sudden, even though we had this enormous deficit, we find that we can spend \$50 million on the TTC. Where did that money come from? The Toronto-Ottawa axis. If you're not from Toronto, you're not going to see any money, but there it goes.

How about the \$112 million we're going to spend on Toronto and Ottawa education, not anywhere else? Waterloo region will not see one cent of that money. It's

all going to Toronto and Ottawa. You know it. The establishment of this province is back in business, and you're backing it.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It's important to note that it has been eight years of fiscal mismanagement, and it isn't this government that is saying this; it is the former Provincial Auditor, who found a \$5.6-billion deficit.

This legislation is an important step in meeting one of our core commitments, and that is to get the province's fiscal house in order. More important, the people of Ontario made a choice on October 2, a clear choice, to say that we have to also get our social debt in order. In other words, we have a deficit dealing with education, we have a deficit dealing with our health care, with our environment. It's more than just about cuts; it's about actual accountability of our public dollars.

We're going to change the Audit Act, and by changing the Audit Act we'll at least have oversight from the Provincial Auditor so that we can evaluate where these dollars are going. We haven't had that.

I would ask anyone who is watching to take a look at the Provincial Auditor's report of December 2, 2003, because the Provincial Auditor noted a very significant, irresponsible lack of spending, as well as spending, of taxpayers' dollars. So we have a huge challenge. We have a fiscal deficit, and we have a social deficit. We're going to tackle those, and we're going to succeed.

1640

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe-Grey.

Mr Wilson: The member for Hamilton East mentioned the energy portfolio. Yes, I was minister there for a number of years. I wouldn't throw stones at glass houses, though. The real question that I've never played up—but I'm not dead yet—is why did the Minister of Energy, a few months after coming to office, have to shut down 10 of 20 nuclear units after the NDPs and Liberals ran them for 10 years—the largest shutdown in the history of the nuclear world, in the history of the world, and certainly the history of North America? I'll write that book yet, and I'll publish. You'll be ashamed of your predecessors in this province, who didn't even do the basic maintenance.

By the way, Maurice Strong under the NDP made more money than Bill Farlinger. The top executives under David Peterson made millions more in salary than what our guys did when they came in. Yes, we didn't do a very good job of cleaning up the mess, but the real mess was created in the decade before we came to office.

The proof is not my word for it; the proof is 10 of 20 reactors shut down because of mismanagement and improper maintenance done prior to our coming to office. It's going to take you probably eight more years to even get some of those nuts and bolts back on line. I can tell you, the mess is so deep, the mess is so bad—and when you're dealing with nuclear energy, nothing happens overnight in terms of the safety you have to go through, in terms of the processes you have to go through with the federal nuclear watchdog. I can tell you, and Jim Bradley

will tell you, and Sean Conway if he was still here would tell you, It's going to take many, many more years. We had a crew in there trying to clean it up, and yes, they weren't successful.

I wish you luck, but I wouldn't throw stones at glass houses, because the decade when you and the NDP were in was a real disgrace. The proof was in having to shut down 10 of 20 nuclear reactors. So don't throw stones at glass houses.

With respect to the tax increases in this bill, you're going to find that you will have killed jobs in this province. Three years from now, you'll be wondering why there's so many people unemployed.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Kormos: The nice thing about being a New Democrat is that you can criticize the Liberals and the Tories equally. You can take shots at Ottawa and not feel any guilt or worry about, perhaps, engaging in career-limiting moves.

I've got to tell you that the change in tune—because I'm listening to Tory backbenchers here talking about this government riding the wave of the US economy. Lord love a duck, that's what we were telling the Tories for the last eight years: that the economic growth here in this province was as a result of the growth in the US economy and as a result of, amongst other things, the incredibly low value of the Canadian dollar. They're saying, "Oh no, it's Mike Harris's tax cuts that are generating this growth." We said, "Oh, horsefeathers. What kind of planet do come from that you believe that stuff?" The fact is that now we are listening as Tories engage in some of the same arguments. I guess they've relinquished their claim to having been responsible for the economic growth. Well, why shouldn't they, because, heck, they were also responsible for a huge deficit in the course of a period of prosperity. It's just unheard-of. It's so typical of right-wing governments.

I suppose the really scary thing now—well, the scary thing is that you've got the former Minister of Energy talking about the history of nuclear power. If you take a look at the history of nuclear power, you're looking at John Robarts and his successor. You're looking at the relationship between them and one Steve Roman and Denison Mines and the sweetheart deals that—God bless Steve Roman; I say, all power to him. But the sweetheart deals that he struck with the Tory government of the day with respect to uranium that he was mining up in Elliot Lake—deals that continued to plague this province well into the early 1990s before those contracts were finally ended.

You're talking about a fascination, a passion, for nuclear energy which was never advocated by New Democrats, nuclear electricity production having proven to be one of the most dangerous, most expensive and, at the end of the day, most difficult to wrap up and clean up and take care of. That's why I'm proud of the NDP position, which has been quite clear about telling this government and previous governments that nuclear power plants are not the way to go. What we've got to

develop now is a systematic shutdown of those nuclear power plants. They are a black pit. They are a money hole. They are going to continue to cost taxpayers huge, huge amounts of dollars and pose significant dangers to the public as well.

We're talking about a bill that's time-allocated. I've got to talk fast, because I've only got 10 minutes to debate this bill, because this government didn't see fit to allow a thorough debate. One of the reasons why this government says that it's gotta do what it's gotta do is so that its backbenchers can participate in the debate on this bill. But I've been here night after night after night, and most of the time Liberals aren't involved in the debate.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Neither are the Conservatives. They're not here either. They don't want to debate these things. They pass in rotation, pass in rotation, pass in rotation. Why, I was here Thursday night when we were debating a motion that had been time-allocated. Did the Liberals want to participate in the debate? No. They sat there mute, I say kindly. Did the Conservatives want to participate in debate? No. They sat there mute, I say rather generously. New Democrats had to carry it. There are only seven of us. We understand that. As I told you before, I wish we were the dirty dozen, but we're only the magnificent seven. We do the best we can.

Night after night I've been in here, and I've seen Liberal backbenchers not wanting to participate in the debate. And then they vote for a time allocation motion that cuts off debate, which means they'll never be involved with it. Come on, you newly elected members. Your folks back home want to hear from you. They want to get the clicker tuned up to whatever cable channel it is that shows the Legislative Assembly broadcast in their home riding. They want to see you on your feet speaking about Bill 2. They want to hear from you.

Did you Liberal backbenchers take care of your folks back home? No. You voted for time allocation, which guarantees that you won't be able to debate this bill because you cut off debate. And you didn't even have enough common sense to ensure there were going to be anywhere near enough public hearings. One day is what it amounts to, one crummy day here in Toronto on Bill 2, the one you're so proud of, never mind Bills 4 and 5. Oh yeah, a second day. Well, that's going to be tied up in a rather pitiful clause-by-clause discussion. You're going to learn in short order that there's no meaningful clause-by-clause in the course of two hours—that's what you've allowed yourself, from 10 in the morning till 12 noon. Take a look at what you voted for in your time allocation motion, because at four o'clock that afternoon you immediately go into voting on clause-by-clause and any amendments.

You guys haven't just shot yourselves in the foot; you've riddled yourselves because you've cut off debate. You shut the door on committee hearings. You slammed the door on members of the public who believed you when you promised you were going to do things differently. They did. People voted for you, where you

folks come from, because they believed you were going to do things differently, and now it ends up you're doing things the same old way. The palace guard has changed its uniform, but it's the same old palace guard.

I go back home all weekend. I was talking to the Korean Veterans Association in St Catharines on Saturday night—it was the 50th anniversary of the armistice in the Korean War. I was down at the market square on Saturday morning, and I was over at the minor hockey house because they were doing a fundraiser breakfast to raise money for minor hockey. All day Saturday and all day Sunday I got people standing there shaking their heads saying they just don't understand what happened to those Liberals at Queen's Park. Even folks who didn't vote Liberal—down where I come from, people voted Liberal, but they didn't vote Liberal as much as they voted NDP. Obviously it was different in other ridings. But even a whole lot of folks who didn't vote Liberal said, "I didn't vote Liberal—fair enough—but I still expected the Liberals to be different." They've become tired and frustrated and disappointed and discouraged at eight years of Tory ham-fisted, jackboot-style government. And what happens? You're not even here two weeks before you move an omnibus time allocation motion cutting off debate on Bills 2, 4 and 5 and cutting off debate on two substantive motions.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Organized? If folks watched question period today—when I was a kid, I used to believe in government conspiracies. It was the 1960s, and you were supposed to believe in them. I believed in them. Maybe some of you did too. I believed in government conspiracies. Then I get here to Queen's Park and I'm actually in a government caucus and I realize there are no government conspiracies, not because governments don't want to but because they're incapable of it, and you guys are no different. People who watched question period today saw this finely oiled machine at its finest.

Mr Levac: Oops.

Mr Kormos: Oops is right. What a mess. A finely tuned machine—it wasn't just the monkey wrench, it was the whole monkey climbing through the sprockets and gears. You haven't been here two weeks before you move and pass an omnibus time allocation motion that even the Tories didn't dare impose. And all the ranting and railing you did—mind you, you did it with the collaboration of the Tories. I should tell you—Billy Murdoch may want to know this. Billy Murdoch's people are standing up, aiding and abetting—not just aiding and abetting but collaborating with the government.

1650

Mr Murdoch, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, if I were in your riding, I would have great concern about the extent to which the Conservative caucus, of which you are a member, is working so intimately with the Liberals. If I was in your riding, I'd say, "I voted for a Conservative. I didn't expect my member to be part of a caucus that was going to suck up to the Liberals and help them pass their legislation." The

Conservatives passed, voted with the government on the time allocation motion. The Conservatives actually helped plan it. They admitted that. They thought it was a great idea. It's true. The Conservative House leader stood up, proud as punch, and said, "By golly, the Conservatives participated in drafting a time allocation motion with the Liberals that even Conservatives wouldn't have dared try to pass in this House." The Conservatives had to wait for the Liberals to get elected before they could pass an omnibus time allocation motion. We've never seen one of those before.

It's incredible. This is downright Kafkaesque, something that's been coming to mind the last couple of weeks, and question period today really capped it off. Question period today, for me—anybody who's seen a John Waters movie would appreciate question period today. It had all the same messiness, vulgarity and outrageousness—honest. Question period today was typical of, I suspect, what we're going to be seeing for four years now. Oh, more of those government backbenchers—all those tough backbench questions, the ones the ministers write for you. Aren't you ashamed to stand up and read those? Yikes. People watching know what's happening. They know you're selling yourselves short. Well, you are. They wanted you to come here and be strong, be brave, stand up against tyranny; rather, you've joined forces with it. It's a sad day.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The member for Bramalea—well, you were standing. Don't be shy.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): It's very interesting that the member from Niagara Centre is supposed to talk about the fiscal responsibility bill, but he has not been talking about this bill, the fiscal responsibility bill.

This piece of legislation is a very important first step in meeting one of this government's core commitments. What is that core commitment? The core commitment is putting Ontario's fiscal house in order, which includes improved health care, stronger communities and excellence in public education. The people of Ontario gave us a mandate to put Ontario's economy on a positive path. They gave us a mandate to bring about positive change in Ontario. This bill on fiscal responsibility makes tax rates very competitive for our businesses in Ontario. That's the mandate the people of Ontario gave us, and that's what this bill on fiscal responsibility is all about. That's our promise, and we are ready to fulfill it.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I want to say that the official opposition recognizes that you have been given a mandate. I think we have shown that with respect to our actions in the Legislature. I think the member who spoke used the term "sucking up" to the government. I'm not sure that's parliamentary. But I want to say that certainly the official opposition worked hard on behalf of the seven-member NDP to ensure that they were afforded appropriate opportunities in this House. We took that stand on their behalf.

I can appreciate the government's view with respect to this, because they watched, after we reached an agree-

ment with the NDP, the treatment we received for four years from the third party. They were completely obstructionist after we reached an agreement with them.

I can say as well that we talked about why they're doing what they're doing. The member was very critical about a debate here on Thursday night when there weren't members participating other than the NDP. That debate was about the appointment of the Deputy Speaker in this House.

We have very important pieces of legislation before us; we have a responsibility to debate those fully, whether it's the energy bill, whether it's the Fiscal Responsibility Act or whether it's the hydro legislation. But the members opposite wanted to debate the appointment of a Deputy Speaker and take up the whole evening debating that. I would ask the viewers if that's responsible opposition. I don't think so. I think most Ontarians would agree that that's not responsible opposition. I would ask the third party to step back. I think their act has gone a little too long and that most Ontarians recognize they're not performing an appropriate role in this place. I would encourage them to take a different view of the world.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I'd like to take a couple of minutes to comment on my friend from Niagara Centre.

Coming from a municipal background, I find it very disturbing that we come here to be lectured and entertained and we tend to forget what we're really here for, what the people of Ontario sent us here for, regardless of party stripe. I know what the people in my riding told me, and I had very good competition, my counterpart, a former member.

We all preached to the people what we believed, and I respected my counterpart to bring his party message forward. They made a choice, and our choice was very, very clear. I believe both parties were clear. All three parties, all five, in my riding were clear on what they believed in, and I respected that; that's democracy. But we get here today and whatever day it was last week—I believe it was Tuesday—all I could hear were bells all day instead of doing House business.

I could hear bells all day and it wasn't because of us; it was because our friends to the end here didn't really want to participate in the democratic process. Let's get down to business. I should tell them, through you, Mr Speaker, that if this government's making a wrong decision, there'll be a referendum in four years, and I think at that time they will be able to bring forward what they'd like to bring forward. I mean, why wait until two months after the election to bring out a platform that hasn't worked before?

So we're delivering what we promised; we're down to a T. The comments I get are quite contrary to what my friend from Niagara Centre is bringing, because I'm actually getting comments when I'm down in my riding that we're finally moving forward. We need to move forward even faster if we want to really bring change to Ontario. That's what we need.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): It's a pleasure to take part in this and congratulate the member from the NDP on his speech. He always gives an excellent speech in here. Sometimes he's off topic, as you all know, but that's OK; he does bring something to this House.

Something the Liberals have managed to do by putting the rump between us is they've managed to have the opposition parties fighting against each other. That's what you guys wanted and that's unfortunate, because that's not democracy. That's one of your promises you have broken.

The minister today said that he's going to bring in some new laws, and we'll have to wait and see what happens. But on this bill, actually you've kept some promises. It's strange; these would have been the good ones you could have broken: our tax credit for our private schools, you certainly could've broken that one. Our tax credits to our small businesses, small businesses that make this economy run, you people are going to put them in dire straits and you're going to see some big problems here. It's unfortunate that you're doing that.

You're saying that we've got this \$5.6-billion boondoggle non-balanced budget. We're only half way through the season, folks, and if you're going to believe some high-priced consultant whom you weren't going to hire—right off the bat, the first thing you do is hire a high-priced consultant to come out and tell you that there's something wrong, while your own finance wizard over there was telling you that anyway. You didn't need to go out and spend that money, but you thought, "Well, let's hire Peters. He's a poor man who doesn't have a job now. Let's give him a job and we'll have him tell us what we want him to tell us," which he did.

You can look at that bogus deficit and you people can sit back on your laurels and blame that all you want, but it will come down to you to balance the budget. You're the guys in government now and you've got to start to take responsibility. That's the unfortunate part. You're not doing that.

As I say, we certainly will be voting against this bill because I think you're wrong on many spots in this bill, it's really unfortunate, and one of them is our private schools.

1700

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre has two minutes in summary.

Mr Kormos: Gosh, let me say to the folks whose heads are still ringing, look, if you didn't want to hear bells ring, why did you vote for the time allocation motion that cut off debate on this bill, on Bill 4 and on Bill 5? Why did you support a time allocation motion that basically gave each and every one of those three bills but one day of public hearings, two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon?

What are you guys talking about? You guys voted for a time allocation motion that cut off debate on three substantive bills, three of the first bills that this government pursues, and then you not only cut off debate on

second reading and allow for but a couple of hours of crummy debate on third, but you deny public hearings so that there can be no public input into either of Bill 2, Bill 4 or Bill 5.

You Liberals, with your Tory friends, and the Liberal House leader, along with the Tory House leader, worked together very hard and very closely—tight, like this—to make sure that the time allocation motion would be more egregious than any time allocation motion that the Tories dare concoct on their own. The Tories needed to elect the Liberals so that they could work together to do the mother of all time allocation motions, to do omnibus, mega, super-duper time allocation motions.

Please. You guys are standing up here talking about democracy. How dare you, when you voted for a time allocation motion that cut off debate on Bills 2, 4 and 5, that denied any meaningful public hearings? You see, what you're supposed to be doing during the hiatus of January, February and March is travelling with committees. That's what those months are for. Instead, you guys are going on vacation because you killed committee hearings with your time allocation motion.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I rise late this afternoon as the time progresses to engage in the debate with respect to Bill 2, An Act respecting fiscal responsibility. I think it's an important bill, and the context of the name is important in and of itself.

During the course of the debate over the past few days and weeks, on occasion people raised questions about the name of a bill, the name of an act that might be an act if this Legislature approves it. This one speaks to our fiscal condition in Ontario and a strategy that respects both that and the taxpayers of Ontario.

The bill charts a course for recovery from the overwhelming burden. Although I've heard it said here on a number of occasions across the House about bogus deficits and the like, this is a real deficit. This is a \$5.6-billion real deficit. It is burdening the taxpayers of Ontario and this government.

This bill will help to set the stage for recovery from that burden. It addresses improvements in fundamentals, the cornerstones as we refer to them or the foundation, as the Premier has spoken to, the necessity to put the province back on track financially. It won't come easy. It's not going to come in a short period of time; the turnaround will be extensive.

It also sets the stage for recovery in respect of public services here in Ontario. It's an effort to ensure that as we move forward we can reach the goals of excellence in public education for all, that the objectives of smaller class sizes, to be starting with the primary grade, can be met.

Unless we deal with this piece of legislation, we'll have difficulty achieving the very goals the people of Ontario put us here for; we'll have difficulty providing the quality of health care that the people of Ontario expect from us; or providing the clean air and clean water

that people so much demand; or continuing to build strong communities and working toward a prosperous economy.

I want to spend a little bit of time, if I can, on some of the elements of the bill and how they affect or will affect the lives of Ontarians.

I want to speak briefly to the matter of the tobacco tax. Tobacco use is clearly harmful to all ages, but much more so among the young, the youth in our community. If by the adjustment in this legislation the increase in taxation helps to move some of those young people away from smoking, then that's a good thing. We're acting quickly in that matter. As a matter of fact, the increase in taxation was implemented November 25, immediately, so no one could take advantage of that particular situation. Tobacco is the leading cause of deaths in the province, killing some 16,000 people a year, four times more than deaths from auto accidents, suicide, homicide and AIDS combined, all four of those that we find so horrific. Yet, death from smoking is four times greater. If this adjustment in legislation assists in bringing that number down, then it's the right way to go. We made it quite clear in the campaign platform that we need to see this province move toward the level of taxation in other provinces across the country with respect to tobacco.

We're committed to moving to that national average. Smuggling, contraband, is always a concern. As taxes increase, there's a greater likelihood that people will try that. Moving in a somewhat modest way will mitigate the impact from contraband and smuggling. We're moving away from the lowest cigarette taxation in the country to one that better reflects what's happening elsewhere.

On the energy front, we've taken some actions with respect to conservation measures. By extending the rebate available under the retail sales tax for the purchase of Energy Star-rated refrigerators, dishwashers, clothes washers and dryers, we've continued the incentive that's so desperately needed. It sets the tone for other actions that are being taken in other pieces of legislation with respect to energy. Unless we get a clear and good handle on energy measures and conservation measures in Ontario, we face some dire consequences. We know what's happened over the past year, this past summer, as people have rallied around the blackout, but it drove home how desperate the situation is in Ontario with respect to energy. It drove home that in winter or summer we run the risk of running out of energy, and as recently as the other day, with the Epp report, identifying a serious concern with regard to one energy facility, the Pickering A plant. It may very well be indicative of the types of costs that are going to be incurred to supply energy at the levels we need. If the energy conservation measure assists in driving home to people the need to use energy wisely and frugally, then that part of the legislation will be of value.

During the campaign we spoke a lot about building stronger communities. We talked about public transit and public transportation. When this legislation is the opportunity for municipalities to be able to extend their devel-

opment charges bylaws for a further year, that will ensure that the development industry that grows and prospers in our communities will continue to pay a fair share of costs for capital in GO Transit. It sets the stage for opportunities for capital improvements in GO Transit, it reinforces the commitment to public transportation and it will encourage municipalities to enhance their own fleets, and give us the opportunity to work through, as was spoken to today by ministers present, the application of gasoline tax, so we'll be able to make those connections between GO and the local transit systems.

1710

The Ontario Loan Act, 2003, is included in this as well. It is to provide the opportunity necessary to ensure that the deficit situation is covered and to ensure that the at-risk money that was identified in the Peters report could be covered. Clearly, that at-risk money is beginning to surface and may very well be off-book debt not yet identified in the process we've been in.

Through this legislation, this will provide the opportunity to ensure that we can invest in key programs in education and health care. We only need to read the papers of the last weekend to learn the dire straits that nursing homes and seniors' care facilities are in across Ontario. So we need the resources necessary for that, and the Ontario Loan Act at least gives us a provision at this point to protect ourselves during this year.

This particular legislation provides the basis to ensure that during the balance of this year we are in good stead, that we're setting out the right objectives and the right targets for the people of the province of Ontario, as we committed to.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Runciman: I'm not going to spend a lot of time responding to that directly because it's really the pap that's produced by the Liberal members' services, and the members stand here and read it, not necessarily knowing what's in the material or understanding or even supporting what they're reading on behalf of the leadership of their party.

They say this is a new day in Ontario, a democratic deficit, and what we see is members already in this House, in two or three short weeks, getting up and reading a script provided by the Premier's office, the leader's office, providing direction to all of these backbenchers.

We've heard issues raised about question period, the lob balls being tossed to ministers so they can bat them out of the park. We are not in any way having a meaningful question period. I wouldn't mind seeing the NDP getting an additional question in the House. I think it would be helpful. I would encourage all the members opposite to step back and listen to the rhetoric they're hearing from the minister responsible for democratic reform. How is that actually occurring within their own caucus and in this House? You must have your own views with respect to how the government is approaching these issues. Let's see some free thinking in here. Let's see you standing on your feet, speaking from the heart, talking about what issues really impact your riding, how

this legislation is going to impact the people in your riding, the businesses in your riding, the nursing homes, the seniors, the small business people who are going to be negatively impacted by this legislation. There's a whole range of very, very serious issues which should be discussed in detail.

We've been raising issues. The NDP have been raising issues and concerns. You should take this opportunity to explain why what we're suggesting is not the case. That's your role, as I see it. We're talking about the dramatic impact in a negative sense that you're going to have on small business in the province of Ontario in the years to come with some of the initiatives encompassed in this bill. Get up and explain why that is not going to be the case; I don't think you can. That's why you're not doing it.

Ms Martel: In response to the comments made by the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, I heard him say that this bill sets the stage for the recovery of public services. Well, I have to laugh. For goodness' sake, that presumes that the bill somehow is going to save the government some money for them to invest in public services. If you look at the tax breaks that have been eliminated, it's clear that very little government money went out in the first place. For example, if you look at the corporate tax cuts, cancelling that doesn't bring in any money, because those tax cuts weren't supposed to happen until 2004, 2005 and 2006. So you are not getting any money back because the money didn't go out in the first place. If you look at the cancellation of the private school tax credit, that's not going to bring you very much money, because it wasn't fully implemented by the former government—thank goodness—but it's certainly not going to give you any kind of money to make, for example, the investments that you've promised in education. Or again, cancelling what we've called the Frank Stronach tax credit isn't going to bring you one red cent, because that money didn't go out to seniors in the first place. So cancelling these isn't going to bring you any money to invest in public services; on the contrary.

The second problem this government has is not only do they not have money coming in from cancellation, but they've got a \$4-billion cut exercise that's now going on in the public service. Believe you me, cutting \$4-billion to try to deal with the deficit that the Liberals knew all about when they went out and made 231 promises is going to cause a lot of pain and suffering for the education system, for the health system, for social services agencies as well. So we're not doing anything here to restore public services. On the contrary, the cuts that are coming are going to destroy public services in this province.

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I'd like to comment on the issue of the education equity tax and seniors education property tax issues. It was spoken of by the other member. In my area, in Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, I have a very strong constituency of faith-based schools that have made their feelings known to me about the equity-in-education credit. I understand

very much their concerns about that. I do understand that they are families that are making great sacrifices to send their children to faith-based schools. I understand, as one of the other members mentioned earlier, what it was like as a member of the Catholic faith to have to pay two taxes to get our children into the school and for my parents to send me to those schools.

But I also understand that the previous government lumped in with this group—the faith-based schools—the private schools, and that's the real crux of the issue in my riding. We do not feel that it's fair to have all those people get the same credit. There are differences between the two types of schools. At this stage in the game—the member over here mentioned something about there being no tax savings. My understanding is that there is a \$165-million tax saving in having this education tax credit. I think that we can use that tax credit further to improve the school system that exists now. The current system is suffering greatly. We need to put our efforts into the current system before we can look forward to doing anything for other systems that we have, including the faith-based systems.

Mr Murdoch: Thank you again, Mr Speaker, to be able to speak on this topic. To the member who just spoke, you can show your independence in here. Don't let them put this through. You can vote against it. This is what this new democracy is all about. You don't have to vote for it. Or, for the third reading, put in an amendment that our faith-based schools get protection on this. Put an amendment in.

Mr Kormos: You can't. You put in a time allocation.

Mr Murdoch: You can put an amendment in, though. She can make an amendment and she can vote against it. Show your independence over there; don't listen to your Premier's office and read these speeches they give to you here all the time. Think about these things over there. Think about these things on the Liberal side. You've got to have some independence over there. Don't let them ramrod these things through. This is what they'll do. Your next bill will have ten more things in it and they'll want you to ram them through. They won't want you to think on your own.

Now, remember that the new minister is going to change some of this. Well, let's hope he will, because you people have to make sure that you—you can vote against this or make an amendment. Tell your leader you won't—or you can just sit out. You can walk out, if you like. Show you're independent. Show them you're not happy with this. But don't be afraid. They can't do anything. They already have you sitting over here in the rump, so don't worry, they can't send you anywhere else. Don't let them tell you what to do. Make sure you speak up. Then in caucus I expect you to tell them they're wrong. Tell them to take this out of this bill.

1720

It's a good thing for our faith schools. They need to be able to send their kids where they like. We tried—and it was a just a small thing—to give them support in their community, yet the Liberals come along and say they're going to take it out.

Interjection: Shame.

Mr Murdoch: Shame on them.

Our seniors: Stick up for our seniors. This government doesn't care about seniors. You've only been here not even two weeks and you're already dumping on seniors. You'll find out what you're doing when voting time comes.

So start thinking for yourselves over there, folks. Think for yourselves. Don't let the Premier's office tell you what to do.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge has two minutes to summarize.

Mr Arthurs: I listened with interest to the members opposite in particular. I assure you that my comments come forward as a result of having reviewed the available material. Certainly not all the information is there at this point, but it's not a scripted speech, for those who might be concerned.

I find it interesting that members opposite talk about independence and voting singly as you wish, when they fully well know, as we do, that there is a process here in this Legislature that deals with party solidarity and support of party members for a policy that has been articulated during an election process. That's what we're doing. That's what we're achieving here. That's what this bill is about.

We've heard the calls and comments. We need only look at our long-term-care facilities. We need only look at the recent media to understand what's been happening in Ontario and how we're going to work through improving that for all members, because that's what all members want to do. We need only look at the energy situation in the province to see that we need to address it in a different way, an effective way, to bring it back to a standard that we can have confidence and faith in.

There are issues that members across and others in the public will take exception to, but we set those out clearly during the campaign. We campaigned on them, and we'll act on them at this point in time.

I've enjoyed my opportunity to engage in this debate, to hear the comments from the opposite side and to have a chance to respond to those.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Runciman: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, and I congratulate you on your appointment to the chair. I'm sure you'll do a fine job. I guess I should say "election to the chair," because there was a motion passed by the House.

I want to speak to the legislation, the largest tax hike in Ontario history, but I also want to briefly comment on the programming motion. As you would know, Mr Speaker, this is part of the programming motion, and because the member for Niagara Centre has taken some liberties with respect to his comments, I felt I should take this opportunity to talk a little bit about the programming motion and the efforts to try to improve the operation of this place.

I sat on the government benches for the past eight years, and I think that in many respects this place was

dysfunctional, especially for private members who wanted to believe they were playing an important role in this place. We saw that with private members' legislation, where we couldn't reach an agreement. We couldn't get important pieces of legislation or resolutions through the House because of impediments placed before it and lack of co-operation by the third party.

If you take a look at the report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, which looked at enhancing the role of backbenchers in this place, one of the recommendations contained in that report was that we consider a programming motion, which has been used in Westminster. In fact, we have considered it. We're talking about a four-week session here and using this as a pilot to see if it can work to the benefit of all of us in this place in terms of guaranteeing times for debate, guaranteeing the appropriate times for committees to hear legislation and scheduling witnesses, and in fact so we can focus on the issues that are of importance to all sides of the House. Rather than debating matters like the appointment of the Deputy Speaker for hours and hours, why are we not talking about tax legislation; why are we not talking about energy legislation; why are we not talking about auto insurance?

That's certainly the thrust of this. It is a pilot, and I think it's worth trying because many, many people, not just in this place but at the federal level as well, are disillusioned with government, with politics and with the performance of the people they elect to office. I think we've exacerbated that feeling, that sense of frustration amongst the electorate by the way we've performed in this place over a number of years now. Hopefully, what we're doing in a very small way will move us in the direction of improving the perceptions amongst the public at large.

With respect to the legislation itself, the largest tax hike in Ontario history, this is not new to Liberals. I was around here during the Liberal tenure in government from 1985 to 1990 and this was commonplace with respect to the approach of the Liberal government of the day under David Peterson. There were 32 or 33 tax hikes in that five-year tenure. They came close to doubling spending within a five-year period, if you can believe that. I think when Frank Miller left office, we were spending about \$26 billion in the province. When Peterson left office in 1990, it was very close to the \$51-billion mark. They came close to actually doubling spending. Of course, we knew what happened to the business community. We were seeing jobs leaving the province; we were seeing investment leaving the province.

Another element of this is that we've heard a lot of holier-than-thou rhetoric over the past couple of weeks from the Liberal benches with respect to the deficit. I think all of us understood that there was going to be a significant deficit challenge facing whomever formed the government after October 2. We knew that. They knew that. Their Chair of Management Board indicated that it could be in the \$5-billion range. The Fraser Institute indicated it was \$4.6 billion. We knew there was going to

be a significant challenge. We were prepared to meet that challenge and keep our commitment to balance the budget, as we have done in the past four years successively.

I was reading some notes, cleaning out one of my offices a week ago or so, and I came across a clipping from that 1990 election. It was in the Kingston and the Islands riding, and the incumbent at the time was a fellow by the name of Ken Keyes. Some of you will remember Ken—

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Good man.

Mr Runciman: —a Liberal and still a good guy. But one of the things he was boasting about was the fact that the Liberals that fiscal year had balanced the budget. It was a modest figure, something like \$50 million or \$80 million. One of the primary planks in Mr Keyes's platform in the 1990 election was, "We've balanced the budget." When the books were opened, I guess it was in September when the NDP assumed office, they found out that in reality they were faced with a \$3.6-billion deficit. That's quite a stark contrast from a \$50-million surplus, when the Liberals were saying, going into that election and throughout the election campaign, that they had a balanced budget, in fact a modest surplus. That was a complete fabrication.

Yet we have the Liberals of today standing up with their holier-than-thou attitude and saying, "We didn't know we had a deficit," when there was certainly all kinds of information available that they were facing a deficit challenge. We admitted there was a deficit challenge and we were going to balance the budget, and we had outlined how we would balance that budget. We knew it was with significant challenges but, unlike the Liberals and the NDP, we have a track record of meeting those challenges.

What happened with the NDP when they formed the government: Regrettably, they tried to spend their way out of a deficit situation, to spend their way out of a recession. Of course, we know how that backfired. They doubled the debt in four and a half years in office, and we continue to pay the price for decisions made by the NDP government. But we're focused on this new Liberal government right now, and I don't want to detract from that focus.

1730

The reality is that we had a plan in place to meet the challenges of the deficit. We would have balanced the budget for the fifth consecutive year. There's no question about it.

The reality is the Liberals are using this in an attempt to demonize the former government. Now they're talking about a deficit beyond \$5.6 billion. They're not talking about meaningful measures to address this issue so that they could have a balanced budget.

We talked about a number of asset sales; that's part of it. We talked about the hiring freeze, which we put in place. There were a number of initiatives across the government which we were prepared to take to ensure that we balanced the books.

The Liberals are now talking about something beyond \$5.6 billion, and the reality is they're going to spend into that. That's what the plan is. I know the member from the NDP was talking about public services being short-changed. Well, that may happen, but what I suspect is really going to happen here is that they're going to spend into that. Instead of taking meaningful measures to address a shortfall, they're going to spend into that shortfall. They're going to make sure that they spend every dollar of that and then some, and then use the former government as the bad guy in this. That's the strategy here, folks. That's the strategy.

No meaningful effort to deal with this challenge, no meaningful effort in a responsible way. They're going to spend it up. They're going to spend it up, and at the end of the day they'll say, "Look, we had to deal with a \$6-billion or \$7-billion or \$8-billion deficit because it was left to us. It was at the doorstep."

Well, it wasn't left at the doorstep, unlike what the Liberals did to the NDP with a surprise deficit, which the NDP had to try and cope with, in a wrong-headed way at the end of the day. But that was a surprise to them, it was a surprise to the people in this place, it was a surprise to the voters of the day.

I simply want to remind people that when we start hearing these stories, come next spring when the Treasurer stands in his place to table his first budget and we hear stories, which I predict will be coming forward blaming the former government with respect to this, we have a responsibility on this side, obviously, to continue to press home that this is a bogus deficit.

If the government wants to address this and balance the budget, we believe they can do it. We believe that they can do it in such a way that they could have a surplus. We have outlined a plan, and I'll be glad to send the plan to any member of the Liberal government who is seriously and sincerely interested in looking at ways in which the budget can be balanced and we can have a surplus at the end of the fiscal year. We're already at the end of December without any meaningful action taken by this government, and that is truly shameful.

The Deputy Speaker: Question and comments?

Mr Kormos: I was in that estimates committee in June 2003, just a few months ago. There's Janet Ecker; she's got the entourage, she's got the high-priced help surrounding her. There's Gerry Phillips; he's the Liberal finance critic. There's Howard Hampton, bang on, and Howard Hampton is saying, "But, Ms Ecker, you've got a \$5-billion deficit," and Gerry Phillips is saying, "But, Ms Ecker, we're at risk here to the tune of five billion."

And Ms Ecker is saying, "Both of you are wrong; there's no deficit." Zip, none, zero, not a penny, not a nickel, not a dime of deficit. Jerry Phillips is saying, "Yes, there is. There's a good five billion." Howard Hampton says, "At least five, maybe 5.6." And Ms Ecker says, "Not a penny in deficit." I was there.

Now, I've got a whole lot of time for the member from Leeds-Grenville. I remember him when he was young, 15 years ago. I was younger too, and I've got a lot of time

for him. When he speaks, by goodness, I listen, just like I listened today. I listened well enough to know that I can say, "Bob, you're wrong."

Ms Ecker insisted there was no deficit. Jerry Phillips insisted there was. The interesting thing is, Ms Ecker now, at least through her good friend and intimate colleague Mr Runciman, is saying, "There is a deficit," and Jerry Phillips is saying, "But back then, there wasn't." So you see, the whole world's been turned upside down. It's like that Alice in Wonderland stuff. You know, the Mad Hatter and those toxic fumes from hat-making?

All I know is, Ms Ecker now says, according to Mr Runciman, there was a deficit, when back then she said there wasn't, and Mr Phillips, for the Liberals, said back then there is a deficit and now he's saying we're only at risk.

Mr Runciman, if you really wanted to debate Bill 2, why did you move time allocation? Why did you support the time allocation bill? But two or three members of your caucus are going to be able to speak to this. You've destroyed your own caucus mates' right and ability to speak to this bill by supporting time allocation, Bob.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's a pleasure to join the debate again. We could pretend we don't have a deficit. It seems to me that some members of this House are asking us to do that. But the fact is that we did inherit a deficit. It's a deficit that we do have to deal with. It's a \$5.6-billion projected deficit. I suppose we could do nothing, as some people would ask us to, and that deficit would grow to \$7.7 billion next year and nearly \$8.6 billion in 2007.

We are prepared to act on this. We're taking a responsible approach to this. I read a lot about it in the media. But I'll tell you, when I talk to ordinary people on the streets about the way we're handling this problem, they agree that this is the way they would tackle the very same problem in their own families, in their own homes and in their own businesses.

We rescinded the private school tax credit. I find that's an extremely popular move in my community. We're also rescinding the seniors' education property tax credit. Not a peep from a single constituent. People in my riding are saying, "Deal with this in a responsible way; deal with this in a way that I would deal with it at home." You pay off your debts, you pay your bills on time, you get your financial house in order and then you start to do the things you promised you would do or the things you're obligated to do. I think this is a responsible approach. It includes a tobacco tax that has increased revenues for the government and provides the added advantage of keeping young people away from tobacco products. I think it's the way to go.

Mr Hudak: I enjoyed the comments of the member from Leeds-Grenville, my colleague and friend from Niagara Centre and the new member from Oakville. There are three points of view on this. I tend to agree that there's more wisdom in the member for Leeds-Grenville's views on this particular topic. We probably

aren't going to solve it today, but I can tell you one thing: I'm going to take issue with the member from Oakville's view about what they're saying on the streets of Oakville.

Interjection.

Mr Hudak: That very well may be. Maybe on the way back to beautiful Niagara, I'll stop in Oakville and ask that same question. I think that taxpayers aren't going for this notion that you pay a high-priced consultant to give a worst-possible scenario that if you get no revenue from the federal government, if the economy goes into recession, if you don't make one penny of savings, you get this manufactured \$5.6-billion deficit.

Do you know what the taxpayers are saying? They're saying, "That dog don't hunt. Get down to work. Roll up your sleeves. Start making some tough decisions." They're going to make this \$5.6-billion deficit self-fulfilling or worse, because they're going to shovel all kinds of spending under this umbrella, this manufactured deficit, and not make a single tough decision to try to control spending and to try to find a dime anywhere.

Mr Speaker, I think you know that this gang came into office approximately halfway through the fiscal year. All I've seen to date is whining and moaning—not one difficult decision from this Premier of the province. In fact, they're still in campaign mode. This is a triumph of politics over fiscal responsibility. All you want to do is make the last government look bad. You're not interested in balancing the books. You're not interested in finding a dime of savings. You're not interested in lowering taxes and trying to spur the economy. All you want to do is score cheap political points and not make any tough decisions.

Based on what I've seen in question period as well, there's no doubt. Taxpayers across Ontario, hold on to your pocketbooks. One big Liberal tax hike is on its way, maybe just in time for Christmas.

Ms Martel: It's so good to see the real Bob Runciman back. It's been a while since we've had a chance to really hear what he's had to say, because you see, Speaker, when he was in government he had to be a little more moderate—I don't mean philosophical—in terms of his behaviour. He had to be a little more even-tempered. Now that he's been able to throw off the handlers, because they're not in government any more, it's great to have the real one back. I look forward to more speeches by Mr Runciman.

1740

Look, I don't have the comments that were made by Madame Ecker—I wish I did—from that estimate committee. It would be great to read into the record her comments regarding the fact that, "Oh, no, there was no deficit whatsoever; there's not going to be a problem at all." But my colleague from Niagara Centre was there, so you know exactly what she said.

Mr Kormos: Your husband was there too.

Ms Martel: Yes, my husband was there too; that's right. But you're the one who just made the comment.

Let me tell you what Gerry Phillips said, because it is a little bit difficult to take this feigned surprise on the part

of the Liberals: "My God, we didn't know we had that kind of a deficit. It was such a surprise to us."

The finance critic, a long-time member of this Legislature—I suppose he's down there on behalf of his leader. He should be. That's how you get to be critic, especially for finance, an important critic portfolio. He was down there on June 4 and he said this to Madame Ecker: "I therefore take it that there is a \$5-billion risk in the budget. That is a fact, with the \$2.2-billion asset sales that you've refused to identify." And he goes on. So he knew very well that there was a \$5-billion deficit. So did his colleague Monte Kwinter, who told the Canadian Press on August 13 that there was a deficit as high as \$5 billion. Don't be surprised. You guys knew. Don't pretend now.

The Deputy Speaker: The member from Leeds-Grenville has two minutes in summary.

Mr Runciman: I thank the members for their responses.

There are a couple of things I want to talk about. I know we talked about the finance committee hearings and Mr Hampton explaining that there was going to be a significant deficit. You know, the reality is that if Ms Ecker responded—and I haven't seen Hansard—in my view, what she was saying was that there would not be a deficit at the end of the fiscal year. There would not have been a deficit at the end of the fiscal year if we had formed the government. We're committed to balancing the books, and we had a plan to balance the books.

After the SARS impact on Ontario, we had implemented initial changes in, I think, July and August to try and cope with what we knew were going to be increasing pressures. So that's part of the reality. We would have balanced the budget, and Ms Ecker knew that we were committed to doing that just as we had in the four previous fiscal years.

One of the areas I'm really concerned about—it's good to see the Minister of Economic Development in here. He was asked a question a couple of weeks ago about the impact with respect to some of the tax changes incorporated in this legislation. His defence was that we're still going to be very competitive.

I think it's Jack Mintz who released a paper recently showing that when you take all of the tax burdens into consideration, we are going to be the least competitive with respect to, I think, five of the jurisdictions that we have to effectively compete with. That should be a serious concern to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, the impact that this is going to have on small businesses. We know that it's going to be serious.

The reality is, of course, that they're hoping that it won't. They're hoping that if any impact does occur, it's not going to show up and have a real impact until four to five years down the road. But I think we're going to see it sooner than that, and it's going to be very damaging to the future of this province.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): Speaker, my honourable colleagues in the House, there are a number

of aspects I'd like to touch upon with regard to this financial bill, Bill 2.

First of all I think I'd like to let it be known that this is really the financial plank in the government's plan to lay the foundation for excellence in education, improving our health care system, building a stronger community and laying the foundation for the future prosperity of Ontario.

I would, with your permission and indulgence, like to just address my remarks to some of the foregoing commentary, particularly to some of the comments made by the MPP from Leeds-Grenville. He said that he's disappointed with how this place has been run, and I would like to let it be known officially for the record that we share that disappointment. That is why we in the Liberal Party, in the Liberal government under the new Premier of Ontario, hope and seek to run this place in a more efficient, more democratic way to better address the needs of Ontarians.

I would also like to say that the MPP for Leeds-Grenville—perhaps his mind is a bit fuzzy. I understand that he's trying to acquire a facility in our second official language, French, for a possible future job application that he may be having. At one point he admitted that there was a budget deficit, and then in the very concluding statement said that there was a bogus deficit. I would very strongly suggest that our honourable colleagues in the Tory party straighten out their perspective on whether there is or is not a deficit and whether they will continue to deny its existence. I suspect that this is part of the Enron economics or, if I may coin a new phrase, "Eves-nomics," in the sense that they seem to be misrepresenting the facts, especially when there has been a very clear attestation to the fact that there's a deep and very huge budget deficit, \$5.6 billion, as has been mentioned.

I would also like to commend the honourable MPP for Niagara Centre for his reference to Lewis Carroll and Alice in Wonderland. I think that he himself seems to be playing the role of Alice, and seems to be undergoing a kind of mock bewilderment and having some perceptual difficulties, as well as using his own vocabulary to mean whatever it means.

I'm also honoured to hear at least one member of the Tory party, the MPP for Erie-Lincoln, Tim Hudak, actually speak in this chamber on record, favouring and speaking pro the consultants, which the Tory party actually raised. I would like it to be known to the people of Ontario that that administration, the previous government actually spent something on the order of \$600 million of Ontario taxpayers' money for their friends and colleagues in various public relations houses and various major consultancies. I would like to put them on notice that that too is going to be done away with, and we're very shortly considering removing the fact that we will be spending, as the Tory Party did in the previous administration, \$400 million on partisan advertising.

There are a number of planks with regard to Bill 2. I would like to speak very specifically, as a physician and also as the representative of the great riding of Etobicoke North, to something that I deal with on a daily basis; that

is, the disease and the pathology and the suffering that accrue to Ontarians and Canadians broadly with regard to tobacco and the inhalation of various tars, nicotine and so on. A tragedy that really is befalling Ontario youth is the fact that ever-increasing numbers of our young people seem to be taking up regular smoking habits in greater and greater frequency. I feel that the rise of the tobacco tax will be a very excellent move to actually address this. We know, for example, that young people may not have the elasticity, to use the economic term, with regard to absorbing that particular type of price increase. As well, to mention the actual numbers that are involved, we're looking at raising something on the order of \$700 million by raising the tobacco tax by \$2.50 per carton of 200 cigarettes.

Something that I can speak to very directly, again as a physician, and someone who deals with a lot of respiratory medicine, is that tobacco, unfortunately for doctors, is considered a universal evil. It's tied to everything, such as peripheral vascular disease, meaning cutting off circulation to the legs; of course lungs diseases—aggravation of asthma, both first- and second-hand. Unfortunately, I say to my colleagues in this chamber, tobacco smoke still accounts for something on the order of 20,000 new cases of lung cancer diagnosed per year. Our own Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care advises me that tobacco is directly tied to approximately \$1 billion in hard costs annually in Ontario alone. To quote from our own election platform of the Liberal Party, "Nothing prevents people from smoking better than increasing the costs of cigarettes. Ontario's cigarettes are still cheaper than almost every other province. We will make cigarettes more expensive to prevent kids"—and others—"from lighting up."

I would like to say that there's been a great deal of mention of supposed tax increases. This has a specific

exemption from the Taxpayer Protection Act legislation commitment that our then-leader, and now Premier, Dalton McGuinty signed.

Having said that, I would like to also mention for the House, for the chamber and for the people of Ontario that our move to increase the tobacco tax actually brings it in line with the general pricing of tobacco across Canada, with the national average. It's really just a matter of achieving price parity.

There are a number of aspects that I've attempted to address: first of all, some of the fuzzy economics, the fuzzy thinking that seems to be going on from the Tory party; as well, some commentary about the continued theatrics—I've now dubbed the MPP from Niagara Centre as the official Alice in Wonderland, as he began the reference to Lewis Carroll. I advise him to maybe check the perceptual difficulties that he, like Alice, seems to be suffering from.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 10 minutes to 6, pursuant to the order of the House dated December 4, 2003, I'm now required to put the question.

Mr Sorbara has moved second reading of Bill 2, An Act respecting fiscal responsibility.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 4, 2003, this bill stands referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

It being near 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1751.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon / L'hon John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires municipales, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
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Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
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Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Don Valley East / -Est	Caplan, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy House Leader / ministre du Renouveau de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint	London North Centre / London Centre-Nord	Matthews, Deborah (L)
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Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Mike (L)	Mississauga Centre / -Centre	Takhar, Hon / L'hon Harinder S. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon / L'hon Steve (L) Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation	Mississauga East / -Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga South / -Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga West / -Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Cansfield, Donna H. (L)	Nepean-Carleton	Baird, John R. (PC)
Etobicoke North / -Nord	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Niagara Centre / -Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Brotten, Laurel C. (L)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nipissing	Smith, Monique (L)
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)	Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)	Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)
		Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)
		Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)
		Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Watson, Hon / L'hon Jim (L) Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Ottawa-Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Meilleur, Hon / L'hon Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Hon / L'hon Gerard (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon / L'hon George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Toronto-Danforth	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Sorbara, Hon / L'hon Greg (L) Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Jim (PC)
Sault Ste Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Scarborough East / -Est	Chambers, Hon / L'hon Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités	Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight (L) Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Hon / L'hon Gerry (L) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement	York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L) Speaker / Président	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Simcoe North / -Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St Catharines	Bradley, Hon / L'hon James J. (L) Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs		
St Paul's	Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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**

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