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des débats
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Thursday 11 December 2003

Jeudi 11 décembre 2003

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 11 December 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 11 décembre 2003

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

DEBT RETIREMENT PLAN

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I move that in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should commit itself to a 25-year debt retirement plan, articulating five-year interim targets, such that the province of Ontario is free from its net debt by the fiscal year 2029-30.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Arnott has moved private member's notice of motion number 1. Pursuant to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes for his presentation.

Mr Arnott: "We in Wellington understand the economic value of hard work and the social value of personal responsibility. From this understanding stems a serious concern when our government refuses to live within its means, when our government grows until it begins to inhibit overall economic growth, when even excessive taxation does not prevent the expansion of government debt."

The words I just quoted are as relevant today as when I first delivered them during my maiden speech in the Legislature 13 years ago this very month. We all remember those days. That was back when the New Democratic Party of Ontario governed with a huge majority in this House, as they embarked upon five years of disastrous fiscal policy, bringing the province to the brink of bankruptcy.

A great deal has changed in 13 years. Financial irresponsibility was replaced in 1995 with financial prudence. Under successive Conservative governments, there were four balanced budgets in a row, the greatest record of sustained fiscal discipline in Ontario since World War I. Today, with the results of the October election still reverberating through this House, we seem to be starting again down the slippery slope of financial recklessness under this new Liberal government.

My riding has changed since 1990. Since the election of 1999, I've been honoured to say, "we in Waterloo-Wellington," when I advocate for the interests of my constituents and the communities I'm so privileged to represent. In the recent provincial election, I made clear

to my constituents that paying down the provincial debt should be made a priority and that I would continue to advocate in favour of a concrete long-term plan to make Ontario debt-free.

This is the basis for my resolution today, stating, "that in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should commit itself to a 25-year debt retirement plan." This resolution represents not only the firm beliefs held by many in Waterloo-Wellington but throughout the entire province. Those beliefs include the need to pay what is due and make a small but necessary sacrifice today, to improve the lives of our children and grandchildren in the future, leaving them with a higher standard of living and even more opportunities than we enjoy today. To do otherwise would be to pass an overwhelming financial burden on to the next generation, and to do so is simply unacceptable to me.

The need to commit to a concrete plan of action to eliminate the debt is sound fiscal policy and makes good economic sense to most people. It is a view that is shared by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, an organization that, as we know, exists to advocate on behalf of taxpayers. In a letter endorsing my resolution, the Ontario director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, John Williamson, has outlined the problem in terms of how our provincial debt, now estimated to be more than \$118 billion, and the interest costs on that debt, tie the hands of government in terms of keeping taxes at the right level and paying for social programs.

He wrote: "While there are many short-term spending pressures on government, lawmakers should consider this: The province will spend \$8.6 billion this year on interest payments to service the accumulated debt. If there was no provincial debt and no interest to pay on it, provincial income tax could be reduced by 44%—without a corresponding reduction in program spending. Alternatively, the health care budget could be increased by 30%. Ontario's high debt load has resulted in higher taxes and restricted program spending options." He also wrote: "This motion is an important initiative and deserves the support of all members of provincial Parliament."

The Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce has also supported making debt retirement a higher priority. Chamber president Todd Letts has written the following in support of my initiative: "I commend you on your intention to introduce a private member's resolution calling for the government to balance their budget in this current fiscal year and enact a 25-year

plan to retire the debt beginning with the coming fiscal year.”

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, a voice for small business, surveyed their membership recently and found that in Ontario there was a whopping 84% in favour of a new, strong provincial debt repayment target.

Support for this idea continues to grow, because it makes good economic sense and is based on proven fiscal principles that are being applied in other Canadian jurisdictions that have already enacted debt retirement plans. For example, in the province of Alberta, which of course is governed by the Progressive Conservatives, they committed to such a plan in 1995 and they have achieved a 78% reduction in their accumulated debt over a seven-year period. That's a reduction from about \$21 billion in 1994-95 to \$4.7 billion last fiscal year. Alberta has legislated a specific debt reduction program, outlined in their Fiscal Responsibility Act, and from what I understand they're approximately 10 years ahead of schedule.

The province of Manitoba, currently governed by the NDP, has a long-term plan to pay off their debt by 2040. In 2003 they announced a fourth consecutive payment of \$96 million against their debt and pension liabilities, and as of 2002 they were four years ahead of their schedule.

So we see that the idea of debt retirement is supported across the political spectrum. We have Conservative Alberta and NDP Manitoba, both with governments that are proceeding with long-term debt retirement plans, paying down their debts.

I look forward to hearing presentations from both sides of the House from members of all three parties, but I hope to address in advance some of the issues members might wish to raise in this morning's debate. We might hear talk of a Liberal deficit this year in Ontario, and some might say we can't look at paying down the debt because there is a belief, however inaccurate, that the current government inherited a considerable deficit. My belief is that the Liberal government can and should balance their budget this year. The member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey has offered a road map on how they can do it. Then, as spelled out in this resolution, they should enact a 25-year plan to retire the debt starting next fiscal year. I reiterate: The Conservative government balanced the budget four years in a row, from 1999 to 2003.

Despite the outcome of this election, not once have I heard a constituent tell me that it's time to revert to the days of uncontrolled spending, tax hikes and deficits that were the order of the day in the 1980s and early 1990s. Voters today will not tolerate the cynical and all-too-familiar gamesmanship of a new government saying they are shocked and appalled at the books they are responsible to manage in the public interest.

When it comes to the Liberals' characterization of the state of Ontario's finances, there appears to be far more in the way of political strategy than substance. I say that the government has a deliberate political strategy to

inflate and exaggerate the size of the deficit to try to dampen expectations on their spending promises and leave the back door open so they can tax and spend like there's no tomorrow. They are trying to create a crisis. What they need to do, and what I think Ontarians expect them to do, is to demonstrate leadership, show that they have a vision for the future, balance the budget, and listen to the people of Ontario who are concerned about how much debt they are passing on and how expensive and counterproductive the interest payments are. If they do, and if they care about fiscal prudence, they will wholeheartedly commit to getting rid of that debt in our lifetime.

1010

There are perhaps others who would try to point the finger back and claim that the previous government could have done more to pay off the debt. I want to address that point as well.

Some members will recall my previous resolution debated here October 9, 1997, calling upon the previous government to pay down the debt in 25 years with five-year interim targets. That resolution passed with support from both sides of the House. In 1999 the Harris government committed in the blueprint election platform to pay down \$2 billion of provincial debt. That goal was increased to \$5 billion in our first budget of our second majority government. The government announced it would achieve that target earlier this year. In the fall election the Conservative Party committed to paying down \$5 billion over five years, if re-elected. Since the last time the House debated this initiative, it's fair to say that there has been considerable action taken on the debt.

The next step is to fully recognize that we need to do the same thing that families do. Many achieve home ownership, burning their mortgages, by paying off the interest and principal in about 25 years or sooner if their budget permits. Others could try to assert that a 25-year plan is too ambitious, too expensive. To that I would simply say, if we don't establish a goal, we'll never solve the problem. It is far better to recognize the problem, set a goal and try to achieve it, than to ignore and just hope that somehow it will go away.

There may be some who don't care if we ever pay down the debt and there may be some who try to muddy the waters with talk about the debt being OK because our economy will grow anyway and the debt-to-GDP ratio will diminish or perhaps stay the same. To that call to inaction, I say nonsense. We should never be spending something like \$8 billion to \$9 billion in interest payments on the debt. The failure to commit to a debt retirement plan by any government of any political stripe simply puts the province at a risk of a higher and more expensive debt down the road.

This problem was created by governments of all stripes. I think all MPPs should become part of the solution by supporting the measures spelled out in my resolution and committing to make Ontario debt-free. I look forward to the debate this morning.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nickel Belt has five minutes.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I listened with great interest to the comments made by the member from Waterloo-Wellington, and I've got to tell him that the people in my riding—when we talk about a financial burden being passed down to kids—are far more concerned about the after-effects and the consequences of your government's fiscal policy, which included irresponsible tax cuts, deficit reduction measures which were extreme and a downloading on to municipalities and the resulting social burden that has now been passed down to our kids, which our kids are going to feel for years and years. That's what people in my riding are worried about—the impacts of your policies when you were in government and the social deficit that my kids and everybody else's kids and the kids to come in future generations now have to deal with.

Let me give you some examples of that social deficit. We have 37,000 kids in Ontario who need special education in our public school system, thanks to the cuts to education that were made by your government. How do you explain that those kids are falling further and further behind? If they don't get the remedial help that they need, they are going to be dropping out of school, they are going to be in trouble with the law, and they'll never be able to fully contribute to Ontario economic life. That's part of your fiscal policy. Or the 12,000 kids who are on a waiting list now for children's mental health services, because of your fiscal policy which was more interested in tax cuts and cutting social programs to finance those tax cuts for the rich and famous. Those of us who were at the presentation this week by Susan Hess heard how devastating, how detrimental that has been for so many Ontario families and is going to continue to be, because now we need to try to find that money to reinvest.

Look at the cuts that were made to home care by the Conservative government. In our part of the world, we've had many, many restrictions by the Conservative-appointed CCAC board which has left hundreds of elderly and the disabled having no choice but to go into long-term-care facilities. These are seniors who, with a little bit of support at home, with homemaking services, laundry and home care, could be able to remain in their own homes with dignity. But because of the cuts that the Conservatives made with respect to their fiscal policy on home care, they're being forced into long-term-care facilities. And we all read the stories that were highlighted last week about how terrible so many of those facilities are in terms of the care, or lack of care, that they're providing to seniors. That goes back to this government's fiscal policy.

Look at the cuts that were made to high-quality, regulated child care by this government: \$43 less per child for regulated space than when we were the government in 1995. And what does that mean? Ontario parents are now paying the highest cost for regulated child care anywhere in Canada. We also know that 70% of Ontario women who work outside the home and have kids under the age of 12, only 8% of those can actually

access high-quality child care, again, because of the fiscal policies of the former government.

For example, look at the fact that ODSP payments have been frozen for eight years because this government was more interested in tax cuts and dealing with the deficit than it was in ensuring that some of the most vulnerable Ontarians, disabled Ontarians, could actually have an adequate standard of living. They're now living below the poverty line in the province. Never mind the terrible cuts that were made to people living on social assistance: a 22% cut in the first year of this government's mandate. Those people have been frozen ever since. We affected 400,000 kids by that cut.

Then we look at the mess at the Family Responsibility Office, done again because this government was more interested in finding money for its tax cuts and dealing with a deficit overnight than they were ever interested in ensuring that they met their obligation to ensure that women and children received the support payments that they are legally entitled to. We've got \$1.3 billion now owing to women and children, thanks to the mess that the Conservative government made at the Family Responsibility Office.

I say to the member, you want to talk about a burden? The burden results from the social deficit inflicted on the province by your government over eight years. We'll have lots of kids who will pay a long time for that social deficit. That's the shame of it. That's the burden that I'm much more worried about addressing.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I join the debate on the motion brought forward by the member for Waterloo-Wellington. It's a well-meaning motion. It would deserve some wonderful attention, because I think it's the intent of every member of the House to have a government that doesn't run into any debt or deficit. As well-meaning as it is, we have seen the action of the past government, and if we are in a situation today where either programs will have to be deferred, or cut, if you will, cut, it's because of the total mismanagement of the former government. It has left the people of Ontario some \$6 billion in debt, or we should say, unbalanced budget, let alone the debt, because in the last eight years we have seen some \$20 million to \$24 million added on to Ontario's total debt. Of course we will be paying that. If it's not us, on top of what they have left us, our kids will be paying for that.

1020

As the government, we are repeating today what our leader was saying during the election. It's refreshing to hear the member for Waterloo-Wellington repeating the exact same phrase that Dalton McGuinty has been saying in the House as Premier—and while he was campaigning—that the government must live within its means. I know that the member understands that and I know he's well-meaning, but unfortunately he was part of a government and leadership that absolutely neglected what was in the best interests of the people of Ontario. Does it make sense to have a balanced budget when year after year we have to sell Ontario's interests to balance the books? I don't think so. With just one sale alone of those

assets, and I'm speaking now of the 407, our kids will have to pay for the total mismanagement of the government. Can you believe that? The 407—

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Come on, Mario. That's not so.

Mr Sergio: Well, you tell me, my friends. I respect your views, but 99 years—the sale of the 407. Don't tell me otherwise, because you know it and we know it, and the people of Ontario know it: We will be paying for your total mismanagement. A 99-year lease—unheard of. I wonder what the heck they would have sold next to balance the books. They couldn't have done it even with selling other assets.

Guys, give me a break. We are not here to play politics when it touches the lives of the people of Ontario. I think the intent is well-meant that we should have in 25 years—I would say we should have Ontario free of debt today, let alone in 2029 and 2030. I think the people of Ontario deserve that, but we are paying now. If you look at your hydro bills, what do you pay? We are paying our share of \$38 billion. Who is paying for that? Why are we paying for that?

I think Dalton McGuinty is right on track when he says that we will have to live within our means, and now, to correct some of the previous government's mistakes, we will have to take action. He's doing well. He's speaking the people's language. He's doing what the people told him to do. And if we cannot live within our means, it means we are neglectful and we are not doing what the people told us to do.

Let's not find excuses. Even the members from the other side are well-intentioned and well-meaning members, but they have to face the reality today. We are facing that reality for you and for the rest of the people of Ontario, and we will take the necessary action to correct some of those horrendous mistakes, the chaos and misunderstanding you have created among the people of Ontario, and very true today.

I'll pass the torch, if you will, for the next five minutes to other members of the House because I think they want to express their views as well.

The Deputy Speaker: It's in rotation, so the member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'm very pleased to join this debate today. I very strongly support the resolution that has been put forward by the member from Waterloo-Wellington. He is putting forward the concept of finally tackling the provincial debt with a very concrete 25-year plan to make this province totally debt-free. I support this. I have always supported this, unlike some of the people who may be speaking today, who did support it at one time and are not prepared to support it today.

I think anyone can agree that between 1985 and 1995 we went through a period of tax-and-spend. When our government was elected, we made a commitment that we would balance the budget and we would tackle the debt. I'm very pleased to say we have done both. We were very successful in balancing the budget four times in a

row between 1999 to 2003, which was unheard of in this province since World War I. I'm also pleased to say that we started paying down the debt. However, I think this motion today is particularly important because I fear for the future of our children and our grandchildren as I see the new Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty embarking on a path of tax-and-spend, which will only increase the debt and will take us back into a position of deficit.

At the present time we know that the Liberal government has done everything they possibly can in order to exaggerate and create a bogus deficit. They are only doing this because they are trying to make excuses for the fact that they know they cannot deliver on their promises. We knew they couldn't deliver on their promises. As a former Minister of Education, when a commitment was made to cap class size at 20, I knew that it was going to cost \$1 billion to do so. Yet they continue to make promises. However, I've noticed they're not talking about it.

They're also making excuses about other promises which we don't hear about any more. They talked about 8,000 more nurses; they talked about more hospital beds; they talked about more doctors. The list goes on and on and on. So, recognizing that they couldn't deliver on their promises, and continuing to break their promises day after day after day, whether it's on the moraine, housing, P3, hydro or whether it's auto insurance, they now continue to do everything they can to create this bogus deficit.

It's a deficit that we faced as well, in 1995. But I can tell you, our team, our cabinet, under the leadership of our finance minister, Mr Eves, got to work and started reducing that deficit, and as I say, we were able to balance the budget in 1999. It took a lot of determination; it took a lot of grit. There were difficult decisions that needed to be made, but I am not prepared to see my children and my grandchildren have a situation where we have even more debt in the province of Ontario.

My colleague is well supported in his resolution by groups such as the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and of course the chamber of commerce. All of these groups recognize the need for fiscal prudence. If we take a look at the letter that Mr Arnott received from Mr Williamson, he says that retiring this debt is extremely important. He says, "Regrettably, many politicians"—I think he's now thinking about the Liberal government; I think he rues the day that he supported them—"prefer to tax and spend without giving much thought to ensuring the debt is not passed on to the next generation of taxpayers."

In his letter he also says that this year we're going to be spending \$8.6 billion on interest payments. He says—and this is what's so important and this is why I would encourage the Liberal members to seriously consider this resolution—if we didn't have a debt, a debt that we started to pay down, and if we didn't have the interest, we could actually reduce the provincial income tax by 44%. He also says that the health care budget could be increased by 30%.

Our debt today is creating higher taxes; it is restricting our program spending. If you had this money available, you could actually move forward with your broken promises of 8,000 more nurses and doctors and hospital beds. The amount of money that we're spending in interest on the debt today—if it is, as Mr Williamson says, \$8.6 billion—is about the amount of that we give to our hospitals. Think of it: We could be giving more money to hospitals; we could be giving more money to children's aid; we could be giving more money to schools. The list goes on and on and on.

So I very strongly support the resolution that has been put forward by the Waterloo-Wellington MPP, Ted Arnott. I hope that members of all sides will support this resolution and that they will seriously consider the impact it's going to have on their children and their grandchildren if we don't take action. I hope they will remember that this is a problem that was created by all governments of all stripes. It wasn't just Liberals or NDP or Conservatives. We, collectively, have created this problem, and I believe it's very important today that we give serious consideration that we do what Alberta has done under a Conservative government, do what Manitoba has done under an NDP government, and move this recommendation for this debt retirement plan. I would hope for the support of everyone in this House.

1030

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay has up to five minutes.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My good friend Mr Arnott and I were having a chat sometime earlier this fall, and he said to me, "Gilles, I really am a right winger. Quite frankly, I'm extremely right-wing." I've always seen Mr Arnott as a bit of a moderate, but I really see by way of this motion that he means what he says. If I look back to the motions this particular member has brought before this House, they've been on a bit of a right-wing edge. For example, in the last Parliament, we dealt with the double-hatter bill, where he basically wanted to change the current system to allow professional firefighters to volunteer in volunteer fire departments and break collective agreements of firefighters in this province. Now he brings forward a bill where he says, "I want to put in place, by way of a motion, a law that would basically say the government has a debt retirement plan of 25 years."

Well, the first thing I've got to say to my good friend Mr Arnott is, where were you for the last eight years? These guys were the government, right? Aren't they the guys who were the government of the province of Ontario from 1995 to 2003, the fiscal managers, as they tried to make themselves out to be? The Conservatives came to government and said, "We're going to get things in order. We're going to bring things under control. We're great fiscal managers."

My first point is, why did this not show up in the last eight years? The member had an opportunity, while he was in government, to whisper in the ear of the Premier and of the cabinet that such an idea was a good one. And

if it was a good idea for the Tories, I think they would have done it. So I just find it a little bit interesting that he brings this forward after the Conservatives were defeated, that he all of a sudden now wants to bring forward a motion that says they want to put together a debt retirement scheme. When you guys were the government, you certainly didn't have one. You obviously didn't want to put one in place, because you didn't adopt this idea when you were the government. For you to come forward now and ask this Parliament to do this, when you're in opposition—I just find it a little bit interesting.

I don't want to repeat everything my friend from Nickel Belt, Shelley Martel, said, but I want to echo and say ditto to everything she said. The Tory government, while they were in place from 1995 to 2003, quite frankly created a social deficit in this province that we're still trying to recover from. For example, take a look at the people on disability pensions in this province. They have not had an increase since the Tories came to government in 1995. People have been falling farther and farther behind, all because that government, the Conservative government, wanted to pass on tax cuts to the wealthiest people in this province. I think that was wrong. I think it was mean-spirited. I think we were targeting the wrong people when it came to assistance. A person like me, who makes \$85,000 or \$90,000 a year, hardly needs a tax cut and a few extra bucks in my pocket compared to somebody who's on a disability pension through no fault of their own, by virtue of being ill and not being able to work having to live in poverty. I say that's one heck of a social deficit.

I look at the kids in our school system. My good friend Madame Martel again raised yesterday in this House the whole issue of children with autism and the money that needs to be invested to make sure that kids after six years of age are able to get the kind of services they need.

I look at kids in schools in my riding—I'm sure you have them in all of yours—who have special needs. A particular child I'm dealing with now, in grade 4, has severe problems, severe behavioural problems, and it has got to the point where the school board has had to evict the child from the school. Why? Because they don't have the money to be able to deal with that child. I'm sure the school board doesn't do this lightly and they don't want to do it just to be mean to the child, but the child is very hard to deal with and they have no resources to deal with that child while the child is in the classroom.

So I say to the member, Mr Arnott, you'd have been better off trying to make sure we reinforce the services that are important to people in this province. Once you've got that in place, then maybe we can talk about your motion.

I come back to my first point: You had an opportunity to do this when you were in government, and you didn't do it; instead what you've done is created a social deficit in this province that we're still trying to dig ourselves out from under.

My last point, in the last few seconds I have, is—and I know Liberals will get up and say, "That's why we're in

a mess. The Tories left us a big surprise”—that there were no surprises. We all knew, going into the last election, that there would be at least a \$5-billion deficit. Mr Phillips, who sat on the estimates committee with me last spring, repeated over and over again to Minister Ecker, the Minister of Finance of the day, “You’re going to have at least a \$5-billion deficit, if not more.” We knew that, so don’t get up in this House this morning and say, “Surprise, we’ve got a deficit,” because it was no surprise. It might have been in your minds, but it wasn’t in anybody else’s.

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): It is my pleasure to rise and add my comments on this motion, “That ... the government of Ontario should commit itself to a 25-year debt retirement plan, articulating five-year interim targets, such that the province of Ontario is free from ... debt by the fiscal year 2029-30.”

I’d like to thank the member for Waterloo-Wellington for bringing this item forward. It provides an opportunity for this Liberal government to address in this House once again the central issue facing this government and facing the people of Ontario.

On the surface it certainly seems like a good idea. I don’t think you could show me a politician, I don’t think you could show me a political party—certainly I don’t think we’ll find one in this House—that doesn’t think debt retirement is a good idea. We all know too well how debt and the interest on that debt can compromise our ability to provide a level of service and the kinds of services to the people of Ontario—services they want and services they expect.

But like most things that are done in this House, it is a question of timing. We all know that at this time the Liberal government of Ontario has a \$5.6-billion deficit, and that’s a whole bunch of reasons why this item is not a good idea at this time. We all understand how the fiscal mismanagement that has occurred here in recent times has curtailed the ability of this government to move forward in the manner it would like.

I’m sure the irony of this item is not lost on anyone. Mr Peters has stated clearly that we have a \$5.6-billion problem that occurred under the watch of the previous Tory government. I think it bears repeating that this is not my number, it’s not a Liberal number, it’s not a number produced by any ministry under the Liberal government; this is a number produced by the former Provincial Auditor of Ontario.

Let’s talk about debt for a little while; not the \$5.6-billion deficit but the debt left by the previous Tory government. At a time when, by most accounts, the economy of Ontario was performing relatively well—and of course the provincial treasury is the beneficiary of that—they still found it necessary to sell off billions of dollars of government assets, and of course the government of Ontario would be the beneficiary of that. Under these circumstances, they still managed to add over \$20 billion to the total provincial debt.

We have talked a lot about the deficit in this chamber, but I’m not sure how many people in the province are

aware that \$20 billion or more has been added to the total debt by the former Tory government, which the taxpayers of the province are now responsible for, and during tenure how the interest expense on that debt has further compromised our ability to provide services to the people of this province. As all of us here know, that \$20 billion in debt does not even begin to include what has happened under the watch of the former Tory government as it relates to hydro and the accumulation of the debt there. We all know there’s only one taxpayer, and certainly we all understand that that responsibility lies with that taxpayer. So I think we have to ask ourselves why a member of the former Tory government would bring this item forward at this time.

You know, a lot of people who would consistently support a Tory candidate would likely do so because they believe Conservatives could fiscally manage this province better than any other party. But now we know that is not so, not just because we found out about a \$5.6-billion deficit—independently provided—but because we also know that during approximately eight years of Tory government they added \$20 billion or more to the debt, and annual interest payments in the multi-millions.

Maybe that’s our answer. Maybe that’s why this item has been brought forward at this time. Perhaps it’s an attempt to begin rebuilding an image of good fiscal management. Perhaps it’s an attempt to go public and beat their chests and say Liberals won’t support or aren’t in favour of debt retirement. I say to the honourable member opposite: Good try, but it’s too late; the bluff’s been called, and the game is up.

1040

Just yesterday, we had a vote looking for a referendum on Bill 2. We just had one. It happened on October 2 and lasted 30 days. We call it an election. The people of Ontario were listening, they were paying attention, and this time they called the bluff. The cards of the previous Tory government have been laid on the table for all of us to see, and it’s not a good-looking hand. The people of Ontario have allowed us to reveal the true state of the finances in this province.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I’m very pleased to join the debate this morning on the resolution proposed by Mr Arnott, “That in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should commit itself to a 25-year debt retirement plan, articulating five-year interim targets, such that the province of Ontario is free from its net debt by the fiscal year 2029-30.”

We all know that Mr Arnott, the member from Waterloo-Wellington, is a hard-working, sincere and dedicated member of this Legislature. He’s a very responsible person. He’s looking out for his riding and his constituents, and this is an initiative that’s based on responsibility. This resolution is about the Ontario government taking on a plan to deal with our long-term debt. It is about the government acting responsibly to deal with our debt.

Think of the Ontario government’s debt, some \$118.7 billion, as a big mortgage on our home, Ontario. Individ-

idual Ontarians deal with their home mortgages in a responsible way. They make their mortgage payments, and over 20 or 25 years they pay off their debt. It's time for the Ontario government to do the same thing.

Think of all the tax dollars currently going to service the interest on \$118.7 billion. By my quick calculation, that's about \$8 billion—I see the taxpayers' federation says it's \$8.6 billion. That \$8 billion to \$9 billion could be spent on health care, education or environmental measures, or it could be given back to the taxpayers of Ontario. That would be a 44% reduction in income tax or a 30% increase in health spending.

We now have a new government in Ontario. Mr McGuinty stated many times in the election, "I won't lower your taxes, but I won't raise them either." Mr McGuinty signed and pledged with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that he would balance the budget. He's saying he wouldn't raise taxes. So why are we seeing a 27% increase in business taxes in this province? That's something that worries me more than anything, and the effect that will have on business in Ontario.

When we were in government, my colleagues would often talk about tax-and-spend Liberals. I was new to the place, and I thought they were kidding. This government is quickly showing they are indeed tax-and-spend Liberals. That's why this resolution is more important than ever. We need a long-term plan to deal with our debt. It is too easy to give in to short-term spending demands and act irresponsibly with regard to spending.

Let me be clear: It is our children and our grandchildren who will suffer if this government does not act responsibly. It's short-term pain for long-term gain. I very much support this resolution. I believe it's the right thing to do. It's tough for governments that live on a four-year cycle to look 25 years down the road, but it is the best thing to do for all Ontarians. I would like to see the government adopt this strategy.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm very happy to rise on this motion, and I want to spend a few minutes speaking about how we got here—the kind of thinking that got us here and what this government is going to do to move forward.

No one can dispute the need, the virtue and the importance of retiring debt. No one can dispute the burden that provincial debt places on future generations. No one can dispute, certainly, that to the extent we are saddled with debt, we can't meet our promises and don't have the ability to fund our programs.

But first, I want to share with the House some information about the status of our debt. Our net debt as of March 31, 2003, was \$132.6 billion, and the interest last year alone on that debt was \$9.7 billion. As my friend has said, the Tories actually increased the provincial debt by some \$30 billion while they were in office. The cost of servicing that increased debt rose as well, from \$8 billion to \$11 billion per year. Every year during the Tory regime, one sixth of the provincial budget was spent servicing the province's debt. That is not a record to be proud of.

Here in Ontario, previous governments have also let the debt more than double. The NDP government let it double from \$38 billion to \$101 billion during their time in office. And we are paying a price for the increases by those past governments. It is not a situation to be proud of. To incur our debt is to mortgage our future. Not only have we been left with a financial debt, my friends, we have been left with a debt and a legacy in terms of mis-managed government.

Mismanagement leads to debt, and we're here to fix it. On October 2, the people of this province voted for the straight goods. They voted against Magna budgets, they voted against accounting tricks, they voted against sweeping it under the rug and they voted to listen to a Provincial Auditor instead of questioning his motives and judgments to act. They voted for respect, openness and transparency in the books of this province, something that has been sorely missing for the past eight years.

Interjections.

Ms Broten: Do you know what? We've already taken a number of initiatives to move forward—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Just take a second. Members more and more seem to think that they have the right to speak when somebody has the floor, and I think we'd like to change that around here, so I'd appreciate it if you'd listen to the speaker who has the floor.

Ms Broten: Thank you. We certainly need to address the deficit and the debt. There's no doubt about that, and we are moving forward in that regard.

The setting of targets is an admirable goal, but I want to ask you how, right now, 28.4% of GDP is being used for servicing the debt. Before the days of the Tories and the NDP it was less than half. But remember, it took a long time to build up this debt and, unfortunately, it's going to take a long time to pay it down.

I know that the Minister of Finance will have more to say about this when he does his economic statement, but I also want to just spend my last remaining moments talking about the deficit in public services and public safety that this province has also suffered over the last number of years. We need to set timetables and we need to have targets for paying down the deficit. But let me ask my friends across the House, where were the five-year targets when it came to improving our health care system and our education system? Where were the targets when it came to fixing our water and improving our air? Where were the targets to ensure that the Family Responsibility Office phone got answered when the people in our communities were calling for help? Where were the targets when it came to ensuring that hospital beds were open and available?

Is it time for Mr Arnott's motion? No. It's time to restore the fiscal situation to a balance. It's time to have openness and transparency in government books so we can ensure that we reverse the deficits in public health and safety. That's the direction we're taking in this province.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nepean-Carleton now has the floor.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Mr Speaker, I watched you over the last eight years in this place, and I listened and I learned. We're going to be an effective opposition because of all we learned from you, Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise and support my colleague from Waterloo-Wellington. I think his resolution is important. I strongly believe in balanced budgets. I strongly believe in debt repayment. I think he has presented a responsible resolution, and I would encourage all members of the House to support it.

This is a rather serious issue. I do think it's important. This is private members' hour and we should be speaking as individual members. In all honesty, and I won't mention which members, but we shouldn't be reading speeches that the minister's office wrote for us. This should be a time when it's non-political and we speak to the question before us. I listened to two speakers and neither of them even said whether they would support the resolution or not. We want to make this place more relevant and we want people to come and tell us what their constituents think on these issues—what they think, not what the canned speeches from the whiz kids in Greg Sorbara's office or the Premier's office say.

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I listened with great interest to Mr Mauro and Ms Broten talk about the \$20 billion of interest that was added by this government. That \$20 billion is funny because it's identical to the number that Lyn McLeod in 1995 said she would have to borrow before she balanced the budget. Lyn McLeod agreed with Mike Harris that you couldn't come in and cut \$11 billion in spending like that, that you had to do it in a responsible way. So the Liberal and the Tory plan, had Lyn McLeod been elected and undertaken her economic strategy, would have added \$20 billion to the debt; exactly the same. I suppose Greg Sorbara's office or the Premier's office didn't tell you that. It's interesting. I think that's important to mention. We balanced the budget responsibly over four years, exactly like the Liberal Party said they would. And I say this quite sincerely: Don't fall into the trap of the spin doctors.

I do think it's fair to admit that all three political parties over the last 30 or 40 years—Conservative, Liberal and New Democrat—including the government that I served in, had to borrow money. I think it's self-evident that that happened. I don't think any of us should be proud of that. I think if there were three people responsible, it would be all three parties.

The question that Mr Arnott is asking today is should we all not, collectively, take responsibility—particularly, I say to the members for Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Thunder Bay, as younger members in this place—for the problem and come forward with a plan to balance the budget and pay off the debt? That's what this resolution seeks to do. I think it's important. If we could set a 25-year plan to reasonably pay off the deficit, I think that would be a good thing.

But I do think it's remarkable. There's no doubt the province is facing some significant challenges this fiscal

year. All we're saying to the government is surely there would be a million dollars out of a \$70-million budget where the government—just \$1 million out of \$8 billion—could say, "Do you know what? We're going to cut spending by \$1 million." We're going to do something. We're not going to take the \$5.6 billion number. It's sort of like driving a car and you know you're going to drive off a cliff in six months from now, on April 1—and you were elected on October 2—but we can't do anything. There's not a single thing we can do.

We came forward with about \$10 billion worth of ideas, and I have no problem with your saying 90% or 95% of those are unworkable, that it can't be done. We'll disagree. But surely there must be one single thing where you could say, "Do you know what? We can take that \$771 million and count it in this fiscal year," as John Manley says. That's not John Baird talking; that's John Manley. Surely we could take that \$330 million of SARS money and say we're going to deduct that right off the \$5.6-billion financial challenge we're facing.

I asked in question period. The Liberal candidates ran on a plan saying, "We have set aside \$2 billion to deal with the potential deficit." David Hall, who verified the plan, said that you can cut that off the deficit. The members won't look at me when I say this, and I don't blame them. Because there's \$3 billion that has gone missing and there doesn't seem to be any willingness whatsoever to say, "Let's roll up our sleeves and work together." We came up with some positive ideas, and I think that's regrettable.

I'm very pleased to support this resolution by my friend Ted Arnott, and I will be voting in favour.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Waterloo-Wellington has two minutes to reply.

Mr Arnott: I want to thank all the members in this House who have participated in this important debate this morning, particularly my colleagues from Kitchener-Waterloo, the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka and the member for Nepean-Carleton, our able and dedicated finance critic.

I want to address some of the points that have been made by some of the Liberal members in this House this morning: the member for York West, the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan and the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore. I was disappointed because I didn't hear the Liberal members say they're intending to support this resolution.

I would point out to you that I introduced a similar resolution in 1997, and it enjoyed the support of all sides of the House. In fact, it was passed unanimously on a voice vote. At that time, I had the pleasure to listen to the member from Yorkview, who is in the House today and spoke today; he's now the member for York West. In 1997, he said about this initiative: "I will be supporting the bill because I think the principle is a sound one. It's something we can subscribe to as present and future governments. I hope we do that." We didn't hear a statement like that from him today, unfortunately.

I would refer to the Liberal campaign platform, their Achieving Our Potential document, which was one of the documents they used during the election campaign. They made reference to debt reduction:

“We will make sure the debt goes in one direction only: down.

“We will not add to the provincial debt. We will pay down the debt as conditions allow, with all surpluses going directly to debt payment.”

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): Another promise broken.

Mr Arnott: As my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound has said, this is yet another broken Liberal promise. You can add that to the list. I think it's most disappointing that the Liberal government, within a few days and weeks, has been breaking so many of its promises. This, to me, is a complete abdication of responsibility. I'm very, very disappointed. I'm concerned about the future generations of this province: my children, my grandchildren, if I have any. I think it's most important that we articulate a long-term debt repayment plan and that governments in the future commit to it. I would ask all members of this House to support this important resolution.

ONTARIO HERITAGE DAY ACT, 2003

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

Mr Brownell moved second 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 Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): According to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes.

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): It is a pleasure for me today to speak to this bill, which will proclaim the second Monday of June of each year to be Ontario Heritage Day and to amend other acts to include Ontario Heritage Day as a holiday.

For many years—actually, since I was a teen in my community—I have been actively involved in the conservation and preservation of history and heritage, most recently serving as the president of the Lost Villages Historical Society. Before that, I served as president of the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Historical Society and the Cornwall Township Historical Society. I was honoured, yet humbled, when I received the Ontario Heritage Foundation's Heritage Community Recognition Award in 2001.

As we all know, Ontario is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse regions on earth, something of which Ontarians are extremely proud. In our province, we have a long, rich history and heritage of the First Nations communities, and I must say that I am indeed

proud to recognize the community of Akwesasne in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh.

In my community, and indeed throughout Ontario, we have had settlements developed along the rivers and lakes travelled by the voyageurs. In eastern Ontario, for example, our lost villages of Mille Roches and Moulinette, communities lost to the hydro and seaway projects of the 1950s, provide evidence of the early French culture and heritage in my constituency. This is true for countless communities throughout Ontario. Yes, check the map of Ontario and see the French origins. Then, in the late 1700s, the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists brought large-scale immigration to Ontario, a welcoming immigration policy that continues to this day. Today, we welcome new Ontarians to our province, encouraging them to profile and celebrate their respective heritages of which they are so proud, and which we, as Ontarians, embrace.

The heritage which my paternal grandmother brought to this country as a home child is a heritage of rich Scottish traditions which I celebrate and remember. As an orphaned child from Bridge of Weir, Scotland, she and many other home children left their marks on the landscape of Ontario. The marks they left are those which we as Ontarians must remember and celebrate on Ontario Heritage Day.

It is time that Ontario establishes a day to pay tribute in recognition to the province's long and rich economic, social and political history. It is time to celebrate our province's rich culture and natural heritage. It is evident in the communities in which we live. As other provinces and territories do in Canada, this day will give the opportunity for Ontarians to celebrate their distinct and unique heritages and the important contributions made by generations of settlers and their descendants.

In Canada, provinces and territories do celebrate with special heritage days. For example, Newfoundland and Labrador celebrate Cabot's day, recognizing the contributions of this great explorer and the heritage which developed in that province. In New Brunswick, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Yukon, a day is recognized in each region to celebrate this distinct heritage.

1100

In my area of eastern Ontario, year after year we welcome and embrace the thousands of visitors who travel across the border from Quebec to celebrate Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day in the beautiful parks and recreational areas and campsites of the St Lawrence Parks Commission. As a community, we join with our francophone neighbours in celebrating. But we are also mindful of the economic boom to the businesses as they begin another tourist season.

Ontarians know that statutory holidays are days with special significance, days established by governments to commemorate and celebrate events, usually of a religious or historical nature. They know as well that the primary purpose of the statutory holiday is to provide employees some time from work days to enjoy some leisure time

and to participate in activities and events in the community, knowing that they are not penalized financially during the holiday.

So why an Ontario Heritage Day statutory holiday? Firstly, an Ontario Heritage Day will give us the opportunity to learn about the past as we project to the future. As we have seen through our museums, heritage sites and educational programs, heritage is alive and fun in Ontario, but an Ontario Heritage Day would place our province's rich and diverse history and heritage on a higher plateau.

As well, communities in Ontario have had boosts in their economies and businesses through the development of heritage attractions. A new statutory holiday celebrating heritage in the province of Ontario would be a boom for our recently battered tourism and hospitality industries. With many heritage and historical sites opening in late May and early June throughout the province, an early June statutory holiday celebrating heritage would be the boost needed in the tourism industry.

Having recently stepped down as a commissioner with the St Lawrence Parks Commission, I have seen firsthand the economic hardships borne by such attractions as Upper Canada Village and Fort Henry because of such events as 9/11 and SARS. Having an Ontario Heritage Day to begin the tourist season would be the catalyst for future economic gains. Those who work in tourism know that new and unique programs and events contribute to economic success. A new Ontario Heritage Day will give tourism a boost. Many Ontarians will use a holiday to get outdoors and celebrate the province's diverse natural, cultural and built heritage venues.

Let us for a moment take time to touch on the educational importance of an Ontario Heritage Day, education for our youth and educational opportunities for adults who wish to learn more about Ontario's cultural, natural and built heritage. For over 32 years I provided my students with the opportunities to explore Ontario heritage through outdoor educational programs. These outdoor educational journeys were not opportunities to get out of a hot and muggy classroom on a June day, but it gave my students and I the opportunity to experience history as it came alive in front of us and before our eyes.

In all of our ridings in Ontario, think of the countless opportunities for students as curriculum is developed around Ontario Heritage Day. Think of the opportunities in the riding represented by my friend the honourable Minister of Agriculture, where the death of an elephant, Jumbo, allows students the opportunity to learn about Ontario's rich entertainment industry and allows them to travel back to the time when travelling circuses were anticipated by thousands of Ontarians each year.

Let us teach our children and encourage them to travel to the places where great doctors left their marks on the Ontario landscape. I think about the times I brought my students and members of the historical society, which I had the opportunity to lead, to visit the homes of Dr Solomon Jones at Maitland, Ontario, and the esteemed Senator from Brockville, Dr Fulford. An Ontario

Heritage Day would give educators the opportunity to showcase and build stories around the life and times of Dr Jones, who not only served as eastern Ontario's first doctor but developed progressive agricultural practices in on his farm near Maitland. Children are fascinated by such stories as Dr Fulford's pharmaceutical exploits, developing his patented pink pills for pale people.

Children and adults as well are fascinated to travel and learn about the legends and tales of a great Canadian heroine, Laura Secord. Yes, Laura is more than chocolates, and an Ontario Heritage Day will give Ontarians the chance to discover and reflect on this bit of history in the ridings of St Catharines, Niagara Falls and Niagara Centre. Think too of the valuable stories which would be passed on to our children and grandchildren. Think, too, about the opportunities they will have, by our actions here to have this bill proclaimed, as they take the time from a busy workweek to reflect on Ontario's heritage and history.

I say to my fellow colleagues in this great House, we have much to celebrate in history and heritage in this province. I truly believe that an Ontario Heritage Day will give all Ontarians the opportunity to reflect and celebrate on a great past as we move on to the future. It will be the catalyst to get this province moving in the tourism industry. It will give this province the opportunity to have our hospitality industry move forward.

The heritage organizations in Ontario, from our local museums, our historical societies, LACAC committees and Ontario's biggest heritage booster—the Ontario Heritage Foundation—will truly have reason to celebrate as we bring history and heritage to that higher plateau that I spoke of with an Ontario Heritage Day.

I encourage my colleagues on all sides of this House in this historic chamber to join with me in having Ontario Heritage Day proclaimed in this great province.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm very pleased to join in the debate today on Bill 16, An Act to proclaim Ontario Heritage Day and to amend other Acts to include Ontario Heritage Day as a holiday, as put forward by the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh.

I think we all agree—it's kind of like motherhood—that supporting Ontario Heritage Day is a worthwhile endeavour. I do have a few questions for the member, however. I believe it's the second Monday in June that he's proposing as the date of a statutory holiday. That does have consequences. I would wonder whether that is the appropriate time for another statutory holiday, when we have Canada Day but a couple of weeks after that. Within the year, the month that doesn't have a statutory holiday is February, so it might make more sense to have a holiday in February.

Certainly there are economic considerations to do with a statutory holiday. There can be some pluses, like increased tourism activity. For example, in my riding—I always like to talk about the beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka—we have a number of different attractions with a heritage theme, like Muskoka Heritage Place

in Huntsville, where they have a steam train. It's become a very popular tourist attraction. They have a First Nations component to it as well. Over in the west side of the riding, in Parry Sound we have the West Parry Sound District Museum, which is a very worthwhile attraction. I'd certainly recommend that everyone visit the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka on the new heritage day to visit these attractions. As well, in the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka we have seven First Nations communities. In Bracebridge there is the Bird house, an octagonal house of historical importance. So even in our riding there are many other historical and heritage-type attractions.

There needs to be an economic analysis of the effect this heritage day and another statutory holiday would have, the economic considerations for the province. For example, when you have a statutory holiday, small business is required to pay time and a half, but at the same time we could see some economic benefit from the tourism aspects of this.

I would ask that the member do that economic analysis. I wonder whether he has consulted with the stakeholders like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I'm sure they have done surveys of their members and probably would have some ideas about whether this makes sense. I hope he would consult with them.

I would also ask him to check the work done by our very competent former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture, who I believe just last year did extensive consultations with the cultural stakeholders. Julia Munro, the member for York North, did a very thorough job and a lot of extensive consultations with heritage stakeholders. I'm sure her work would be of use to you in determining if this is the appropriate time and if there are any other considerations.

It's a worthwhile idea. I do think we need that economic analysis, and I question whether mid-June is the appropriate time.

1110

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I'm pleased to join in the debate. I want to congratulate the member for bringing the bill forward. I want to point out that before and during the election campaign, the New Democrats said very clearly that we believe we should have two more statutory holidays in the province of Ontario, so I'm supportive of any consideration that moves us along in that regard and say I support the bill that's brought forward today. We supported two statutory holidays, primarily because we believe working people in Ontario, who are working longer and harder than ever before, deserve to have a break. If that break comes in terms of them reflecting on and celebrating Ontario's culture, that's great.

I want to give the House a bit of an idea of a slice of Ontario in terms of my own riding. I think we can all look at our own ridings and look at those who have made important contributions that should be recognized, perhaps in this way, with this bill. I have three First Nations communities in my riding, two in the north part of the riding, one adjacent to a non-native community. All those

communities made very significant contributions very early on to the development particularly of northern Ontario. They are communities that certainly, in some cases, could use more support from the federal government in terms of what they're trying to do—building a child care centre in one of them, for example. But by and large, it would be important for us to acknowledge our very first Canadians in a very significant way.

Secondly, I have a very large Franco-Ontarian population in the riding of Nickel Belt. In fact, the communities adjacent to the one I live in, Capreol, will be celebrating their 100th anniversary in 2004. The heritage committee that has been involved in Valley East has done tremendous work over the last 18 months to two years documenting the history of the families who came to Blezard Valley, to Hanmer etc, talking about their significant contribution. They were primarily involved in agriculture and then became involved in mining in our community and made many other significant contributions. There's a great deal of activity underway with respect to that celebration. Again, this is a community, a population that has made a tremendous impact and a tremendous contribution, not only in northern Ontario, where there are many communities with large francophone populations, but right across the province.

If you look at the composition, you'll see that many others came, primarily because they were involved in the mining industry and the development of that in the Sudbury basin. I think about the very large Finnish population we have, the very large Ukrainian population, the very large Italian population, Greek population, that have been members of our community for many, many years. We are lucky in our community that we have a wonderful association, the Sudbury Multicultural/Folk Arts Association, that celebrates our diversity and is responsible for many multicultural events that occur across our community, efforts made to have people become involved in the celebrations, the language, the art, the culture, the history of all these communities, to make our community much more tolerant. We have a much newer wave of immigration now that has occurred in recent years, many people of Indian descent, many more coming from places in South America, all of whom together are making our community an incredible place to live.

I think each MPP has a similar story they could relate with respect to the composition of their own ridings and the contributions that have been made. If this is an appropriate way to celebrate all that, to recognize it in a very formal way, then I am supportive of that.

In the short time I have, because I said our party had been very interested in two statutory holidays, I should make mention of a resolution debated recently at the Ontario Federation of Labour that had to do with a statutory holiday we should consider on April 28, now recognized as a day of mourning in the province of Ontario but not recognized as a statutory holiday. The April 28 event marks the contributions that have been made by Ontario working men and women, acknow-

ledges and calls all of us to remember those who have died as a result of their workplace, those who have suffered industrial disease as a result of their workplace, those who suffer from ongoing injuries as a result of accidents in their workplace. That particular day—and I think the many members who have participated in the April 28 day of mourning ceremonies in their own ridings recognize that it calls us to remember those who have died and to fight for better occupational health and safety so that we reduce the number of workplace accidents, deaths and disease. The title of that has been “Mourn for the Dead, Fight for the Living,” and it seems to me it would be appropriate for us to consider at one point making that day, April 28, a statutory holiday as well.

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I am proud to support the motion put forward by the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. I tried to think of a way that I could speak about this recommendation in a personal way. The first thought that came to my mind about how important it would be to my community was the fact that in Brampton we’ve been known as the Flowertown of Canada for many, many years. That’s changed over the years. I think part of our aim is to celebrate the rich, diverse and proud heritage of Ontario, and that’s something I’d like to encourage people to think of when they think of Brampton.

From the 1800s until the 1970s, roses, tulips, orchids, violets, daffodils, carnations and chrysanthemums made Brampton famous around the world. We were dubbed the Flowertown of Canada. We were once home to dozens of acres of greenhouses, and at their peak in the 1950s we produced more than 20 million blooms a year. Today there’s very little left of Flowertown. In fact, there are just some small retailers that are left from that proud heritage.

It had its start in the small market gardens of Edward Dale. He arrived in Brampton from England with his family and created a small dugout type greenhouse to raise produce. Like other market gardeners, Mr Dale would peddle his produce door to door. According to the family legend, his son was not interested in producing the produce; he was more interested in the flowers that were growing wild in the neighbourhood. With each vegetable order, he ensured his dad included a rose for the lady of the house. By the time they went into business together in 1869, Harry had developed a cut rose variety of roses that convinced his father to add flowers to his greenhouse. The enterprise grew rapidly, with roses exceeding the popularity and profitability of the vegetables. Soon the roses were being shipped all over North America and England. After the death of Sir John S. Macdonald in June 1891, as many as 800 roses were shipped to Ottawa and Montreal from the Dale greenhouses.

By 1915, 3.75 acres had become 25 acres, with over 1.25 million square feet of glass, making Dale the largest employer in Brampton, according to The Brampton Sesquicentennial Historical CD-ROM.

Looking for ways to expand the estate, Duggan visited England, where he examined similar industries. He was

inspired by what he saw, and by the mid-1930s the Dale estate owned and operated 250 acres, employing more than 350 workers, with 132 greenhouses and approximately 1.5 million square feet of glass covering 40 acres of the estate. You don’t see that now; that history is gone. Although the flower market in England was larger, the Dale estate’s became the largest under glass, encased in greenhouses.

Following the war, Brampton’s Flowertown began to feel the effects of a massive population boom, reliable air travel and skyrocketing oil prices. The demand for land increased, and nearby businesses such as AVRO/Orenda Engines and Dixie Cup soon were offering higher wages. An increasingly fast world, where air travel was more reliable and flowers could be more cheaply shipped from South America, also left Flowertown behind. In 1961, there were 61 flower growers in the Brampton area. In December 1974, there were 13.

In an attempt to revive the flower spirit, the city, the Dales and other local businesses sponsored Brampton’s first Flower Festival in 1963, including a parade and a concert band in our Gage Park. The festival, renamed in 1981 as the Pine and Rose Festival, ran for 26 years before the board of directors disbanded in 1988 over financial difficulties.

Although 81 businesses are listed under “florist” in the Brampton area Yellow Pages, the closest greenhouses are in Huttonville. Only two flower retailers remain from Flowertown days.

I support this bill; I think it makes a lot of sense. It’s important to recognize your history. You can’t understand where you’re going if you don’t know your past.

1120

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): It’s a pleasure to rise today in the House to speak to Bill 16, An Act to proclaim Ontario Heritage Day and to amend other Acts to include Ontario Heritage Day as a holiday.

I guess it’s laudable to recognize the importance that heritage plays in our society, and I think we should, from time to time, take time to stop and think of that. I commend the member opposite for bringing this bill forward.

Having said that, I’ll start off by saying that I won’t be able to support the bill. I have some real concerns, and they have to do with what the impact of doing this will be, not only on our heritage but on our economy and on the very people whom we want to help.

The member brought forward the situation we’ve had in the past year, where we had problems with our tourist industry because of some of the things that have happened in our society. We need to do something to bring more tourists in to help those people in the tourist industry recover from the SARS and other impacts. Yet we are going to be asking those same people to pay half as much again for the people who are working on that day in order to bring these people in.

I don’t think the declaration of the holiday will bring people from outside Ontario into the province, because declaring the day will have no impact in other provinces or in other countries. The impact will just be here. So

what it's really going to suggest, as I see it, is that we are going to ask all the people who employ personnel in this province to pay people so they can go out and enjoy a holiday. Of course, the cost of doing that will be tacked on to the products or the deficit of products or the lack of products produced that day in our society, which will make all our exports and all our products that we produce more expensive on the markets. So again, it will be a disadvantage to our economy.

I think a lot of people would appreciate a signal as to when the heritage appreciation and the summer holidays start—starting in mid-June as opposed to the end of June may be a good idea. As we all know, our summer holidays, when people take time off and travel the province and go and visit these tourist attractions, traditionally start the first part of July as opposed to mid-June. This may very well encourage them to start earlier. I don't expect them to do it much longer, because they will not have generated much more revenue.

I have a bit of a question to the member, and maybe he could answer it in his responses. I did get a printout of some of the information, as it relates to the act, and some of the pluses and minuses of introducing this piece of legislation. I was very much impressed with the fact that we would be recognizing the contribution of our settlers, their descendants, our First Nations and new Ontarians.

I'm not quite sure I understand how new Ontarians fall into that category, as to how their heritage would be recognized. I know we have a lot of special days declared for new Ontarians who come from offshore and immigrate to Ontario, and I happen to be one of those. We have special days for nationalities to recognize their heritage and their contribution to our society, and I'm not sure declaring an Ontario Heritage Day—at least I'm not clear as to how the member opposite would see that as coming out in this bill. So I'm not sure that that has a great impact.

As I said, I'm a new Canadian myself—I'm not sure whether we can call it “new”; it was 51 years ago that we arrived in this great country—and we celebrate that each and every year. In fact, I'd just like to relate that I came here in 1952. We landed at pier 21 in Halifax with 14 siblings and my parents. Last year, we had the great opportunity to celebrate our arrival in this great country and having spent 50 years here. We invited just the immediate family of those descendants. Incidentally, we don't have a special day to recognize this, but it was in April we arrived, so maybe we could move this day to April if the legislation passes.

This year we invited all the people to come back and celebrate with us our good fortune to be Canadians. We had to send out invitations to 236 direct descendants of our family, and 197 of them came to the celebration—since that time, of course, this heritage has moved out; one of them came from as far away as Australia to visit—because they were part of that family that arrived here in 1952. As I say, I take great pride in the heritage, in being an Ontarian and in being a Canadian, but I'm not sure that this legislation will deal with that at all.

I would be much more comfortable in supporting the bill if the member opposite had brought forward some information that he had contacted the business community, the retail sector, the people who will be impacted, hopefully not negatively impacted, by this legislation. It would be nice to know what they thought of that and whether this was, in their estimation, going to improve their economy and their lot in life, or whether in fact it is going to be a hindrance. I would be much more comfortable if I had that type of information to help me in my deliberations. I strongly support the need to celebrate our heritage and the need to recognize the positives in our society, but I don't believe we should do that at the expense of our society. I really believe that this is going to do that.

Lastly, I would just like to again ask the member who proposed this legislation—on the other side of the information page, in listing where the statutory holidays are in different jurisdictions, we have listed that a number of them have nine paid holidays; Ontario and Quebec have only eight, and of course that is the second-highest in Canada. But then when we look at the next slide, in fact it suggests that there are 10 in Ontario too. I was just wondering if maybe we could get clarification on that.

With that, I will turn my time over to my colleagues. I thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity to speak to this bill.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Just before I get into the details about why I support this and what kinds of comments I have in regard to this particular bill, I just want to say it's interesting that the previous speaker says we should go out and consult with the small business community, because after all they're the ones who are going to have to foot the bill for the holiday.

I understand that as far as logic, but the inference I thought the member meant was that maybe we have too many holidays now. I just want to point out that other jurisdictions in the world are much more progressive when it comes to dealing with the issue of holidays than we are here in North America. Quite frankly, North America is probably one of the worst jurisdictions when it comes to statutory holidays for their citizens.

If you go into powerhouse economies like Germany, France and many other European economies, it is standard there in the first year to get four or five weeks' holidays. The interesting part is, people don't see that as a cost of business; they see that as a benefit. Because what it has done, quite frankly, is to create a culture in Europe where people actually take their holidays, take their savings and go on a little trip somewhere, within the European common union more times than not. It has created a tourism industry in Europe that is far outpacing anything that we're doing here in North America.

We seem to have this attitude in North America, “Nose to the grind wheel. Work 14 hours a day, seven days a week, 365,” and if you don't do that, somehow you're not as good as the rest of the people in the economy. I remember reading the book *Future Shock* when I was a teenager in high school. I'll tell you, the

year 2000 isn't at all what I expected it to be, because I thought we were going to get a lot smarter and we were going to learn how to really build in, by way of legislation, the ability for people to take time off and enjoy their lives so that they could be more refreshed and better able to contribute to the workplace that they work in.

I think in North America, quite frankly, we have some of the worst legislation when it comes to mandatory holidays. So on the basis that this is an additional holiday for people, I support it. I just want to say that out front. But I just think at one point it would be interesting—actually, I'm thinking of bringing such a bill into this Legislature—that we look at the jurisdictions of Sweden, Denmark, Norway—Holland is quite progressive, to my good friend across the way here. I've been there a number of times. People in Europe are quite progressive when it comes to this whole issue of the concept of holidays and statutory holidays.

1130

To the issue of this bill being called a heritage—what are you calling it?—heritage day, I guess is what you're calling it? I just want to point something out. A couple of First Nations friends of mine were here the other day. You might have noticed them in the gallery. We were having a bit of a chat about this bill when you were introducing it. They were a little bit taken aback. Not to be negative toward what you're doing, but they're saying, "Heritage? God, we were here first. What do you mean? We come from here. We didn't come from anywhere else. You're the immigrants. You all came from over there and came to Canada and North America; we were here. If you want to signal in some way the heritage our country has gained from First Nations people"—I think their comment is a good one—"maybe we deserve a holiday of our own." I just put that on the record, because I know among my First Nations friends across the province, as I think of people I deal with, everyone from the chiefs of Ontario to the local communities in my riding, there is a real sense within the aboriginal community that they are different, in their own minds and their own rights, from the rest of Canadians; that they are not founding fathers, they are not immigrants to this great nation, that they are the people who were here before, and we're the people who came after. I just signal to you that there is a little bit of uneasiness in comments I got from some of my First Nations friends on this.

I was also talking to—it's funny how these things go—another gentleman, a francophone from my riding, who happened to be in the gallery on the day this bill was introduced. I thought it was kind of interesting. I had First Nations friends from the James Bay coast and a friend of mine from Timmins here when the bill was put in place. He raised the point—I don't necessarily agree with him, but I think the member needs to respond to his point—that francophones and anglophones see themselves as founding members of our country, and maybe the bill should have been called multicultural day. That was the question he was asking: Are you trying to celebrate the multiculturalism of Canada, all the people who

emigrated from all the various nations of the world vis-à-vis what their cultural background might be? He wondered why you didn't call it multicultural day. I said to my buddy, "Don't get hung up on it, because I'm sure the member is doing this for all the right reasons and he'll respond to that in his speech."

But I will support it. It's a step in the right direction. I would just echo what my friend from Sudbury said: It would be nice to do a workers' day on April 16 to mark those workers who have died in the workplace.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): I'm pleased to rise in support of this bill from my colleague from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. I think my colleague has given a very good historical perspective as to why this bill is important, as to why as a province we need to celebrate and remember our history, our heritage.

Speaking as someone who was not born in Canada, coming to Canada as a child, admittedly I very much appreciate the multiculturalism, the embracing of diversity that we have in this great province of ours. With that, I think many young people may tend to lose a little bit of the historical perspective of this province, may tend to lose the value or not understand it because we're doing such a great job of integrating and working together and showing the world how we can come together from all countries around the world to Canada, to Ontario in particular, the biggest focus of immigration in the country, and really show the world a model of understanding and acceptance and working together. But in that, we possibly tend to lose a little bit of our history of this province.

I look at Ontario Heritage Day as a celebration, a day on which we can celebrate the wonderful contributions over the years of people in this province: natives, francophones and other Canadians and Ontarians from all walks of life, some who have been spoken of today in the House. It's an opportunity for the schools to become involved as part of this program. I can envision the schools actually doing much more than they should be doing to help young people understand the heritage of this province.

We should be very proud. We have a very rich history in Ontario. We have a history we should be proud of. We have a history of pioneers. We have a history of inventors, of people who have stretched the limits, of people who have gone beyond the call of duty in making this province a better place to live over the years. This opportunity of celebrating Ontario Heritage Day would give us that. It would give us an opportunity to highlight some of these individuals. It would give us an understanding of where we came from as a province. I believe that is extremely important, because if we are not careful, we are going to lose some of that. If we are not careful, we are going to lose some of the historical perspective, as a province and as a country, that I think is valuable and is as rich any country in the world, any province in the world.

The other aspect of this bill that I certainly support is the fact that it would be a statutory holiday. I find it a

passing fascination that some of my Tory friends across the floor are saying, “Well, who have you consulted? Have you consulted the chamber of commerce? Have you consulted the Canadian Federation of Business?” But none of them have said, “Have you consulted working men and women who may like another statutory holiday to spend with their family and friends?” The fact is that in this fast-moving society of ours, this fast-moving world of ours, there’s often not enough time for family and friends. I think many working people who would benefit from this would very much appreciate the opportunity to have another day in June that they can spend with their family and friends.

Again, work the schools into this. Use it as an opportunity to educate young people as to why it’s not just a day off but, “Here’s what we’re celebrating today.”

So I believe that this is a very worthwhile piece of legislation. I am hopeful that all my colleagues in the Legislature will support it. It is important to celebrate our multiculturalism, it is important to celebrate the Ontario we have today, but it’s also important to celebrate the history of this great province. This bill will help us do that.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): It’s a privilege to speak on this bill for a few minutes and mention that this has been talked about before in the House, and in Ottawa they talked about a Heritage Day across Canada. I think it might even be better if we had it in February. I think February is when people need a break. Christmas is gone and spring’s not there. In February they need a break—

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Groundhog Day.

Mr Murdoch: —and we could call it Groundhog Day. Yes, the member for St Catharines knows what I’m going to talk about. Of course, in Wiarton we have the most famous groundhog in the world, called Wiarton Willie.

Interjection.

Mr Murdoch: Wiarton Willie has caused some problems here before when he had that untimely death and we had to find some of his predecessors. I believe that we had to go all the way to Ottawa. I believe Wiarton Willie had visited Ottawa somewhere along the line and he had some offspring there that we were able to bring back. So the bloodlines of Wiarton Willie are still there.

That’s when we celebrate in Wiarton. Wiarton Willie comes out and tells us what’s going to happen, when we’re going to have spring. Sometimes he’s right; sometimes he’s wrong. It took our last mayor quite some time to learn groundhogese. It’s another language we have in Wiarton. Not many people can speak that, but that’s one of the things the mayor has to do. Carl Noble was the new mayor the first time, and he did get it mixed up. He had spring coming early and Willie had it coming late. The two of them just didn’t get together on that.

So I would suggest that if we’re going to have a Heritage Day, that’s when it should be, in February when people are feeling the winter blues and maybe need a holiday.

The other thing we’d have to look at, that Mr Miller mentioned, is the economic impact of another holiday on businesses and things like that. It is quite expensive and it’s something we would have to look at. As I said, my colleague the MP Ovid Jackson from my riding is supporting this in Ottawa too, that there may be a Heritage Day, but we would call it Wiarton Willie Groundhog Day and that would go right across Canada. We could probably support something like that.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): It is a great honour for me to speak in favour of my colleague’s bill, Bill 16, An Act to proclaim Ontario Heritage Day. Just before I address this bill, I would like to congratulate the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh for his first election victory to the Ontario Legislature. It has been only two months since the provincial election and my colleague from the riding next to mine is already demonstrating that residents from his riding made the right choice in sending him to Queen’s Park.

1140

Ontario is a beautiful province, a province that is rich in diversity and with a history that is worth celebrating. What better way to recognize the important contribution made by generations of settlers and their descendants, as well as First Nations, than to proclaim the second Monday of June in each year as Ontario Heritage Day in the province of Ontario?

Francophone residents are a very important part of Ontario’s rich diversity. La langue française est présente en Ontario depuis plus de 350 ans. Les premiers francophones qui se sont installés dans le territoire de l’Ontario furent les missionnaires qui établirent la mission de Sainte-Marie-au-pays-des-Hurons en 1639. La communauté francophone de l’Ontario compose la communauté francophone la plus nombreuse au Canada après celle du Québec. Le français est une des langues officielles au Canada. En Ontario, il jouit du statut de langue officielle devant les tribunaux, dans l’éducation et à l’Assemblée législative. Il y a présentement environ 540 000 francophones et environ un million de francophiles en Ontario. En juin 2001, l’emblème de la communauté francophone de l’Ontario a été officiellement reconnu par l’Ontario à l’unanimité dans cette Assemblée législative.

Ma circonscription, tout comme l’Ontario, a une histoire riche. Je suis fier que Samuel de Champlain est passé par ma région. Certains disent que Champlain aurait lui-même changé le nom d’un village de ma circonscription, le village de Grande-Chute, à Chute-à-Blondeau, en mémoire de Blondeau, un ami cher de Paris, mais selon la toponymie la plus récente, ce petit village n’aurait obtenu son nom qu’en 1875, pour d’autres raisons qui ne ressemblent pas du tout à celles mentionnées ci-dessus.

Également, les historiens savent que Cartier a exploré le territoire de ce qui est aujourd’hui la ville d’Ottawa, mais peu de documents étoffent l’histoire de Samuel de Champlain en Outaouais. Son séjour s’avère de courte durée, de quelques jours, tout au plus quelques semaines.

This is but a fraction of Ontario's rich history. Ontario Heritage Day is a wonderful idea. On behalf of all Ontarians, especially Franco-Ontarians, I thank my colleague from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh for introducing this bill, a bill that would go a long way in sparking the pride Ontarians feel for this wonderful province. I urge all members of this Legislature to support this bill.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate today. I think it's a good idea, to the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh.

I just wonder about this. I think he did good research on it with respect to the other jurisdictions. I noticed he indicated what the other provinces were doing and what statutory holidays we have. Certainly I think it should be reviewed. It's been quite a while since we've looked at the statutory holidays, and it's probably a worthwhile review. I don't know whether that's going to be a part of the Minister of Labour's review with respect to statutory holidays. I would say that obviously the Minister of Labour will have a major say in this, and I note that this is a private member's bill. It's not one that has been brought forth by the minister, it's not a government bill, so I don't know whether there's support there from the Minister of Labour. I haven't seen anything in writing with respect to their support.

Consultation is important and you have to have that—there are certainly stakeholders that are going to be impacted by this, employers, to name a few, the tourism industry and other stakeholders—in terms of what their thoughts are.

I think the member from Owen Sound and the member from Muskoka-Parry Sound mentioned the timing of this. You have a statutory holiday in May, you have another statutory holiday in July, another one in August, and another in September. The timing of this, in terms of being in June, may be something that could be reviewed. Perhaps it's more beneficial to the general public having it in February, when it may be of more use to them in terms of having not had any holidays.

But certainly this could be a great benefit for tourism, and I would look at supporting this.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I stand to support the measure from the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. Most of us in this legislative chamber count among the most rewarding and enjoyable of our community tasks the reaching out to our ethnic communities. Many of us have helped groups get organized to raise money among their membership, to celebrate the connections they have to their countries of origin, and to assist newcomers with settlement and integration issues.

Especially here in Ontario, which continues to be the engine of growth in Canada, we need to look at our vibrant body of newcomers and to ask ourselves if there is a good reason we should not celebrate their continuing and vital contribution to Canada and to the rich fabric of diversity that drives our province's prosperity.

If we gather with members of individual ethnic communities to celebrate with them the events that are significant to their country of origin, I say it's time to gather together to establish a Canadian event that commemorates the contributions of those who leave their country of origin to settle in Ontario and to build our country.

The sacrifices made by newcomers can be recognized annually at an Ontario Heritage Day. Newcomers who apply to their Canadian embassy at home or who arrive desperate on our shores as refugees from ethnic, religious or political persecution abroad would benefit, as would Canadians, from a knowledge of their culture and their heritage.

Other jurisdictions in Canada have statutory holidays to celebrate aspects of heritage. Curiously, Ontario, the most diverse province in our confederation, does not. The member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh asks, with this bill, why not? Even the United States, the traditional yardstick by which new initiatives are measured in Ontario, has one more statutory holiday than does Canada. Let's open up one day each year to celebrate Ontario's diversity, to know one another better and to enjoy a day off while the weather is good.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh has two minutes to reply.

Mr Brownell: It's certainly an honour for me to stand today in the House to make the presentation on this bill, a bill that's very near and dear to my heart, as I've explained.

At the outset, in my wrap-up, I would like to thank the members from my side of the House from Brampton Centre, Hamilton East, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell and Mississauga West for their comments of support. As well, I would like to thank those on the other side of the House—the members from Parry Sound, Nickel Belt, Oxford, Timmins-James Bay, Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford—for their comments and for, in most cases, their support of the concept. With this bill, there is and there will be an opportunity for further debate, a further opportunity to look at economic impacts, to look at the stakeholders and to consult with those stakeholders.

I have to say, though, that we must look at the working people of our province. We must listen to the working people of our province in that, yes, they are saying that time off to celebrate, time off to bring heritage to that higher level, is what is needed. As I listened today to the debate, I saw Ms Jeffrey bring history to a higher level. She talked about flowers from her riding coming down to my riding to be used when the Honourable John Sandfield Macdonald, our province's first Premier, was laid to rest in the municipality I live in, South Stormont.

That's what this bill will do. It will give Ontarians that chance to celebrate, that chance to link history, as it should be in this great province, with our First Nations people and new Ontarians.

I thank you for your support and I look forward to the vote on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no further debate, and pursuant to standing order 96, the business of this House is suspended until noon. So don't go away.

The House recessed from 1150 to 1200.

DEBT RETIREMENT PLAN

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): First, we will deal with ballot item number 3, in the name of Mr Arnott.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

There will be a vote on this, and we will deal with this matter after the second item.

ONTARIO HERITAGE DAY ACT, 2003

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

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): On ballot item number 4, standing in the name of Mr Brownell, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. It's carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96—

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I request that this bill, An Act to proclaim Ontario Heritage Day and to amend other acts to include Ontario Heritage Day as a holiday, be referred to the standing committee on general government.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour?

I heard a no. It will be referred to the committee of the whole.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. We'll learn this as we go along.

All those in favour will please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed will stand and be counted.

The majority is in favour, so the bill is referred to the standing committee on general government.

DEBT RETIREMENT PLAN

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Call in the members. I remind you that this will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1203 to 1208.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Arnott has moved private member's notice of motion number 1.

All those in favour will stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Baird, John R.

Klees, Frank
Miller, Norm

Runciman, Robert W.
Scott, Laurie

Barrett, Toby
Dunlop, Garfield
Hardeman, Ernie
Hudak, Tim

Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.

Tascona, Joseph N.
Yakubuski, John

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will stand until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Agostino, Dominic
Arthurs, Wayne
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Caplan, David
Craitor, Kim
Delaney, Bob
Di Cocco, Caroline
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel

Fonseca, Peter
Gravelle, Michael
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Martel, Shelley
Mauro, Bill
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Mitchell, Carol
Oraziotti, David

Parsons, Ernie
Phillips, Gerry
Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sergio, Mario
Smitherman, George
Takhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 16; the nays are 41.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been completed, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30.

The House recessed from 1210 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHRISTMAS EVENTS IN DURHAM

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my pleasure to share with the House today just one of many outstanding Christmas events taking place in my riding of Durham. If the opportunity arises, I'd be pleased to recognize more of these events.

On December 5, close to 2,000 people gathered at the community Christmas tree in historic downtown Bowmanville for the annual Moonlight Magic and Tree-Lighting Ceremony; a Just for Kids concert by entertainers Terri and Rick; and performances by the Bowmanville Handbell Choir from the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Volunteers from St John's Anglican Church, led by George Webster, are playing Christmas music on the church carillon each weekend throughout the festive season.

The Moonlight Magic evening also included a message by Pastor Paul Vanstralen of Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church. Charles Taws, curator of the Bowmanville Museum, invited everyone to the nearby Edwardian Christmas celebration at the museum. Ron Hooper, chair of the board of management, served as master of ceremonies.

A highlight of the evening was the lighting of the 40 strands of lights on the Christmas tree by Mayor John Mutton. Some of the many people who contributed to the

success of the evening were Garth Gilpin, Shane Hastings, Paul Watson, Paul Morton, Bob Gilbank and Mike Burke. The Bowmanville Kinsmen Club warmed the evening with hot chocolate.

This is but one shining example of yuletide in my riding of Durham.

SHIRLEY EIDT

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): I rise today to pay tribute to Shirley Eidt, born Shirley Pickle in Leamington, Ontario, in 1927. Shirley succumbed to cancer Saturday, November 29.

Over the course of three decades she served the people of Scarborough, particularly the Scarborough Centre area, as school trustee, alderman, councillor and Metro councillor. A registered nurse by profession, Shirley has been called “the mother of public health in the old city of Scarborough” and was a driving force behind the creation of the Indianapolis-Scarborough Peace Games, originating in 1972.

Shirley was the epitome of the community volunteer. An elder at St Stephen’s Presbyterian Church, she assisted the developmentally handicapped children at the local elementary school, served on the boards of the Canadian Cancer Society and the Jack Goodlad Seniors’ Residence, and was a long-time volunteer for the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

Predeceased by her husband, Tom, Shirley is survived by her children Cathy and Jim, their spouses Brad and Nancy and her three grandchildren, whom she fondly referred to as her “kidlets”: Chris, Casey and Caley.

When Shirley first retired from public life in 1991, she said her goals were “to help people with their problems and to promote public participation in local government. We now have public participation in local government and I am still helping people with their problems,” she said.

Shirley touched people’s lives. She’ll be sorely missed. I wish to extend condolences to her and her family and her many, many friends.

VIOLET HIPGRAVE

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise today to recognize Violet Hipgrave. Violet is a long-time resident of Huntsville in my beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. Vi, as she is known to everyone, has been a dedicated volunteer for many years at Fairvern Nursing Home in Huntsville. Vi attends to her regular commitment of wheeling residents from their rooms to breakfast once a week, often starting as early as 6:30 am. Vi’s commitment to the residents at Fairvern doesn’t end there. She is also involved in their breakfast club program and can be counted on to help whenever the need arises. Vi also visits palliative care residents at Fairvern. Fortunately, Vi lives only a block away from Fairvern. Violet is well known to patients who require ambulance service to out-of-area hospitals. She accom-

panies patients to provide support while they’re being transported, and will do this several times a week. She is much loved by the residents there. Violet is also a member of Huntsville Hospice. She is a recipient of the Queen’s Jubilee Award in recognition of her selfless volunteerism.

I’ve witnessed Vi’s volunteer work at Fairvern firsthand, and I was moved by her caring touch. I would like to personally congratulate Vi on her 80th birthday, which she will celebrate on December 13, 2003, at Fairvern Nursing Home.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN BRANT

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): It’s a new era for municipalities in this province. Signals of hope and resources are already flowing to our municipal partners, telling them they are no longer creatures of the province, but real partners. To that end, I want to congratulate the new mayor of Brantford, Mike Hancock, on his election victory. His inaugural address earlier this month spoke of a commitment to openness, co-operation, transparency, inclusiveness and team-building. I also want to congratulate the returning councillors and the newly elected members who make up the rest of the team that works with the staff and officials to provide services our community needs.

I also congratulate the re-elected mayor of Brant, Ron Eddy, along with the entire council returning, acclaimed and newly elected members. Best wishes to both councils as you continue to build communities that truly respond to the needs of the people.

As we in the riding of Brant tackle such challenges as downtown renewal, continued growth and development of Laurier Brantford, Mohawk College, Nipissing teachers’ college—Brantford campus, brownfield re-development and infrastructure renewal, let it be known that it will be done in co-operation and partnership with the government of Ontario and the government of Canada. It is the only way the people ever expected us to do this in the first place.

Finally, I want to pay special tribute to the outgoing members of the previous councils for their dedication and willingness to serve the public, which they did with dignity and honour: former mayor of Brantford, Chris Friel; councillors Vince Bucci, Paul Urbanowicz and Wally Lucente; councillors of the county, Bob Van Sickle, Ron Dancy, Art MacKenzie, Diane Cooper and Barbara McMillan. Thank you very much for your dedication to your community.

HYDRO RATES

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): The government’s broken promise to remove the 4.3-cent electricity rate cap will devastate many seniors, single mothers, disabled and vulnerable persons.

No one believes that the average consumer will only see a \$6-a-month increase. What the government hasn’t

told voters is exactly who is profiting from this hydro rate hike. Well, it's the local distribution companies that will now be permitted to collect over a billion dollars in deferred asset charges and guaranteed 10% profit margins, not on the backs of large, industrial consumers, but on the backs of residential and small business consumers, seniors living on fixed incomes like Mr and Mrs Hawkins of Woodstock, who face a 32% increase in their monthly hydro bill. They can't cut back on their energy consumption due to a chronic illness requiring oxygen and air purification systems 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Liberals refuse to listen to the Hawkins. In fact, the Minister of Energy yesterday told this House that he had instructed his Liberal members to reject amendments from consumer groups before they were even tabled. Why waste taxpayers' money on three hours of public hearings to hear six people, when the government had predetermined it had rejected their advice. Today I will table a private member's bill amending the Electricity Act to protect our frail elderly, poor and disabled citizens. These utilities, about to collect a billion dollars, should not be able to cut off the hydro of vulnerable persons during the dead of winter.

1340

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY IN LONDON

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I want to rise today to bring attention to a recent comment by Mr Dennis DesRosiers. He is the leading automotive industry analyst.

My riding of London-Fanshawe has a large industrial base, and in London, the automotive industry alone employs one out of every five people. The automotive industry is very important in Ontario's economy and in London. It's one of the fundamental pillars of our economy.

While the automotive industry has seen a slight decline overall, DesRosiers pointed out that London's automotive-based economy is surging. The reason for this is the work of the mayor of London, Anne Marie DeCicco, and the London Economic Development Corp, who foresaw what sort of automotive industry would work in London and then went out and brought it there. They convinced leading automotive industries in Europe to come to London and open bases and factories to employ the people of London.

Without a strong automotive industry, the London economy would not work. I'm proud to stand today to recognize the efforts of Mayor Anne Marie DeCicco and the London Economic Development Corp on behalf of the people who are prospering in my riding.

REPORTING OF GUNSHOT WOUNDS

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Earlier today I tabled a resolution calling on the government to introduce legislation to require hospitals and physicians

to report gunshot wounds and knife injuries to their local police service. Recently this has become a major irritant in terms of police relations with hospitals and physicians, especially, I think it's fair to say, in the Toronto area. Some Toronto police officers have described a number of Toronto hospitals as "virtual safe havens for injured gunmen on the lam."

The Ontario Medical Association has recognized the gravity of the situation and last month issued a position statement urging action by the provincial government.

Most Ontarians would find it difficult to believe that physicians and hospitals are required to report patients considered unfit to drive, but when dealing with a wounded and possibly fleeing felon, they have no obligation to inform, let alone co-operate, with the police.

This is an untenable situation and I encourage the government to move quickly to institute a law requiring reporting and, at the same time, provide physicians and others with a comfort level regarding their ethical and statutory duties to patients.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARDS

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): Last night the Toronto ceremony for the 2003 Volunteer Service Awards was held at the Toronto Centre for the Arts.

The Ontario Volunteer Service Awards honour those Ontarians who have committed their time and energy to organizations for five years or more and youth who have volunteered for one organization for two years or more. Volunteers fill in the gaps in our society, they keep people from falling through the cracks, but often they're not recognized. These awards give people an opportunity to be recognized for their work.

At this year's ceremony, 51 residents of Don Valley West were honoured. I'd like to bring the Legislature's attention to five of them who have volunteered for 25 years or more with one organization: Ruby Chapman, who has volunteered for 30 years at the Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre; Jalou Kooper, who has volunteered for 25 years with the Zoroastrian Society of Ontario; Kassamali Ahmed Dawood, who has volunteered for 30 years with the Ismaili Muslims home and hospital visitation committee; Marjorie Ribble, who has volunteered for 30 years at Nisbet Lodge; and Ethel Wakayama, who has volunteered for 25 years with the art and culture program at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. I don't think we can underestimate the contribution that these people make, and I'd like to thank all Ontarians who volunteer their service.

FEDERAL LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): It's a great privilege for me to rise in my place and announce that our caucus is going to induct the first lifetime achievement award in the Liberal promise-breakers club. This is

awarded to someone who has made a career of breaking promises and not fulfilling election campaign commitments.

Could I have the envelope please, Mr Runciman? Thank you. Who will this be?

Interjections.

Mr Baird: Just pay attention. The winner is the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien on his last day in office. This individual has made a career of misleading voters and not fulfilling campaign commitments. He has broken his promise to renegotiate the free trade agreement. He has broken the promise to scrap the GST. He has broken his campaign promise to “appoint an independent ethics commissioner.” He has broken his campaign commitment to say, “My decision to cancel the”—

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): On a point of order, Speaker: I don’t want to catch the member in full stream, but I heard the words “misleading voters.” I wondered whether that terminology is parliamentary or not.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I didn’t hear the word, but if the word is there and you would like to withdraw it, that’s fine.

Mr Baird: I did use the word, but he’s not a member of the House. The rule says, you’re not allowed to mislead—could I speak to the point before you rule?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr Baird: There were 30 seconds on the clock.

The Speaker: You go ahead. I’ll tell you when the time is up.

Mr Baird: He broke his campaign commitment when he said, “My decision to scrap the EH-101 and Pearson Airport deals won’t cost taxpayers a cent.” He said that he would want a scandal-free government and that he would sell the government’s flying Taj Mahal.

Congratulations to 40 years of breaking promises in Ottawa. Thank goodness Mr Chrétien is on his way out the door. We’re beginning to see a brighter future in Ottawa thanks to my colleague the member for Leeds-Grenville.

SUDBURY REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): In the spirit of Christmas I ask the Liberal government: Ho, ho, ho, where’s the dough for the Sudbury Regional Hospital? That’s right, where’s the money to pay for 85% of the construction costs for the Sudbury Regional Hospital as advocated by the member for Sudbury during the election campaign?

On September 9, the member told the Sudbury Star, “Our job is to advocate what we believe in, which is an 85/15 split. We will not deviate from that.” I agree, just as I agreed with the member when he told the Sudbury Star on August 22, “We will be back here, demanding that this government”—Conservative at the time—“live up to an 85/15 split.” Both the member for Sudbury and I are on the public record on more than one occasion calling on the previous Conservative government to

recognize our hospital as a regional hospital and fund an increased share of construction costs. Both of us have specifically referenced an 85%/15% split of the costs.

The member’s party got elected to government, and now it’s time to deliver. Our community was asked to raise \$17.5 million, and we raised \$23 million. We can’t afford to fundraise any more, nor should the hospital be forced into a mortgage scheme to cover higher construction costs, because I believe that finding the money for mortgage payments will come at the expense of hospital jobs and programs for patients.

Christmas is upon us. I say to the Liberals, give our community something to celebrate. Announce that you will fund 85% of the construction costs of the Sudbury Regional Hospital.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE

ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on finance and economic affairs and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

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

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be adopted? I heard a “no.”

All those in favour, say “aye.”

All those against, say “nay.”

I think the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1349 to 1354.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise to be counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Duguid, Brad	Parsons, Ernie
Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Peterson, Tim
Bentley, Christopher	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Fonseca, Peter	Qadri, Shafiq
Bountrogiani, Marie	Gerretsen, John	Racco, Mario G.
Bradley, James J.	Gravelle, Michael	Ramal, Khalil
Brotten, Laurel C.	Hoy, Pat	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Smitherman, George
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Sorbara, Greg
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Takhar, Harinder S.
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Van Bommel, Maria
Craiton, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	Oraziotti, David	

The Speaker: All those against, please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Baird, John R.
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Chudleigh, Ted
Dunlop, Garfield
Flaherty, Jim
Hampton, Howard

Hardeman, Ernie
Jackson, Cameron
Kormos, Peter
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill

O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Scott, Laurie
Tascona, Joseph N.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth

Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Chudleigh, Ted
Dunlop, Garfield
Flaherty, Jim
Hampton, Howard
Hardeman, Ernie

Kormos, Peter
Marchese, Rosario
Martel, Shelley
Miller, Norm
Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John

Runciman, Robert W.
Scott, Laurie
Tascona, Joseph N.
Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 53; the nays are 24.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Thursday, December 4, 2003, the bill is now ordered for third reading.

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON JUSTICE AND SOCIAL POLICY

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice and social policy and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill 4, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 with respect to electricity pricing / Projet de loi 4, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario à l'égard de l'établissement du coût de l'électricité.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be received and adopted?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have got it.

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

The division bells rang from 1358 to 1403.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise and be counted.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic
Arthurs, Wayne
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bountrogianni, Marie
Bradley, James J.
Broten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Chambers, Mary Anne V.
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Crozier, Bruce
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dombrowsky, Leona

Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jeffrey, Linda
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol

Oraziotti, David
Parsons, Ernie
Peterson, Tim
Phillips, Gerry
Qaadri, Shafiq
Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Smitherman, George
Sorbara, Greg
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those against, please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Baird, John R.

Hudak, Tim
Jackson, Cameron

Ouellette, Jerry J.
Prue, Michael

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 26; the nays are 25.

Interjections.

Clerk of the House: It's 56. Sorry. I'll take it from the top: The ayes are 56; the nays are 25.

The Speaker: There is still hope, eh?

The ayes are 56 and the nays are 25. I declare the motion carried.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Thursday, December 4, 2003, the bill is ordered for third reading.

Interjection: Point of order.

The Speaker: If it's the introduction of anyone, could you wait until I just complete this?

MINISTER OF ENERGY'S REMARKS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Yesterday, the member for Burlington, Mr Jackson, rose on a point of order respecting certain remarks made by the Minister of Energy. I beg to inform the House that I have had an opportunity to review the statement made by the minister and can find nothing out of order.

VISITORS

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's my pleasure to welcome constituents of mine who are visiting Queen's Park for the first time: Camil and Lise Piché, accompanied by my wife, Gisèle.

Mr Piché has given over 30 years of his leisure time to minor hockey in Embrun. He also organized, in 1970, the largest minor hockey tournament in our country. Welcome to Mr Piché.

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Just an introduction of two Hamiltonians: Jeff Ballantyne from Hamilton Health Sciences Corp and Judy Mintz, my favourite Tory/Liberal in the whole country.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to take this opportunity as well to welcome and introduce two directors of the Toronto Police Association who are in our gallery: Tom Foude and Terry Nunn. Welcome.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's my pleasure to introduce Patricia Bregman and Neil McGregor, who are with the Canadian Mental Health Association. What they observe here today will no doubt appear in publications for many months to come.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it a point of order?

Let me listen carefully for this point of order now.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask all members to join me in welcoming the grade 10 civics students from a great high school in my riding, the home of the Huskies, Stratford Northwestern Secondary School, who are in both galleries.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to ask the House to join me in welcoming two members from Mississauga West paying their first visit to this House, Bruce and Janice Fligg, who participated in a fundraising drive on behalf of the Dam to aid youth in our riding. They are sitting here in the visitors' gallery. I'd like you to welcome them.

1410

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Hopefully you'll want to join me to welcome the Ontario Student Trustees Association. They are here with us in the gallery. They're coming from across the province to attend this session.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): So nobody feels unwelcome, I'd like to welcome all those people that weren't mentioned earlier.

The Speaker: Since we're in the festive season and since we have put away points of order, does anybody else want to welcome anybody else? Even those we have missed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CELLULAR PHONES), 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (TÉLÉPHONES CELLULAIRES)

Mr O'Toole moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 23, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of cell phones and other equipment while a person is driving on a highway / Projet de loi 23, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour interdire l'utilisation de téléphones cellulaires et d'autres équipements pendant qu'une personne conduit sur une voie publique.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Should the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have got it.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): As many members here would know—and new members, this is, I think, the fourth time I've introduced this bill. It really addresses the broader issue of driver distraction. It also prohibits

the use of hand-held cellphones while operating a motor vehicle. People know that it's a privilege to operate a motor vehicle and have a drivers license. It's not a right. Our responsibility is to keep our eyes on the road, our hands on the wheel and our mind on the job.

I should indicate that I've spoken to Minister Takhar about this legislation and would be happy to see it become government legislation. I know Mr Takhar cares very much about road safety, but this is simply the right thing to do now, and I ask the minister to make this government legislation.

ELECTRICITY AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉLECTRICITÉ

Mr Cameron Jackson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 24, An Act to amend the Electricity Act, 1998 / Projet de loi 24, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité.

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

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): This bill, as I stated earlier in statements, replaces sections of the Electricity Act. A distributor of electricity in Ontario is prohibited from shutting off the distribution of electricity during the period that begins on November 11 and ends on March 31, of the following year, or during any other period described by regulation.

A distributor that shuts off the distribution of electricity during a period in which it is prohibited from doing so must restore the distribution without charge and compensate any person who suffers a loss as a result of this prohibited shutoff of their hydro during winter.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA PUBLICITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

Mr Phillips moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising / Projet de loi 25, Loi concernant la publicité gouvernementale.

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

Mr Phillips?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'm honoured to introduce the Government Advertising Act as part of our pledge to deliver positive change for Ontario. The bill, if passed, would fulfill our commitment to ban partisan advertising, and I will be speaking more fully about this during ministers' statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): It's an honour to stand before the Legislature this afternoon. Today, as part of our pledge to deliver positive change, I introduced groundbreaking legislation, legislation we believe is the first of its kind in North America and perhaps in the world. The Government Advertising Act, 2003, if passed, will ban partisan government advertising.

This legislation is the central part of our democratic renewal initiative. It's a priority of this government and, if I may say, it's a high priority of our Premier, who spoke strongly, often during the campaign and before, against partisan government advertising during his days in opposition.

This bill helps fulfill a pledge he made and we made to work to restore public faith in our democratic institutions, to strengthen our democracy, to make government more accountable, transparent and fiscally responsible.

Partisan government advertising is the expensive, paid advertising on television, radio, billboards and in print that is used to promote politicians and political parties instead of informing the public. Partisan advertising cost taxpayers millions of dollars under the previous government. This kind of waste must stop. Under this bill, if passed, this waste will stop.

If this legislation is passed, the days of finding a glossy partisan booklet in your mailbox, a glossy booklet that your tax dollars paid for, would be gone for good.

Let me provide some details of this groundbreaking bill.

First, the Government Advertising Act, 2003, would, if passed, require the office of the Provincial Auditor to pre-screen proposed government advertising. We are confident that the Provincial Auditor as an independent officer of the Legislature is best suited to take on this role.

The proposed legislation includes strict standards the auditor would apply in the review of advertising. The ad must be a reasonable means to accomplish the following: to inform the public about policies, programs or services; to inform the public of their rights and responsibilities; to encourage or discourage specific social behaviours; to promote Ontario, or any part of it, as a good place to live, work, invest or study. Those are standards. All ads must include a statement that they were paid for by the government of Ontario.

The bill also dictates that a primary objective of the ad must not be to foster a positive impression of a governing party or a negative impression of any person or group critical of the government.

As well, under the proposed legislation, the name, voice or image of members of the executive council

could not appear in advertising directed at an Ontario audience.

The bill does exclude certain items such as advertising in respect of urgent health or safety issues or advertising required by law. We want the government to be accountable, but we don't want to interfere with the government's need to communicate urgent information to the public in a timely manner.

What is critical is that any advertisement deemed by the Provincial Auditor to promote partisan interest would never see the light of day and the auditor's decision would be final.

1420

To strengthen awareness and compliance with this bill we will develop a code of conduct in advertising to apply to all ministers, including their ministries and their staff. We will let the public judge us.

The Provincial Auditor will report on any examples of non-compliance with this bill in his or her annual report to the Legislature. He or she will also report on the total cost of advertising, subject to this legislation, and paid for by taxpayers, so that Ontarians know how their advertising dollars are being spent.

Every dollar spent on partisan advertising is a dollar less for our classrooms, our health care system and our water inspectors. Every dollar spent on partisan advertising is a dollar wasted. This must stop and this will stop.

With this bill we are taking our government in a new and better direction. We are delivering real, positive change. Further, we're taking an important step forward in renewing our democracy by bringing greater transparency and accountability to everything we do as a government.

In closing, we are putting principle and public interest over partisanship in introducing this groundbreaking legislation. I would urge all members to support this important legislation.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Speaker: I seek unanimous consent to allow a representative from the third party to speak for up to five minutes in response to the ministerial statement.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to respond to Mr Phillips, who, over the last number of years, I've had the privilege of working with on committee. I'm pleased to see him in the new role as Chair of Management Board. I'm a little surprised he's not in finance, but that's between him and the Premier.

In specific terms, I'm alarmed that this is a good example where communications are an important asset and responsibility of government. In this case here, I should tell you that I found out about this about an hour ago; in fact, it was delivered here in the House. So the opportunity to respond in context is somewhat at a disadvantage. It's a good example of government not advising people of the importance of—

Interjections.

The Speaker: When the Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet was giving his statement, it was very quiet on this side and they listened attentively. I expect the same courtesy to be offered to the member for Durham, who is making the response.

Mr O'Toole: The overall impression that was implied here was that there was some misuse of government money. I want to set the record straight. If one looks at the history here—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you for that reaction. They knew that I would come up with the numbers. If I look to the history—with the very brief time I had, I looked at between 1985 and 1990. The average spending on advertising by the then Liberal government under Peterson—it's your brother, I think—\$71.2 million. If I look at the NDP—there are so few of them left—how effective was the advertising when they spent \$70 million? And between 1995 to 2000—

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): Look what happened to you.

Mr O'Toole: That's an excellent question, Lou. Between 1995 and 2001, we spent \$58.3 million. The point I'm making here is the advertising was effective because you listened.

I can tell you that it's important for governments to communicate with the people of Ontario. There were a number of important changes that were implemented during our term of government. Many of the changes were well needed and were overlooked for a long time.

When you think of the important initiatives that our government brought forward, and the free flu vaccine is just one example, it's important to inform the people that these are measures the government is taking—not to mention SARS, West Nile and BSE. To notify Ontario citizens of important changes like education changes and reform in health care and our new university expansion—these are appropriate communications which the people of Ontario, at the end of the day, are actually paying for.

As a matter of fact, upon further examination of the brief remarks made by Mr Phillips, it appears there may indeed be some loopholes here—I knew if I looked long enough. I only hope they don't retain the former auditor of the province to perform this function. It sounds to me like the auditor may not be the person; it may be some other appointed person, which again would remind me of—

Interjection: John Manley.

Mr O'Toole: Well, it sort of reminds me of the Radwanski federal privacy commissioner kind of appointment, heaven forbid.

I will say there are important initiatives the government should advertise, and if they don't, they're denying people access to information.

If you look at his second statement, he says the executive council would not appear in advertising directed at Ontario audiences. This would leave the impression that

you'll be advertising in Buffalo or New York. In fact, Mr McGuinty probably started it yesterday while trying to ring the bell at the New York Stock Exchange, which again was an abysmal failure.

Mr Speaker, you have my assurance that we'll be keeping a close eye on not just Mr Phillips but on this government as they go forward. We've had two evidences today of broken promises with Bill 2, which is a record tax increase of \$4.1 billion, as well as breaking their promise on the electricity charge. Next week we'll be dealing with a broken promise on auto insurance. We should be advertising about your broken promises.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): On behalf of New Democrats, I want to draw the attention of people across Ontario to yet another loophole in legislation, a loophole so large you could drive a convoy of Mack trucks through it.

I remember when sanctimonious Liberals used to stand in this House and say of the former Conservative government that their advertising on Buffalo television, on Detroit television and on CNN was the crack cocaine of partisan political advertising, that it was the most egregious misuse of government money and that it certainly should be outlawed. Yet when we look at this bill, subsection 6(2), what does it say? It says that none of this applies if the advertising is directed at an audience outside Ontario, which means that the people of Ontario—

Interjections.

Mr Hampton: I don't think the Liberals want to hear this.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. I'll give you your time.

This front bench is really noisy today. I'd like to hear the member for Kenora-Rainy River's response.

Mr Hampton: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think the Liberals are a bit upset at learning of this loophole.

What it means is that the people of Ontario will be treated to partisan advertising on CNN, on their favourite Buffalo channel, and of course they'll be able to say, "Oh, that doesn't apply under the law."

Secondly, there are some even bigger loopholes here. I remember when Liberals used to rant that if the former government wanted to put partisan advertising on, then the Conservative Party should pay for it. I was looking for a section in this bill that said that if the Speaker found that some of the government's advertising was partisan, the Liberal Party would pay for it. Is that there? No, it isn't. In fact, there is no penalty section whatsoever in this bill. All the auditor gets to do is to say in his huge report on one page that the government has breached the rules on partisan advertising, but there is no penalty whatsoever.

1430

This is yet again a government that says they're practising democratic renewal, but there are enough loopholes in this legislation—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Hampton: —that you could drive several convoys of Mack trucks through it.

Speaker, I want to note something else. As I read the legislation, this takes you entirely out of the picture. If a member of the Legislature wants to rise on a point of order or a point of privilege from now on, and argue that a government ad is partisan, you have been taken completely out of the picture. In other words, we won't be able, as opposition members, to raise that point because it says specifically this is now under the ambit and the authority of the auditor. Speaker, I think you should be very concerned with this legislation because it effectively takes away your capacity to say, for example, that partisan legislation is an affront to the Legislature or an affront to the members of the House.

In concluding, I want to say to people across Ontario, what is the difference between this much-ballyhooed bill, this most boasted bill, and what the Conservatives were able to do? Not much at all.

The auditor can find that an ad is partisan, but he can't do anything about it. He can't order it to be struck from television. All he can do is say in his report that on page such-and-such the Liberal government breached the rule against partisan advertising. Will the Liberal Party be forced to pay for advertising if it's found partisan? No. Will the Liberal government be prohibited from advertising on American television that just happens to slip over the border and engage Ontario audiences? No.

All of the things the Liberals used to complain about with respect to the Conservatives remain in this bell, but at least the Conservatives were honest enough to say that they were engaging in partisan advertising. Not so with this outfit.

The Speaker: Let me see if I can set the tone for the next session of this Parliament now.

Interjections.

The Speaker: The member from Kenora-Rainy River, please come to order. Thank you so much. It's so kind of you.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is to the Minister of Health. Two weeks ago you stood in this House and introduced Bill 8, Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, under the guise of eliminating two-tier and creeping privatization. What you did not say to the people in the province of Ontario was that this bill was going to limit their access to health care, made no guarantee regarding wait times, and contained very dangerous breaches of privacy rights that allow you, the minister, to collect, use and disclose personal information.

I would say to the minister, did you not understand the consequences of this bill, or were you trying to keep from

the people in this province the fact that this bill, rather than committing to the future of medicare, was going to seriously undermine your government's commitment to medicare? Because that's what the stakeholders and the lawyers are saying now: you put that in jeopardy.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to respond to a question from the member and tell her that the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, Bill 8, demonstrates very much our commitment to the future of medicare.

You talk about wait times. Wait times are going to be dealt with by the Ontario Health Quality Council and dealt with by the actions of this government. In part, our support for the National Health Council deals with this issue.

With respect to the bill, it is a comprehensive bill. Unlike your government, which jammed every bill through without the opportunity for consultation, without the opportunity for any work at committee, what we've committed to, right from the get-go, and what I've had the opportunity to convey to some stakeholders this week, is our very strong determination to work with the committees of this Legislature to ensure that the legislation that comes forward that we would propose to this House be passed at third reading will be a bill which all members of the House can be proud of.

Mrs Witmer: I would remind the minister opposite that, as minister, you have an obligation to understand the consequences of legislation that is being introduced. It now appears that this Bill 8 has serious drafting errors. I would just say to you that it does contain provisions which would permit you, as minister, to collect, use and disclose personal information. You know that this constitutes fundamental breaches of privacy rights and should immediately be withdrawn. Are you prepared to do so?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'll remind you that you're the minister who did just that. The fact is, your government failed when you were the government in bringing forward privacy legislation, and you'll see no such failure from our government. We'll be moving forward with legislation that will adequately protect the health privacy of Ontarians. That's a commitment that I offer to the government which failed to do so when you had the honour of being the government in this province. We will fulfill that obligation as we attempt to clean up the very many messes that you, as Minister of Health, were responsible for.

Mrs Witmer: I would remind the minister opposite that he is now responsible. You promised throughout the election campaign that you were going to improve accessibility to health care. You committed to the future of medicare.

We now learn, as we read from the Ontario Hospital Association legislative update, that indeed you are restricting accessibility to health care services. You are making no commitment with respect to wait times. By removing the requirement of the minister acting in the

public interest, the minister is less accountable to the public in ensuring the accessibility of health services in the community where the hospital is located. This is a serious breach of a key principle in the Canada Health Act. Why did you not, before you introduced this bill, understand the consequences of what your bill will do?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I say to the honourable member that the responsibility for determining the consequences of the bill are not to be determined only by you standing in your place and reading from a stakeholder's representation.

I've committed to the Ontario Hospital Association, the Ontario Medical Association and other stakeholders our commitment to work with them, through the committee phase of this bill, to make sure the bill that is presented back for final passage upon recommendation of that committee to this Legislature will be a bill of which all members can be proud.

If the member has very certain and specific recommendations that she'd like to make, I would ask her to pass those along. We will take a good look at them and make sure the committee does as well, making sure we deliver to the people of this province a commitment to the future of medicare which builds on the principles of the Canada Health Act, which includes accountability, and which includes the Ontario Health Quality Council, which will be a very important opportunity for Ontarians to see just how their health care system is performing.

1440

VIDEO CAMERAS IN POLICE VEHICLES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Premier. Premier, yesterday you and your community safety minister connected the placement of video cameras in police cars with racial profiling. Our government was in the process of piloting cameras in cars as an officer safety issue, not to identify police officers as bigots. There are 365 days in the year, and your minister chose to make the video camera announcement on exactly the same day the Human Rights Commission report came out.

Premier, you and your minister have tarnished the reputation of each and every police officer in this province by suggesting that this pilot is linked to racial profiling. Will you apologize in this House to the men and women in blue who put their lives on the line 24 hours a day for you, your family, and every other citizen in this province?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to thank the member for his question. I want to begin by cautioning the member opposite against using this issue as a way to exploit what could be a very controversial and divisive matter. I want to begin as well by thanking our police officers, who day in and day out put their lives on the line to protect the public safety and the well-being of our families.

This is not about taking sides; it's about finding ways to make progress. I had an opportunity earlier today to

speak with Chief Fantino. I've invited him to sit down with us. We're not going to be caught up in some kind of exchange through the media. We think it's important to sit down together, to allow cooler heads to prevail, and to ensure that we work together to build a strong, caring society.

Mr Dunlop: Premier, I can't stress enough how disrespectful it is for police officers to be unfairly linked to racial profiling. Here's a quote from Brian Adkin, president of the Ontario Provincial Police Association, which appeared in the press release your minister was bragging about just yesterday. One thing he didn't say was that the headline of the press release said, "Ontario Provincial Police Association Warns Against Police Profiling."

I'd like to read a comment that Mr Adkin made from the press release. It says, "The commission asks Ontarians to accept as a fact the existence of systemic 'racial profiling' and suggests that policemen and women are among its greatest perpetrators. We reject this, and suggest that the commission itself is contributing to 'police profiling': the belief that police unfairly target lawbreakers only if they are members of visible minorities. This is not true and is very offensive to my members."

Furthermore, my staff member spoke to Brian Adkin just this afternoon, and he told her that the OPPA agrees with the installation of cameras in police cruisers solely for officers' safety and obtaining evidence. Premier, why is your government trying to—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. When I stand, I would like you to sit, because you have run out of time asking your question.

Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the minister is very eager to speak to this issue.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member is trying to imply things that aren't there. Just so you'll know, Commissioner Norton's report suggested that police cars should be equipped with video cameras. All I responded to was the fact that we are starting a pilot project that will put 12 cameras into Kenora and 22 into Toronto. This is the OPP. That is all the comment was about. I had no comment to make about racial profiling.

But you should also know that Chief Algar of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police supports this position. Chief Bevan of Ottawa supports this position. The chiefs of police of Ontario support this position. It's a situation where it is deemed to be an effective police tool. It is there for the safety of the police officers as well as the safety of the citizens who interact with them. It is a safety measure only, and it has nothing to do with the implications that you're putting forward.

Mr Dunlop: It's funny; we didn't actually make that link. The link came from those two people over there.

Our government spent eight years supporting police officers, building their morale and their confidence. Are you trying to destroy the morale of police officers before Christmas of this very season?

Hon Mr Kwinter: You should know, if you've followed any of the reports, that I have been very supportive of the police. I can tell you that I also had a conversation with Chief Fantino this afternoon. He understands exactly that we are supportive of the police. We respect what they do. They put their lives on the line every day for the citizens of Ontario. We support them. We want to make sure that we prevent them from being in harm's way, and this is one of the ways of doing it.

SAFE SCHOOLS LEGISLATION

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is to the Minister of Education. Yesterday you chose to make a comment on racial profiling in the school system and the merits of the Safe Schools Act. You said, "The problems stem from school principals not using proper discretion before expelling a student, not with the act itself."

School principals in Ontario, Minister, demonstrate exemplary leadership in education. They held an excellent conference in Toronto recently. I understand you attended, and I attended as well. They had a principals' day here at Queen's Park. I assume you hold the same degree of respect for principals in Ontario that we do, and I assume that you would not make such a blanket, serious accusation without clear and compelling evidence.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Flaherty: What is that clear and compelling evidence in support of your accusation against all principals in Ontario?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I say back to the member opposite that you are not referencing the comments I made in any fashion related to what I said on the subject. In fact, I talked about and was asked about the Safe Schools Act, referenced twice in the last two days, once to do with people with special needs, the other to do with allegations of racial profiling. I said we have no statistics on racial profiling; we have nothing to say on that subject.

On the subject of sometimes people with special needs being put in a situation of leaving classrooms, of having to leave schools, there are exemptions allowed under the act, very clearly, to exempt them. Sometimes, for example, certain syndromes have children swearing and that is actually part of their disability, and yet the Safe Schools Act, if strictly applied, could cause them to leave. That is the comment I made and that's a comment we are exploring with the principals' associations. I met with each of the principals' associations in the last few weeks and we are working closely together for the betterment of students in this province.

Mr Flaherty: Minister, I did not hear the clear and compelling evidence, in fact I heard no evidence, in support of what you said. What you said was, and I will quote it again, not what you just were talking about. You were asked about minority students and you said, "The problems stem from school principals not using proper discretion before expelling a student, not with the act

itself." Will you apologize to the principals of Ontario for that accusation?

Hon Mr Kennedy: To the member opposite, again he insists on trying to find some kind of aspersion that doesn't exist. There are no statistics that our ministry keeps—

Mr Flaherty: Why did you say that?

Hon Mr Kennedy: Member, if you want to hear the answer, I'm happy to give it to you. You may not like it because you want to exploit situations. You haven't stood up yet in this House, member, for public education or for anybody in it.

As the minister, what we say back to you, member, is we do not subscribe to your politics of phony division, of phony attacks on people. We have principals and teachers in this province prepared to reckon with their issues, with any problems they have, and we're prepared not to cast aspersions on them and not to reinforce any cast by the member opposite, but instead to work with them. My office spoke to each of the principals' associations this morning to make sure there was no misunderstanding, and I can assure this House that there is none on the part of the principals of this province, being perpetrated by the member.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): My question is to the Chair of Management Board. For the past eight years the Harris-Eves government has spent tens of millions of dollars every year on partisan government advertising. That money should have gone to our classrooms, to our health care system, to our water inspectors and to transportation. My constituents, the constituents of Willowdale, do not want their money wasted on self-promotional advertising. They want it stopped. Minister, will your bill absolutely ensure that partisan government advertising is a thing of the past?

1450

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I thank the member from Willowdale for his question. Let me be very clear, because there was some confusion in the response to the bill. All advertising, whether it's run in Ontario or run in the United States or run in China, must be pre-cleared by the Provincial Auditor. None of it can run until it's pre-cleared, and the auditor must certify that the advertising is not partisan, regardless of where it runs. He must measure it against the clear criteria we've laid out here. It must not run—and he will not allow it to run—if the primary objective is to advance the reputation of the governing party. Wherever it runs, the ad has to be cleared by the Provincial Auditor, and if it's partisan in any way, it won't run regardless of where it is.

Mr Zimmer: Minister, the leader of the New Democratic Party seems to have some concerns about this bill. He claimed that this bill would allow broadcast of taxpayer-funded government advertising on American television. Whether it is CTV or CNN, partisan govern-

ment advertising is wrong. Minister, will your bill outlaw broadcasts of partisan government ads on American television?

Hon Mr Phillips: Again, just so the public is clear—and I'd urge the public to judge this bill against what the government did for eight years, spending \$40 million a year on advertising—no ad can run, wherever it is, if it's partisan. The independent Provincial Auditor has the criteria for laying it out. The public should be aware of this. It will be submitted to the Provincial Auditor. Someone said, "Will you pay back the money that you spent on it?" You can't run it. It can't run, so no money will be spent on it. Let's recognize that this is groundbreaking legislation. Nowhere in the world has this kind of legislation. It's time that we put a stop to the partisan advertising that we've seen for so many years here in Ontario.

HYDRO RATES

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is to the Premier and it's about his broken promise to maintain a rate cap for consumer protection in Ontario. Earlier today I raised in the House the story of Mr and Mrs Hawkins, who are facing a 32% increase in their hydro. Mrs Hawkins is being sustained by life-sustaining equipment that runs on electricity 24 hours a day. This woman will die without being able to have sufficient electricity and affordable electricity in her home.

Premier, a year ago on CFRB you said, "We have to maintain the rate of relief for consumers. I have had the terrible responsibility to raise horror stories in the Legislature, people who have been put in a desperate position because they simply can't afford to pay their hydro. So we've got to maintain this rate relief for our ratepayers."

My question to you is this: Why is it that on October 2, after all the ballots were counted, you dropped the hands of the Hawkins family on Main Street and parked your new-found compassion on Bay Street, with the distribution companies in this province?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I will refer this matter to the Minister of Energy.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): With respect to the individual case, if the member would provide me with the details, I will have a look at it.

First of all, the new price won't kick in until April 1, so we'll have time to look at the individual case and make adjustments. Number 2, the way we've structured this is to deal specifically with people in these types of situations. Number 3, I would suggest to the member that indeed for those people who require electricity for life-supporting systems such as his constituent, such as my mother for instance who has the same situation, I would submit that it's important that we have supply of energy. With the artificial price cap, it was making it virtually impossible to attract any new generation into Ontario.

So I'll look at the individual case. The price regime we have looked at is designed specifically to ensure that

people like the family you raised are not negatively impacted. The Premier's very clear direction was to make sure that we have a regime that does take those issues into account. This government is showing compassion for people like that, something your government never did.

Mr Jackson: The protection was put in our legislation, which you are now cancelling. Yesterday you instructed your Liberal members to vote against the amendments that we brought in that would protect the Hawkins family. And in public hearings you actually suggested—in your mother's case—that there should be more charitable organizations to help out people in the community. That's on the record.

Again, the Premier should be aware that his high-priced consultant who told him that the accumulated cost of the cap has been \$800 million—would the Premier be aware of the fact that \$655 million had been spent last year, paid for, and the books were balanced. This year, the current rate cap is projected to cost only \$100 million to \$120 million. The fact is, you have a bill this week that will generate \$800 million more by increasing taxes, and yet you could protect consumer in this province for \$130 million, because the cap is working, and you know it's going to work. This is about a billion dollars you're going to give to distribution companies. It's about your friends on Bay street; you've abandoned your friends on Main street.

Hon Mr Duncan: Just to set the record straight, first of all, Mr Peters, the former Provincial Auditor, indicated that the costs going forward for this year were \$223 million, not the figure Mr Jackson outlined.

To suggest that this would be revenue neutral is just to be in la-la land. The way the price cap was struck by the previous government it will be impossible, because under their plan, we would be continuing to subsidize those retailers at a higher price. Therefore, we can project with certainty that there was no revenue neutrality associated with their proposal, even if market rates were to have dropped. What we're doing is getting rid of a bad piece of public policy that needed to be changed in order to ensure the future supply of electricity in this province. I regret that the member opposite's amendments didn't pass, but the fact is, their policy failed this province and we're fixing it. We've changed direction once and for all.

CLASS SIZE

Mr Vic Dhillon (Brampton West-Mississauga): My question is directed to the Minister of Education. In a letter received by my office, Brampton resident Cathy Allen expressed her deep concern with the issue of class sizes in Ontario. Ms Allen writes that she had previously brought the issue to the attention of the former member for my riding and that he had expressed concern over the issue. During a subsequent conversation with Ms Allen, that same member again agreed that something needed to be done to rectify the situation.

However, in spite of the fact that a cabinet minister in the previous government privately expressed repeated

concerns over a situation that they had both created and continued to make worse, that government failed to take meaningful action to address the over-crowding in Ontario's classrooms.

During the campaign, I, along with many of my colleagues, campaigned forcefully on the issue of class size in Ontario. Could the Minister of Education please let us know what actions our government will take to remedy this problem that the previous regime created with their callous attitude toward our schools and our children in the province?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I certainly want to say that we're prepared to address this issue as one of our most important priorities. This is an issue that we hope we can get an agreement on from all sides of the House. We cannot afford to have children to get lost in the crowd any longer. They need the one-on-one attention that comes with the pledge that we're making, and will be fulfilling, to have class sizes brought down to 20 children in primary grades, in the grades where all the research tells us we can make a difference in the lives of the children—in Ms Allen's class and in classes all across the province.

What we're saying is that this measure is important. In fact, we're working right now with the schools and school boards to plan exactly how it's going to be implemented, because we can't afford to delay in making sure that the students of the province have the advantage that small class size will bring them.

1500

Mr Dhillon: Minister, it's good to know that you're taking some action, but this is only one step. What else are you going to do to improve early education for the children in my riding?

Hon Mr Kennedy: We are looking at a range of measures. Unfortunately, not properly observed by previous governments was the fact that it's in the early years that we can make a difference that lasts for a lifetime. We believe that the early years class size cap will actually pay for itself by the time the kids graduate because there are higher achievement rates associated with those conditions. There are lower dropout rates, there are fewer discipline problems and better access for parents.

We will be training teachers to take advantage of the lower class sizes. We will be working with them on special remedial programs and other measures to improve literacy and numeracy in the early years. We will, in short, be doing what everyone has known for years is absolutely needed to advantage kids in this province, that has been taking place now in 20 US states, in Alberta, in BC and Quebec. Finally there's a government in Ontario that's going to pay attention to the needs of these kids and give the advantage that they need to succeed in the world.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Your government plans to repeal

the equity in education tax credit. Not only that, but they plan to do that retroactively. This is mean-spirited, draconian and outright hurtful to so many hard-working families across Ontario. This government falsely claims that the EETC drains money from the publicly funded schools.

Let's examine that in the case of Ms Lubna Ashraf, who lives in Mississauga. A single mother with two children, she pays all of her school taxes to support the public school system. Then she goes into her own pocket, with an annual income of \$35,000, sends both her daughters, Maryam in grade 1 and Mehreen in grade 3, to the Isna Islamic School. She budgeted this year based on the tax credit, based on the law of Ontario. Now, just before the holiday season, you propose to destroy that budgeting of a single mother with an income of \$35,000 a year. How can you justify that?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I can understand the former minister, now the member from Whitby-Ajax, asking that question because he was the author of the private school tax credit. He promoted it, notwithstanding that his Premier was against it, notwithstanding that the then Minister of Education was against it.

We made it very clear from the moment the bill was introduced that our priority was public education. We showed that priority, even within the first two months of government, when we announced \$112 million in public education for those most vulnerable and most at risk within the public system.

Mr Flaherty: This is another broken promise. This promise was to eliminate the tax credit for what they call "exclusive private schools." This is the exclusive "private school" that Ms Ashraf sends her two children to. What an inaccurate statement to the people of Ontario. You are accomplishing this, though: The only people in Ontario who will be able to send their children to independent schools will be rich people. Forget about the working families of Ontario that these Liberals used to talk about, caring about the working families in Ontario. There are 850 independent schools in this province; two thirds of them are attended by low- and modest-income families and their children.

They pay all their education taxes. Now you want to go into their pocket retroactively and deny them the right to send their children to Muslim schools, Jewish schools and Christian schools. It's wrong. You should not do this retroactively. How can you justify that?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I tell my friend from Whitby-Ajax that he now has the luxury of having it all ways. The other day he was arguing in this House that if we just rolled up our sleeves we'd be able to balance the budget this year. When we keep a campaign commitment to kill that independent school credit—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could I hear the minister's response? Thank you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: When we bring in measures that start to put our financial house back in order, my friend

from Whitby-Ajax starts complaining. I would just tell him that when I took the oath of office to do this job, it was my commitment to get Ontario's financial house back in order. I tell my friend from Whitby-Ajax that is a one-way street we will continue down until we succeed.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

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

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Agreed? Agreed.

Mr Hampton: My question is for the Premier. Today, hundreds of people who care deeply about medicare and about public hospitals came to Queen's Park to protest, because they see no difference between your Liberal P3 hospitals and the Conservative P3 hospitals. In fact, they held what they called the betrayal lunch, and here's the menu: three pea soup; "Et tu, Dalton?" Caesar salad; chicken à la Dalton; and for dessert, waffles.

Premier, explain to those people who work on the front lines of our hospitals and who know there is no difference between Liberal P3 hospitals and Conservative P3 hospitals why you broke your promise to end the construction of P3 hospitals in Ontario.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): If the leader of the NDP doesn't understand the distinction between the publicly owned, publicly controlled and publicly accountable hospitals that we have put in place, in contrast to what the former government put in place, then he's losing something which I believe is very clear to the people of Ontario. The people in Ottawa and in Brampton are delighted on two fronts: They are getting their desperately needed hospitals, and those hospitals will be publicly owned, publicly controlled and publicly accountable.

Mr Hampton: Well, Premier, here's the only difference I see: The Conservatives designed a concept that would be a 25-year lease-purchase, financed by private sector corporations that want to make lots of money on the financing, with lots of privatized services so they could make lots of money on that privatization. Your concept is, you just changed the 25-year lease-purchase into a 25-year mortgage, with private financing and lots of profits made on the private financing, and all kinds of private services with lots of profits made on those. At the end, the taxpayers of Ontario pay double, because it's essentially a private hospital.

Premier, if you think there's a difference, then table today in the Legislature the complete scheme for the hospital in Brampton and the hospital in Ottawa. Your Minister of Health said he would do that; he hasn't done it yet. If you think this isn't a P3 hospital, table the documents here today.

Hon Mr McGuinty: It's interesting to hear from the leader of the NDP, a party that has its hands all over the 407 privatization deal that has continued to take advantage of Ontario motorists, that he fails to understand the concept of public title. The public continues to own the

hospitals. We think that is very important, not only to the citizens of Ontario, but to the people of Ottawa and the people of Brampton. Let me say on behalf of our party and our government that we are proud of these hospitals; we are proud of the fact that we've been able to move ahead with them. Those hospitals will be built and, once again, they'll be publicly owned, publicly controlled and publicly accountable.

1510

HIGHWAY 410

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Brampton is the sixth-fastest growing city in Canada, with the annual growth rate doubling and sometimes tripling the rate of the GTA, but the infrastructure of the city is not keeping pace with the growth rate. The previous government made countless commitments to extend and complete Highway 410. A former Conservative member from Brampton assured our community that we would be driving on an expanded Highway 410 by summer 2004. Well, as has been the case with previous government promises, they were hollow. Their words have no force.

Minister, your own ministry documents state, "Existing traffic volumes to the north of present terminus of Highway 410 at Bovaird Drive result in significant congestion to the existing roadway network." We know the previous government ignored the needs of Brampton residents. Will you now commit to completing Highway 410?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First of all, I want to thank the honourable member for raising this question. I also want to thank the other members from the Brampton area for diligently following this project. Being a fellow member from the Peel region, I am very much aware of the needs of the Peel region, and I know this project is really important for the growth of the region and also to control the gridlock on the highways. Our government is prepared to move ahead with the Highway 410 project.

Mrs Jeffrey: Minister, I'm pleased and I'm proud that our government is committed to the construction of Highway 410. Can you please give my residents of Brampton Centre a timeline for the completion of this project.

Hon Mr Takhar: Let me give you some details about this project. The first phase of this project is under construction right now from Bovaird Drive to Sandalwood Parkway. We are going ahead with the design for the second phase—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. It seems to me many members here want to answer the question for him.

Hon Mr Takhar: For the second phase of this project we are going ahead with the design of the project. We are also moving ahead with the acquisition of the property required from the Sandalwood Parkway to Mayfield. As

a result, I will not be able to give you the exact dates for the completion of this project, but we are committed to moving ahead with this project in a fiscally responsible manner.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to make it very clear that our government announced that program in June—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I can see that the member for Oak Ridges misses his portfolio.

PREMIER'S VISIT TO NEW YORK CITY

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): My question is to the Premier. Mr Premier, today's National Post ran the headline "Consulate Apologizes for McGuinty Faux Pas." We've now had two consecutive days of media regarding your tale about what happened at the New York Stock Exchange. Mr Premier, 48 hours later have you yet apologized for your remarks?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'll give it to the member opposite; he certainly has an inclination for looking for mischief where there is none to be found.

Let me say once again that I was honoured to represent the people of Ontario in my recent visit to New York City. I was privileged to meet with representatives of the financial community. I assured them that ours is a strong and growing economy. I assured them that we are tackling our challenges head on, that we have made significant headway, that we will continue to work as hard as we can.

We're rolling up our sleeves in this province today. We're not pretending that we don't have fiscal challenges the way the past government did. They were pleased—in fact they were delighted—to receive that news. I look forward to returning shortly after our first budget has been introduced to deliver still more good news to further strengthen our trading relationship with our largest trading partner.

Mr Hudak: I appreciate your comments here in the assembly. Let me describe what I see as the problem. Your tale was described in a headline that appeared in the Kingston Whig Standard as: "McGuinty Suggests American Trade Ignorance Behind Big Apple Snub." Sadly, this fits an unfortunate pattern of behaviour by Liberal leadership and staff in Ottawa; for example, comments by Jean Chrétien, Herb Dhaliwal, Carolyn Bennett, Bonnie Brown, Françoise Ducros. These Liberals have used American-bashing to score points, and then they blame the media for blowing it out of proportion.

While you've told the assembly, the problem is that this causes accumulative damage to our relationship with our greatest trading partner.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Hudak: Yesterday you told the assembly that your tale was inaccurate. Mr Premier, I ask you to do the right thing and begin repairing the damage where it happened and apologize to the New York Stock Exchange. Will you do the right thing?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The last time I checked, they were still trading today at the New York Stock Exchange. Life apparently is going on. I'll tell you what the real damage is that the people with whom I met were concerned about. It's the \$5.6-billion deficit. That's the damage they are concerned about. What they are looking for is a solid plan to address that damage. I have committed to them, as I have committed to the people of Ontario, that we are rolling up our sleeves, we are getting cracking, we're going to deal with this particular challenge and we're going to clean up the mess that has been left behind by the former government. At the same time, we acknowledge, recognize and champion the very strong relationship that we have with the United States of America.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a question for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. Now that we are on the eve of Christmas shopping, consumers everywhere will avail themselves of the purchases on credit so readily available and advertised by financial institutions and merchants. However, most consumers are not aware that every new application for credit can lower consumer credit scores and consequently consumer's credit worthiness. Amazingly, as few as three credit applications could result in the consumer getting cut off from any further credit.

Joe Cordiano introduced legislation last year to ensure that consumers are not penalized every time a report is made. Consumers need protection from this problem. My question to the minister is as follows: How will the Ontario government address this important issue?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I thank the honourable member for Davenport, who has a true interest in helping consumers, not just in his own riding but throughout the province of Ontario.

We recognize the importance of a well-functioning consumer reporting system in Ontario. I am pleased to report that I will take a look at Mr Cordiano's private member's bill that was introduced in the previous Parliament. I'm going to refer it to our consumers advisory committee for their input, because we believe it's a very good advisory committee set up by the former minister. We think it's appropriate that we give consumers in this province greater protection when they're applying for credit. I thank the member for his interest.

Mr Ruprecht: Minister, I want to raise another issue. There are thousands of consumer files corrupted by incorrect information that can result in denial of credit. Removing incorrect credit information from consumer files may be a very lengthy and tedious procedure. It may take months, even years to remove non-factual, erroneous information from consumer files. In the United States, the Fair Credit Reporting Act stipulates that disputed information must be deleted from a consumer's file if the provider of information, such as a bank, does not confirm the information within 30 days of dispute.

Our Consumer Reporting Act does not have such provisions. It simply says that erroneous information be corrected “within a reasonable time,” which may be one month, six months or a year. Will you look into this matter in order to ensure that Canadian consumers can have the same rights as US citizens?

Hon Mr Watson: Obviously our ministry does take that issue very seriously. I don’t consider one year to remove erroneous information from a credit file to be, in my view, a reasonable time. I think we can do a better job, and I will certainly work with our ministry and with the honourable member and other members of the House who have concerns about having this blotch on a credit rating. We’ll get back to the honourable member early in the new year.

1520

NORTHERN TAX INCENTIVE ZONE

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier. I have previously asked the Minister of Northern Development and Mines about your government’s plans for northern tax incentive zones. The minister was not clear in his first attempt at an answer. What are your plans for the northern tax incentive zones?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I want to thank the member for the question. I am looking through my book for an appropriate answer. I can’t seem to find it, but let me speak to this in the absence of the minister and say that we look forward to working with our communities in northern Ontario. I also look forward to receiving these missives sooner when I stand up.

We are reviewing the tax incentive zone initiative, I can advise the member opposite. In addition to reviewing the status of the northern zone, the government is considering the role that tax incentive zones should play in southern regions of the province. So we continue to believe it is a good idea not only for the north, but we think it might have some application in the south.

Mr Miller: Premier, I appreciate the answer. I’m a little disconcerted that you had to refer to your book. It should be at the top of your mind. I can’t stress how important an issue this is in the north.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. The member is only expressing his concern. Would he put his question, please.

Mr Miller: I’d like to quote from a newspaper, from the North Bay Nugget:

“Confirmation about the Liberal government’s stance on the northern Ontario’s tax incentive zone, scheduled to begin January 1, was one of the chief concerns raised Wednesday at the North Bay Economic Development Commission meeting.”

People in the north are very concerned about this. It was an announcement made May 9 of this year to the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities. I can tell you, it was very well received. If you talk to northerners,

they think this is a very important initiative. I hope you’ll be very strong in supporting it.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me just say that having had the opportunity to visit the north countless times during the course of the past 13 years, but particularly in my capacity as Leader of the Opposition for some six years—they were desperate for the kind of change that we are bringing to the government of Ontario.

The former government left them behind, abdicated its responsibility. Things had gotten to such a deplorable state that they didn’t even have a minister from the north who was representing the north. We have made that change, at least.

We intend to move forward with this initiative, as well as many others, because we recognize the fundamental role, a role of importance, played by our communities that are located in northern Ontario.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: Maybe my address wasn’t exactly northern Ontario, but my grandfather and my great-grandfather were both—

Interjections.

The Speaker: You’re from the north, I can see. New question.

FLU IMMUNIZATION

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. My constituency office has been getting a lot of calls from people who are concerned about the latest outbreak of flu. I understand the current outbreak is the result of a strain called A-Fujian and that it may not be covered by the flu vaccine we’re currently using. People have real concerns when they have senior relatives and friends and young children and are reading about the number of people who are dying from the current outbreak. What can we tell our constituents about protecting themselves against the A-Fujian strain that may not be covered by the flu vaccine?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The member raises an important question with respect to flu vaccines and the strains of flu that are present in Ontario this year.

First, it’s important to note that although the Fujian strain may be present, it is not the only strain; it’s not that we only have one strain of the flu. Many of the deaths that have occurred this year are not related to the Fujian strain, which underscores the essential message to Ontarians that the very best way available to protect ourselves against the flu and against the impacts of it is to get the flu vaccine, which is made available through public health in each of the 37 different public health regions in our province, or get it through their doctor.

The very best evidence and the very advice we can offer to Ontarians is to take advantage of the free flu shots, the free vaccines in the province of Ontario. This is the very best protection against any strain of the flu that’s present in Ontario this year.

Mrs Van Bommel: My staff has certainly been encouraging all our constituents to get the flu vaccine as soon as possible. This is just the beginning of the flu season; we know it normally peaks later in the winter. Minister, can we assure our constituents that there is an adequate supply of flu vaccine available to us?

Hon Mr Smitherman: It's important that Ontarians know that the five million vaccines that were ordered at the beginning of the year have been supplemented with an additional order of 500,000; some 250,000 of those were recently shipped to our public health partners. Ontario has a stockpile and will continue to add to that stockpile. So I give the assurance to the people and to all members that Ontarians will be adequately protected and that we will have sufficient quantities of vaccines. We have a significant stockpile on hand and will be adding to that as required. We encourage all members to do what they can to encourage Ontarians to get their flu vaccination this winter.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think it would have been very appropriate of the Minister of Health to mention that the former Minister of Health made the vaccine freely available to Ontarians.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You could have made an excellent point if you were in your seat.

FOREIGN-TRAINED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): My question is to the Minister of Health. First of all, I want to congratulate the minister and all ministers on their appointments to cabinet, as well as yourself, Mr Speaker.

My question pertains to health workers in Ontario. I have a family in my riding whom I was recently able to assist to come into the riding—into Ontario—except for one member. We had to go through the Canadian consulate in the country of origin to get the individual out. Now that the individual is here, the federal government has issued a work permit for this individual to work in a carwash. The difficulty is, it's a qualified physician. Immigration will not issue landed immigrant status to this individual until the individual goes back to the country of origin, and of course we may not get the individual back out after they've gone back.

The reason I'm asking you this question, Minister, is that the individual cannot begin processing with the College of Physicians and Surgeons until they receive landed immigrant status. Are you working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the federal government to speed up this process so we can get these people working in Ontario?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): A really essential part of the member's question is to recognize that the difficulty his constituent is having is because that individual—I don't know if it's a man or a woman—does not have landed

immigrant status, which is essentially close to the equivalent of permanent residency in our country. As such, the agreements that were built with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and with the government he was involved with do depend on meeting the minimum standard of being a landed immigrant before they can access any of the programs that have been developed to try to make sure our international medical graduates are able to be deployed into the Ontario health system.

We recognize the need to enhance this capacity. My colleague the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration will work with our federal officials to make sure we're doing all we can to take advantage of these international medical graduates, who are so badly needed, especially in communities like the member of Oshawa's, which is currently under-resourced from this standpoint.

1530

Mr Ouellette: Minister, it's not just the physicians. Recently, the members from Durham, including a member of your own party, met with the nurses at a meeting in Oshawa. Their concern was that over the course of your mandate 6,000 nurses are going to be retiring. Your commitment was for 8,000 new nurses. How are you going to be able to fulfill those 14,000 net new nurses? Individuals from New Zealand who were at that meeting found it easier to get into Quebec and then come to Ontario. Minister, are you working with the nurses' association, and can you speed up that process as well?

Hon Mr Smitherman: We're working with all parties, including the federal government, to speed access to the province of Ontario and to the communities of Ontario with respect to foreign-trained professionals. I will note that I also had a recent letter from the chair of Durham region, Roger Anderson, and committed to meet with him as soon as I can.

Our government made specific commitments in our platform to address the shortage of physicians and nurses. I'm very confident we're going to be able to deliver on those commitments, not the least of which is by the early work that we're going to do to make sure a much higher percentage of nurses currently practising have the opportunity of full-time employment, something I think everyone will recognize is a serious deficiency in the current environment. This is an essential piece of the foundation, to be able to encourage more people to take up nursing so that we can graduate more nurses and so that we can access more foreign-trained nurses and deploy them in the various communities in Ontario that so desperately need their help.

DEVELOPMENT CHARGES

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. For several years, the people of Oakville have suspected that changes made to the Development Charges Act by the previous government have led to higher property taxes in Oakville. As a result of changes such as the reduction of soft services

and the exclusion of capital cost categories, many of our community facilities such as libraries, hockey rinks and transit buses are no longer covered by development charge funds.

Minister, my question is, will you look into the impact on our community facilities and public transit of the previous government's changes to the Development Charges Act?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors): I'd like to thank the member for his question. I know he's expressed his concerns, as have many other people as well, about the current status of the Development Charges Act. Those concerns regard, for example, the mandatory 10% reduction of the soft services and the exclusion of certain categories of capital costs and the required 10-year average service level standard. We're looking into the Development Charges Act right now. I've heard from many municipalities on this issue and I can assure the member that his concerns and the concerns of many other people will be taken into account when we take a look into it.

Mr Flynn: Thank you for the answer, Minister. Recreational facilities, libraries, public transit and public parks are vital to the Oakville community. We have seen the steady erosion of these facilities and services under the previous government. On behalf of my constituents, I request that changes be made to the Development Charges Act that will reinstate full funding for public transit and full funding for facilities at the current level, rather than at 10-year average levels. I would also request that the capital cost category be expanded to include parkland, hospitals and waste management services. Minister, will you consider my request for changes to the Development Charges Act?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: I would like to thank the member for his supplementary as well, because this is a very important issue, particularly in the fast-growing areas of this province.

As you know, and as the members of the public may know, the Development Charges Act, 1997—it was passed that year—allows municipalities to impose levies to pay for the growth of certain capital costs such as roads, water and waste water services, and public transit. There are currently about 159 out of the 448 municipalities that are collecting development charges under the act. Some of the proposals you recommend in your question and your supplementary were part of the old Development Charges Act that existed prior to 1997. This act was subsequently changed by the province, and it's high time now that we take another look into that act to see that the people of Ontario, and the developers in Ontario especially, pay the proper charges when they develop subdivisions and the various properties—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

VISITOR

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to take

this opportunity to introduce a special guest in the members' gallery east, the former president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and newly elected mayor of the municipality of Greenstone, Michael Power. Welcome, Michael.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I was informed by the Minister of Health that I had mistakenly said Carolyn Bennett, when I was referring to Carolyn Parrish, two MPs in Ottawa. I'd like to change the record and apologize to Mrs Bennett.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you very much.

PETITIONS

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the equity in education tax credit seeks to restore equity and parental choice to Ontario's education system;

“Whereas the equity in education tax credit allows those from lower-income homes to have the same opportunities as other students;

“Whereas families who choose to send their children to independent schools have to pay twice for their children's education;

“Whereas the majority of families who benefit from the equity in education tax credit come from lower- or middle-class homes;

“Whereas the United Nations has called on the government of Ontario to remedy the inequity in the education system...;

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

“To allow the equity in education tax credit to continue to be the law of the land in Ontario, and allow lower- and middle-income parents the privilege to send their children to independent schools if they so choose.”

I have signed my name.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition 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, parents, 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 be closed and that specifically the Liberal government will immediately halt the closure of Prince of Wales Public School in Barrie, Ontario."

I support the petition and affix my signature.

TUITION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Thank you very much for recognizing me on this very important petition. The students find that tuition fees have astronomically risen, and that's why the Canadian Federation of Students keeps on sending these petitions to us. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas average tuition fees in Ontario are the second-highest in Canada; and

"Whereas average undergraduate tuition fees in Ontario have more than doubled in the past 10 years; and

"Whereas tuition fees for deregulated programs have, in certain cases, doubled and even tripled; and

"Whereas Statistics Canada has documented a link between increasing tuition fees and diminishing access to post-secondary education; and

"Whereas four other provincial governments have taken a leadership role by freezing and reducing tuition fees;

"Therefore we, the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"(1) Freeze tuition fees for all programs at their current levels; and

"(2) Take steps to reduce the tuition fees of all graduate programs, post-diploma programs and professional programs for which tuition fees have been deregulated since 1998."

Since I agree with it wholeheartedly, I'm delighted to put my signature on this petition, and I know that other members would like to do it as well.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I have a petition in support of the independent school tax credit that reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government respected the right of parents to send their children to independent schools; and

"Whereas the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves government passed a law providing parents with a tax credit of up to 50% of tuition to a maximum of \$3,500 once fully implemented; and

"Whereas the Dalton McGuinty government has now introduced a bill that will cancel this important tax credit that provides working-class parents with the ability to send their children to a school of their choice;

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

"To protect the equity in education tax credit and stop the Liberal tax hike bill from becoming law."

I affix my signature in support.

1540

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

DÉBAT SUR LE DISCOURS DU TRÔNE

Consideration of the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I move, seconded by Mr Qadri, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

To the Honourable James K. Bartleman:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has addressed to us.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Ms Mossop moves, seconded by Mr Qadri, that an humble address be presented to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor as follows:

"To the Honourable James K. Bartleman:

"We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has addressed to us."

The member for Stoney Creek.

Ms Mossop: A couple of weeks ago, my knees were beginning to buckle under the weight of a wide range of new and demanding tasks. I have been on this very steep learning curve of joining the ranks of those in government and in ministries. In addition, as many of you may know, I am the very proud and besotted mother of the loveliest seven-month-old baby on the planet, and thinking that that wasn't quite enough, my husband and I

decided on Thanksgiving weekend that we would sell our home, and pack up our belongings and our memories, and move to two houses, one in Stoney Creek, in Grimsby, the riding which I represent, and the other a house in Toronto, where I can keep my family close to me while I perform my legislative duties.

It was on the eve of one of these two moves that the Premier stopped me in the doorway here. He said he would like me to give my maiden speech as part of the motion to debate the throne speech—in essence, the maiden speech of maiden speeches for this session, the honour of which was not lost on me, and I leapt at the opportunity. As I verily skipped down the hall past the marble walls with all the names of people who have gone before me etched there, I started to organize my thoughts, all the heady and weighty things I wanted to say to you all to leave a favourable, even admirable, impression—my deep desire.

I had the weekend to prepare, three days.

And then I remembered that the moving truck was coming the next morning and I imagined myself amid dozens of unpacked boxes, rocking the baby with one toe and pecking away at my keyboard, trying to come up with a speech. I wondered, maybe for a moment, if anybody would mind if I read from the phone book, something that I know has been done in the odd filibuster in parliaments like this one, and dare I say we might even hear that one again in the not too distant future.

But this is a once in a lifetime opportunity—an opportunity, I am told, to speak from the heart about the things that matter most to one. And so I took comfort in a saying borrowed from my sister, who is an artist, who raised four children and many pigs, chickens, cows, dogs and cats while baking her own bread, churning her own butter, and teaching art and art history in the riding of Leeds.

The saying is, “Neatness is for lesser mortals.”

And so, in the midst of the chaos of dozens of unpacked boxes and the remnants of takeout food, I sat on the floor of one of our new homes, by the fireplace, I lit the fire and I poured a good glass of Niagara wine and got on with greater things.

I’m a storyteller by trade, so now I’m going to tell you a story. It has many characters, plots and subplots.

First and foremost, I wish to thank the people of the riding of Stoney Creek for giving me the opportunity to represent them. The people of Stoney Creek form a microcosm of the provincial population. They are farmers and business people, small and large, workers and volunteers, doctors and nurses, students and teachers; they are young and old; they were born here and they were born very far away.

Stoney Creek has a long and distinguished history as part of Upper Canada, Canada and the province of Ontario. It’s a beautiful spot, boasting some of the province’s most enviable natural features. Its northern boundary stretches across one of the world’s greatest bodies of fresh water, Lake Ontario. It is home to some of the world’s best tender fruit lands and the Niagara Escarpment.

The riding is also where I have spent my professional, volunteer and social life for more than 22 years. In 1981, I became the Niagara bureau chief for then CHCH television and my duties were to cover the stories of the day anywhere in the Niagara region. I covered everything from the Winona Peach Festival to the Love Canal crisis and its impact on the Niagara River and Lake Ontario, the source of drinking water for millions of Canadians and Americans.

I remember when the grape growers and vintners got together and put their livelihoods on the line by ripping out old wine grape varieties, risking a great deal and investing in the future by putting in new French vinifera varieties. It takes about eight years for a vine to come to maturity, so this was quite the gamble, and it has paid off. Niagara wines are now among the finest in the world.

I covered every election at every level of government. That meant interviewing politicians, from the local alderman to the mayors, regional chairs, MPPs, MPs, the Premiers and the Prime Ministers of the day. The Prime Minister was Trudeau; the Premier was Davis. The MPPs included the Honourable Bob Welch for Brock riding, the legendary Mel Swart of Welland-Thorold, the Honourable Vince Kerrio of Niagara Falls, and three members who still grace the halls of this great establishment.

First, it was the Honourable Jim Bradley of St Catharines with whom I discussed many issues over the years. But the most memorable was the government’s new education policy put forth by the Minister of Education at the time, the Honourable Bette Stephenson. It was well received but it did have a few cracks in it through which was falling a small group of disadvantaged children who were developmentally handicapped. At member Bradley’s behest, I produced a small, special television series examining the impact of the policy on these children and their families. The result was that we were able to stop the closure of a centre for these children which was performing a unique and, for those families, an invaluable service.

Second, I often had the opportunity to interview Mr Peter Kormos, the member for Niagara Centre. I remember well the day that his predecessor, Mr Mel Swart, resigned and handed the baton to Mr Kormos. You might even call it an anointment. But that was not the first time I interviewed our distinctive member. Whenever there was a particularly major crime in Welland, I would have cause to meet Mr Kormos. I’m not suggesting or insinuating that he had anything to do with the crime itself, but when I arrived at the Niagara Regional Police station in Welland, invariably there would be a red Corvette—I think it was a red Corvette; it was a flashy sports car anyway—parked out front of the station and a track of cowboy boots leading into the station. Those were Mr Kormos’s, the criminal lawyer. I never saw him or heard him fight any fight with anything less than full gusto and spirit.

Then there was Mr Dominic Agostino, who I have followed for many years in Hamilton politics, as an alderman, as an MPP and now as the PA to the Minister

of the Environment, and a colleague on this side of the microphone instead of the other. He has been very helpful and very supportive in this great change in my life, and I thank him for that.

After a number of years in Niagara, I moved into the Hamilton television station, where I became the first female anchor at that station. So from inside the newsroom now, I covered the issues and elections in an area ranging from Oakville to Fort Erie, and also all of Ontario and Canada.

1550

In the role of television anchor, you are often asked to participate in charity events and fundraisers, and there is an endless list of groups that want you to come and do everything from being dunked in a dunking tank to doing the twist with the mayor or whatever it is that's needed to raise funds for something.

I had a personal interest in literacy and the importance of reading among children, and that led me to become a volunteer with the Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Hamilton and Burlington as an in-school mentor. I was matched with a little girl at an inner city school and followed her as she moved from crisis to crisis and school to school. This little person experienced more of the hardships that life has to offer by the age of 11 than many of us have to face in a lifetime.

She moved from Hamilton to Stoney Creek to Winona, and then she moved away from the region. Each time she moved, she would run to greet life's new challenges, the latest offering, with the enthusiasm and energy that is the core of a survivor. And in turn, she was rewarded. In a series of public schools, she met an army of teachers, principals, school staff, volunteers, and friends and their families who offered her a warm reception and a solid-as-bedrock foundation on which to lean and from which to grow. I know that for the rest of her life, wherever she is, she will look back on her days in those public schools, especially Winona Public School, and she will remember the names of so many who were there for her.

Even more recently, I had the privilege of interviewing one of Stoney Creek's heroes, Dr Bob Kemp. He has just celebrated his 90th birthday. Many residents of Stoney Creek have, in their personal histories, memories of Dr Bob coming to their homes for a house call. In addition to his physician's duties, he would blend in genuine compassion and a practical helping hand. He would often be found washing the dishes or helping with some other household chore as part of his house call—no extra charge.

Dr Bob and his wife, Mildred, have devoted their latter years to the realization of a long-held dream: the Dr Bob Kemp Hospice. Practical, compassionate programs will blend health care with soul care to ease people through their last days. The end of life is filled with enough uncertainty with its many unpleasant ways of arriving without the added fear, anxiety, discomfort and loss associated with moving from our homes to an institution.

During these many years—more than two decades—I came to know the people of the riding of Stoney Creek and they came to know me. When I knocked on their doors during the campaign it was kind of like a family reunion. I was meeting all sorts of cousins and second cousins and cousins twice-removed that I didn't know I had. We had a lot to talk about. We talked about the desperate need for more home care for seniors so they could stay in their homes, like we all want to do. We talked about the need for more nurses and more doctors. We talked about the need to create supportive and safe environments in our schools for our students and our teachers. We talked about the need for clean air and clean water, for without them we have nothing—we are lost.

When I was first approached to run for politics, I have to say I didn't have much of an appetite for it: I had little interest. After all, why on earth would anybody want to get involved in something that's akin to a blood sport? My colleagues from the other side of the microphone always ask me, "Why? Why did you do it?" Some of them ask incredulously, and I must say some of them ask a little enviously. It's always asked with that journalistic curiosity that is essential to the breed. But it was my journalistic curiosity that killed this journalist.

When I was first approached, I said I was interested, not because I had any great political ambitions but because I was so curious to know how political parties lured people into this often cut-throat business. I was offered a meeting with the then Leader of the Opposition. I had interviewed many a politician, every Prime Minister from Trudeau to Chrétien, and every Premier from Davis to Eves, but I had never met Dalton McGuinty, a man who had, through the media's filter, been seen as wanting a bit as a leader. I spent 40 minutes interviewing Mr McGuinty and I was given a glimpse of the integrity, the passion, the vision and the caring that now resides in the Premier's office.

I don't know what I had expected, a pot of gold or the lure of the life of leisure to be laid on the table in front of me, but none of that was forthcoming. Instead I was told of the need for committed and serious public servants and what being a public servant entailed. I was told that I could look forward to eating cold hot dogs late at night, far away from family and friends, and that I would be asked, and often expected—even demanded and commanded—to be at events and meetings seven days and nights a week, to solve the world's problems, and often not to be able to do so. I was told that I might feel achievement and a sense of satisfaction and reward about 10% of the time, if I was lucky. But I was also told that there was nothing better and that I would love it.

I asked Mr McGuinty what he was most proud of in his political career, what would make him look back and say, "That made it all worthwhile." He told me about a little-known private member's bill. He found out that many companies and agencies were throwing perfectly good food away while others were going hungry. The companies and agencies didn't give leftover food away because they were afraid there would be substantial

liability if anything went wrong. The private member's bill he drafted enables companies and others with good intent and in good faith to give that food to those who need it—a simple solution to help end a needless deprivation and imbalance in the supply and demand of our oh-so-very wealthy society; nothing overly glamorous, nothing that would grab any headlines.

I felt a vibration in the fibre of my being. The less celebrated contributions of people, known and not well known, are legion around the world. They are what make our civilized society civilized. Such people are in my blood.

My uncle, Bill Buchanan, started his adulthood on the front line in Italy during the Second World War. In his professional life with CN, he had a significant impact on the economy of Canada, and particularly Halifax, when he played an instrumental role in opening the land-sea container service between Canada and Britain. Prior to that, Canada was shut out and the US eastern seaboard had a monopoly.

He then moved to England with CN and, on a weekend afternoon, working on his farm in the English countryside, he experienced one of life's split-second transformations. While trimming a tree, he fell and became paralyzed from the waist down, and to this day he is in a wheelchair.

He hasn't spent the last 30 years idly. He turned his personal tragedy into public service, spearheading and overseeing the retrofitting of public buildings and carriers, making them accessible to a wide range of physically challenged people. He became the adviser to the Prince of Wales on such issues, and most recently worked on the handicapped facilities on the Chunnel service and at Buckingham Palace when it was opened to the public.

I asked him once how he balanced life's struggles. He shrugged and said, "The only thing that matters is to do something that will matter and will make a difference in 100 years."

He came by the philosophy honestly. His father—my grandfather—Dr E.V. Buchanan of London, Ontario, was Sir Adam Beck's right-hand man in bringing light and power to the people of Ontario, even to the most remote farmhouse. As general manager of the public utilities in London, my grandfather made the creation and preservation of green space—parks and playgrounds—a priority. He brought a pipeline from Lake Huron to London so that everybody could have clean, safe water to drink. When he first came from Scotland in 1910, he couldn't understand why only the rich could play golf; it was so expensive here. So he started the first inexpensive public golf course—two bits would get you nine holes. Still in existence today, the parks, the pipeline and the Thames Valley EV Buchanan golf course are being enjoyed by many, and I trust they will for many years to come.

He died at the age of 100 in University Hospital in London, a hospital he helped to build, within budget, as a member of its board of directors. To this day, I do not

know what his politics were. He never divulged his leanings.

When I look back in my family history, I see examples of public service everywhere: a distant aunt who taught the slaves to read and write in the southern states during the Civil War—I still have a vase that her students painted for her and gave to her in gratitude; a grandmother who was devoted to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind; and a mother who, among other things, worked for the Kidney Foundation and opened our home to kidney patients and their families when they were coming to the big-city hospital for what were then experimental transplant operations.

1600

These people and their contributions were racing through my head as I stood up to leave Mr McGuinty's office. I was definitely feeling the call to duty. My journalistic curiosity led me to the brink, but the sense of duty that courses through my family bloodlines was reeling me in.

Then Mr McGuinty said to me, "You know, there is never a good time to enter politics. There are always other things to do. It's kind of like the decision to have a family. There are a lot of sacrifices involved. There's just never a perfect time. You've just got to do it." So I nodded and wandered off.

The next day, I went to the doctor, and I found out I was expecting my first child. So, with a huge sigh of relief, I was able to reject the call to duty.

But they came back, those Liberals, just as I was settling into an uncomplicated and satisfying life of writing and rearing my baby. I said no three times. I said it was impossible to run for office with a three-and-a-half-month-old baby. But then I realized that as much as I was responsible for my baby because I brought her into this world, I was and am also responsible for the world that I have brought her into.

As I walked along the beach of Lake Huron just north of Grand Bend, gazing at the once pristine waters of that crown jewel of great freshwater lakes, I knew that I had to do it. I saw the evidence of the degradation of that great lake, and I knew that I wouldn't be able to look at myself in the mirror if I had been given a chance to do something about all the things I care about and I didn't take it. So I said yes.

Now, there were conditions, and the conditions were that I would be given some practical support in balancing the gruelling pace of a campaign and the life of politics with the tyranny of a newborn. So, parked outside of my campaign headquarters, which was an old Arby's restaurant on old Highway 8 in Stoney Creek, was a small motorhome, an RV. Inside was my family: the baby, the husband and the two dogs sometimes too. I would dash in and out and visit and nurse the baby. When we went campaigning we'd bounce and rattle off down the road, and we'd park the RV on the corner. I would run out to the doors with a cellphone in my pocket. When they needed me, I would be called and I would run back and

feed my baby, and then back to the doors. That's how we managed to do it.

I said throughout the campaign that, if elected, I would be bringing the baby to work here, and I have. I have heard a few people remark with disdain about this, but they are very few and they are living in an unrealistic bubble. Women have been taking their kids to work for centuries, for millennia in fact—when they fetched the water, when they worked in the fields, when they ironed their husband's shirts, when they built offices in their homes, their kids were and are with them. When I bring her to work, I know where she is, I know I can get to her quickly, and I'm able to focus fully on my work. I have been helped in doing this by my family, friends, co-workers and colleagues. We have made my dual responsibilities workable, a win-win situation, by being flexible and creative. This is a common sense approach and should be adopted in workplaces everywhere.

There are spinoff benefits to bringing a baby to work. Whenever I walk down the halls with her in my arms, the smiles replace the clouds on faces, offers of help and advice abound, party lines dissolve and human interaction is warm and real.

I have to thank everyone I have met and who has been so helpful and so kind over the last few months—from the many wonderful volunteers on the campaign, to all my colleagues here, to the many people who work inside this building, from the office of the Sergeant at Arms to the library, to the Clerk's office, to Hansard, to our translators, our pages and others. For the most part, they are people I had never met before.

As I mentioned the other night during one of our debates, it's a little bit like being Harry Potter at Hogwarts Academy. In this magical, mystical, beautiful building with its hidden transoms, its huge halls, intricate craftsmanship and immense history, people decked out in their long black robes scurry along. They seem to know us all by name and a little bit about us. They pile us down with books and binders and instructions, and they are always there to give us a helping hand. My admiration and appreciation go to you all.

I am proud to be part of such a remarkable team. I'm awed and I am gratified to find that the spirit of public service is alive and well here, and while in my time here I may not succeed in leaving a lasting legacy, I do hope that I will at least help forge a link in a lasting chain of events that will bring about a change or development that will make the lives of those now and in the future better or will preserve for those in the future a piece of this very spectacular province.

I have travelled much of the world and I have travelled much of this province, and we live in one of the richest, most naturally beautiful places in the world. We should revel in it; we should fawn over it. It's stunning and it's wondrous, and we must conserve it and preserve it.

Pour terminer, j'aimerais à nouveau remercier les habitants de Stoney Creek de m'avoir fait confiance et de m'avoir donné la possibilité de les représenter. Lorsque

je quitterai mes fonctions, j'espère que l'on se souviendra de moi comme quelqu'un qui a bien servi ses électeurs. Les habitants de Stoney Creek le méritent. C'est le mandat dont ils m'ont chargée.

Je dois me montrer à la hauteur de mon prédécesseur, l'honorable Brad Clark, qui a travaillé dur pour ses électeurs, et je sais qu'il continuera de le faire.

Durant la campagne en septembre, j'ai eu l'honneur de disputer la course non seulement aux côtés de M. Clark, mais également de la candidate du NPD, Lorrie McKibbin, et du candidat du Parti Vert, Richard Safka. Ils ont consacré énormément d'énergie et de temps, et je les félicite de leurs contributions à notre démocratie.

When I am awakened in the middle of the night by the needs of my baby, my mind worries over my decision to enter politics. I wonder if I have made a grave personal or professional error. Did I suddenly abandon a life I had worked so hard for, a dream I had held so dear? For what? An ideal or a shadow, or something in between, something of more substance? I hope, more than anyone, that I have not been in error.

My name will in future be etched in the marble inside this building, and it will be a measure of our success as participants in the democracy of this House if that marble remains intact and is not, like in so many other corners of the world, reduced to rubble, in societies gone badly wrong, where violence has replaced the dignified, or at least for the most part dignified—OK, the occasionally dignified—debates of assemblies such as these. It is how we have come to solve our problems and to resolve our differences. It allows for peaceful coexistence to exist.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member for Etobicoke North.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): Thank you, Speaker. Honourable ministers, Clerk DesRosiers, Deputy Clerk Deller, my fellow parliamentarians and, through you, Speaker, to the people of Ontario, it is with a great sense of honour, pride and solemn responsibility and duty that it's my privilege to second the motion to adopt the speech from the throne.

It's also a great honour to be part of a government, part of an agenda and part of the McGuinty vision that states as our platform a mandate for excellence in education, improving our health care, building stronger communities and laying the foundation for economic prosperity, a message of hope that has been widely appreciated by the great riding of Etobicoke North, the riding that I have the privilege to represent.

It's with a sense of history and heritage and knowledge of the weight of parliamentary democracy that I speak before you. For example, I quote from the address in reply to the throne speech that was made in 1903, 100 years ago, and I think this applies to our government still: "I feel assured that your legislative labours during the present session will be characterized by the same earnest care and thoughtful attention as have heretofore marked the work of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario." Sir,

Speaker, people of Ontario, that was tabled at 3:30 pm March 10, 1903.

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In order to highlight some of my remarks, I'd like to offer a personal vision and some road signs or guideposts under six different headings. I would just like to address some brief commentary. The first is as a matter of introduction; second, as a Liberal; third, as a physician; fourth, as a South Asian Canadian or a multicultural Canadian or a hyphenated Canadian; fifth, as a writer or media commentator; and sixth, as an MPP and parliamentary assistant.

I'd like, by way of introduction, to quote from the father of Western medicine—Hippocrates, that is—whose oath I swore in 1988 at Convocation Hall at the University of Toronto, not too far from where I speak today. He wrote in fourth-century BC Greece: "Life is short, and the art long; opportunity fugitive; experience deceptive, and judgment difficult." I think this very well highlights not only the dilemma that a physician faces but that, too, of the legislators.

I represent proudly here the 120,000 residents of Etobicoke North, and I'm reminded of some of my days spent in kindergarten when we were actually taught a lesson which I used to think was the Ontario provincial anthem, and it went something like this:

Give us a place to stand
And a place to grow
And call this land Ontario.

I wish that this would come back into vogue, but it seems to me that my particular riding of Etobicoke North is such a land. Bordered by Steeles and the Humber River, Dixon Road, the 401 and Highway 27, it remains to this day a vibrant and energetic place for both old and new Canadians to grow, to stand, to progress and to flourish, with the busy, busy thoroughfares of Albion, Islington, Kipling, Rexdale, Highway 27 and Dixon Road. I think the residents of the riding of Etobicoke North will especially benefit as we bring to law and bring to pass our ambitious agenda, which puts people first.

As a Liberal: Liberal values, I think, were very well codified in the throne speech, and I would like to invoke now the mantle of one of the great Canadians of this century, a nation-builder, and whether we offer him a mountain or a highway bearing his name, I think the mantle of Pierre Elliott Trudeau remains with us still, abides in and informs our judgments, our legacy and our vision.

I'd like to quote from one of the books he wrote, of the title *Towards a Just Society*. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Prime Minister, wrote: "In my thinking, the value with the highest priority in the pursuit of a just society had become equality ... equality of opportunity."

It is with great pride, Speaker, that I bring to your attention and, through you to the people of Ontario, that it was the immigrants, many of whom came on his watch, who have now spawned their second and third generations, of which I number. That is one of the reasons why

his name is spoken of so fondly in many, many circles. As Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien mentioned at his farewell address here in Toronto most recently, « Nous célébrons la vision, la passion, l'esprit. Ça, c'est le libéralisme. »

In the present time, I am a Liberal for many reasons, not only for the heritage of Trudeau. I would like to share with you the encounter I had with the then MPP from Ottawa South in 1996, before he was the honourable Premier of this province, before he was even Leader of the Opposition, one Dalton McGuinty.

I happened to be sitting next to him at a multicultural dinner of the Multicultural Society of Pakistani Canadians, arranged by my friend and colleague and adviser, Mr Qamar Sadiq. As we spoke throughout the evening over a couple of hours and I learned of his vision for health care, education and fiscal responsibility, it became clear to me that he fully embodied the vision that is actually carved into the august wood of this very chamber: integrity, industry and intelligence.

Just as one example of that, Premier McGuinty has appointed every single one of the members of his caucus to powerful cabinet committees so we will have a true, honest and forthright say in the legislation that will affect the lives of Ontarians.

I'd also like to, with your permission, recall some encounters with the MPP from Scarborough-Rouge River, one Mr Alvin Curling, who was there for me on a personal basis to always lend a hand and wise counsel and advice and strategy. I recall the words of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr, who said there will come a time when people "will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character." I'm honoured to speak in front of the first black Speaker this Chamber has ever had.

I'd also like to recall for a moment some of the events and encounters associated with the MPP for Toronto Centre-Rosedale, one Mr George Smitherman. Following the terrible events of September 11, 2001, many multicultural Canadians, especially those of Middle Eastern, Asian and Muslim background, recalled, once upon a time, a dark phase of Canadian history when Japanese Canadians were actually interned, imprisoned in a sense, following the episodes of World War II. We felt there might be some new form of internment, perhaps a virtual internment—a new form of internment of the mind.

I say that, not as mere sophistry or academics, because there were others in this House who sought to exploit that time of vulnerability of that community, who wanted to invoke the old adages of divide and rule, divide and conquer, strategic blame, narrow casting, wedge politics and wedge issues. That is certainly not the mandate of this government, but to show tolerance and respect for others and liberal values.

I would like to say, with regard to the MPP from Toronto Centre-Rosedale, that his honourable conduct then preceded by several years the title of "honourable" that he now bears. Immediately after the events of September 11, there was a press conference at one of the

largest mosques here in Toronto. I would like to say that the very first member of this Legislature who came to that event to reassure that particular group, that particular population, of the values of tolerance and respect was in fact Mr George Smitherman, the MPP for Toronto Centre-Rosedale.

As a physician, I ask rhetorically, what does a physician actually do, by training and by nature? Well, we engage in both a physical as well as an emotional examination, internal and external, and we try to bring to bear the collective wisdom of the ages. We seek out problems, suffering, the bodily injustices and wounds of the flesh as well as the soul. I say to you, isn't the role of the Legislature the same? Isn't the Legislature's goal, not unlike the goal of physicians, to bring real and positive change to the body politic, the very catchwords of our government?

That's why I'm especially proud, as a physician, to be part of a government that has brought forth the commitment to medicare act that will outlaw the privatization or profitization of health care. As we have said, the McGuinty government will pass a commitment to a medicare act enshrining the universal nature of our health care system in law, and making two-tier, pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care illegal in this province.

As a doctor for the past 14 years practising family medicine, dealing with major illnesses and terminal conditions, and with people who are recovering from both external or self-abuse, I know that illness can be a time of vulnerability and challenge. That is the very time when our people, our patients, Ontarians and Canadians broadly, should not have to worry about the financial ramifications. That is why I am proud to be part of a government that will enshrine into law and extend the principles of the Canada Health Act—comprehensiveness, accessibility, universality, publicly funded, publicly administered—and now add the quality of accountability. I'm proud to be part of a government that will preserve, protect and defend these principles.

As well, as a physician, I think it's very important that we ensure it will be an effort of health care and not wealth care, where the citizens of Ontario will be asked only for their health card and not for their credit card. I would like to share for a moment some quick observations from the United States of America. In the same way that we here in Canada have RESPs for education and RRSPs for retirement, I hope the time will not come, as it exists today in the United States, where we will have RMSPs, medical savings plans, because as you rightly know, certain operations—for example, cardiac bypass surgery and its after-care—can actually bankrupt families. That is particularly one of the reasons why 40% of the citizenry of the United States has no health care coverage at all.

1620

En matière de soins de santé, ce gouvernement partage le point de vue de la majorité des Ontariennes et Ontariens. Dans cette province, il n'y a pas de place pour un système permettant à ceux qui ont de l'argent de se

procurer des soins de santé meilleurs ou plus rapides. Au cours de cette session, nous allons mettre en œuvre notre Loi sur l'engagement d'assurer l'avenir de l'assurance-santé, en consacrant le principe de l'universalité dans la loi et en rendant illégaux les soins de santé à deux tarifs en Ontario.

Nous entamerons aussi le processus de réforme des soins de première ligne en créant des équipes de santé familiale dans toute la province. Ces équipes seront composées de professionnels de la santé qui veilleront à ce que les Ontariennes et les Ontariens reçoivent les soins les meilleurs et les plus efficaces possibles. C'est bon pour eux, et c'est bon pour le système.

I would now like to share with you for a moment some comments under the heading of a South Asian-Canadian or a multicultural Canadian or, for want of another title, a hyphenated Canadian. I am proud to be part of a country and a province and a city that values and honours and celebrates its diversity. I think never before has this been more true of this province and this country than in this Legislature, with now, for the first time, eight visible minorities, and in particular four South Asians.

I'd like to share, in total, an article that I had the privilege of publishing in the Toronto Star in 1997 during the 50th anniversary of nationhood of the Indian subcontinent and that for me broadly summarizes the mind-scape, the intellect and the sentiments of multicultural Canadians from my particular vantage point. Though when it appeared in the Toronto Star it was actually titled "South Asian Canadians Savour Best of Both Worlds," I think of it now as a rhapsody on multiculturalism.

"This August 14th and August 15th mark 54 years of nationhood for Pakistan and India. Globally, celebrations are being orchestrated by embassies, professional groups, learned societies and community associations. Locally, we hyphenated folk, the South Asian-Canadians, reflect and give thanks, overeat and reminisce.

"First, to reaffirm our Canadian content. Though our origins are from the subcontinent, our psyches and allegiances are Canadian. The ties now bind. Though it took a generation, we have learned to enjoy the snow, not just endure it. We now are alumni of all educational institutions, viscerally attached to the Blue Jays and Raptors. We have learned how to sing national anthems in various languages—English, French and many eastern dialects. Put us in an international gathering, and instantly we are ambassadors for Canada.

"Alongside this love for Canada, however, there remains in us a bond to South Asia. The ideal of the subcontinent, its soaring spirit, masala cuisine, Arabesque architecture, draping fashions ... love triangle movies, super-extended families, and respect-laden values. Every family here shed blood for those countries, and it is a memory not easily erased. Emotions still pull, and the senses still gravitate.

"So we're often of two minds. And like the dollar-rupee exchange rate, the proportion one way or the other is always in flux.

“Categorizations are dangerous, but here goes: The Canadian influence is secular, commercial, experimental and bracing. The South Asian wave is spiritual, traditional, poetic and tropical. The combination, like the mixing of the Gulf Stream and the Atlantic Ocean, creates something new and exhilarating. This synergy, this ability to register from a Can-Asian perspective, is at once a source of great richness and recurrent struggle. Seeing life through such a prism makes us appreciate afresh and re-evaluate all that we hold dear.

“What is valued most by the expatriate community here is that Canada is a place for education, new beginnings and the development of talents. All this in a mutually respectful society that honours its multicultural mosaic.

“Here since the 1960s, our first generation came to Canada for those now echoing words—‘graduate degrees, higher studies.’ It can perhaps be revealed now that their intention was to graduate, lengthen their name by a few letters and return home.

“The unexpected happened. Slowly, Canada became home. The education worked. Since children are everything for South Asians, the first generation stayed to give the next one even broader horizons. The community realized that being educated was not just a matter of knowing a few ministry-approved facts. Canada was a way of life, the opportunity to labour in freedom, guarding your religion as you wished, always enticed by a never-ending stream of creature comforts.

“The heavy push on education has had worthy after-effects. It turns out, I guess inevitably, that the parents were right. Cultivation of the mind and contributing to society have been the collective enterprise.

“That’s why South Asian-Canadians contribute to the old countries, visit often, lead trade delegations and attend festivals with a vengeance. We transfer technology, participate politically and share medical advances. Last, we pray for progress and peace.

“Though we have learned to play hockey on ice and not on a field, the South Asian element lingers. We follow the subcontinent’s geopolitics and fortunes. We await the fateful” notifications “announcing the demise of aged relatives left long ago. We hope that with our Canadian vantage, we can contribute to the betterment of those graceful post-colonial lands. They say Canada is a resource-rich country. We think of ourselves as a resource. We are the brains that, once drained, reached here.

“It is certainly getting easier to reach out to South Asia, though great challenges remain. The subcontinent has tumbled fast forward into the information age. This is now acting as a creative destruction. The countries are learning what it means to be a Web-linked, menu-driven cultures.

“I was surveying the scenery from atop my grandfather’s house in Karachi,” Pakistan, “recently. I counted some 20 satellite dishes within easy view. Strangely, my grandfather’s home had two dishes pointing in opposite directions. Asking why, I was given the self-evident

answer: ‘Son, one’s for the east, one’s for the west. We want the best of both worlds.’” We too.

For myself, that summarizes the duel levels of perception and experience and I feel it’s a privilege and blessing to be a part of a province, a society, a party, and now a government that honours and values its multicultural heritage, in particular as part of our mandate a government that is striking a new immigration and labour-market agreement with the federal government and is going to allow qualified and internationally trained tradespeople and professionals to work here in their chosen field, here in their chosen province.

Some comments to the people of Ontario as a physician-writer and a participant in medical media, having published in my own local Etobicoke Guardian and also as a former medical contributor to the Globe and Mail:

It was Joseph Stalin—not a friend of democracy—who thought that writers were “the engineers of human souls.” That was his phrase. He thought that the writer’s mandate was to awaken insight and occasionally propagandize. I think the press here at times furthers the government’s agenda but very often at times challenges the government’s agenda. I think that’s great, because we in the government here feel that we will be honest with Ontarians, giving them the straight goods on the challenges that we all face; again, embodying the visions of integrity, industry and intelligence.

Part of the pleasure of being a broadcaster or a writer or a person engaged with the media is dealing with people with an audience, a readership, a listenership that is alert and informed. That’s why I’m proud to be part of a government that will increase the learning in the public education sector to age 18 and will reduce class sizes and freeze tuition fees at universities and colleges, because we know that’s the only way we’ll be able to compete in a knowledge-based economy, and best as able we are to guarantee prosperity and contentment for the future. It’s together with Ontarians as we write a new chapter that we will be the authors of our own destiny.

I speak now, Speaker, under one of the final headings as an MPP and parliamentary assistant. I’d like to once again bring to your attention and, through you, to the people of Ontario some of the great riches found in the riding of Etobicoke North, be it residential or in the service industry or the commercial enterprises. In particular, as an example, we have in my riding alone Etobicoke General Hospital, Humber College and Woodbine Racetrack and slots. So you can quite easily engage in Etobicoke North in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It’s a great place for both old and new Canadians, vintage and recent Canadians. I’m reminded that even during this most recent election campaign in September-October I had the privilege of campaigning in my own riding in nine languages, including English, French, Urdu, Punjabi, Italian, Arabic, Spanish and Somali. It’s the message we brought forth, then as the Liberal Party and now as the government, and people responded to the message, imaginations were captured.

I'd like now to recognize for a moment some of the visionaries who shared with me their hopes and dreams and struggles in Etobicoke North: people like Jack and Pauline Helferty, people like Kevin and Lisa Malcolm, and Gary Singh, and Dr Naseem Mahdi, and Dil Mohamed and the Gilani Group, and Tony Vlassopoulos, and Omar Farook, and Osman Ali, and Sukdev Randhawa, and Charles Sachdev, and Jagdish Grewal and Manjinder Singh, people who embody the best that is Ontarian, the best that is Canadian.

I would also like to salute for a moment some of my counterparts in other levels of government, the federal member of Parliament, the MP for the area, Mr Roy Cullen, as well as the most recently re-elected councillor Suzan Hall.

It's a special privilege to be part of a government, part of the McGuinty vision, a Premier who is bringing to bear many of the instruments of government. That's why I'm privileged to be the parliamentary assistant to the now being created Ministry of Children's Services, an issue that is of prime importance to this government as well as to the Premier, and I may also mention, to the incoming new Prime Minister, Mr Paul Martin. I'm privileged to serve under the very capable and ever enthusiastic and energetic Minister for Children's Services, the Honourable Marie Bountrogianni.

Honourable Ministers, fellow parliamentarians, and through you, Speaker, to the people of Ontario, I've had an opportunity to rhapsodize on some of the philosophy, the underpinning, the positioning, the mindset I've had and have developed over several years as a Liberal, as a physician, as a South Asian-Canadian, as a writer, as someone engaged with the media, as well as an MPP and a parliamentary assistant. Once again, it's with a sense of history and duty and great solemn responsibility that I beg leave to conclude my remarks for an address in reply to the speech from the throne.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member from Stoney Creek and the member from Etobicoke North for some very interesting and thoughtful words on the speech from the throne. With that, I'd like to move the adjournment of the debate today.

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

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I move adjournment of the House.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Whoa. What are you doing? Sit down, please. We've got our signals crossed here. It can roll off the tongue and I understand that, Speaker.

I wanted to inform the House of the House schedule for next week, but I'd also like to add my congratulations to the members from Stoney Creek and Etobicoke North on very fine maiden speeches.

As follows, on Monday, December 15, in the afternoon we'll have an address from the leader of the official opposition in response to His Honour's speech from the throne; in the evening, resuming the throne speech debate, the leader of the third party, and then the general rotation of speakers.

Tuesday afternoon: third reading of Bill 2, the tax bill; Tuesday evening is to be arranged.

Wednesday afternoon: third reading debate, day two of Bill 2, the tax bill; the evening is to be arranged.

Thursday afternoon and evening also are to be arranged.

With that, I would like to move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried. This House stands adjourned until 6:45 o'clock this evening.

The House adjourned at 1634.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

Public accounts / Comptes publics

Chair / Président: Norman W. Sterling
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Julia Munro
Laurel C. Broten, Jim Flaherty, Peter Fonseca,
Shelley Martel, Bill Mauro, Julia Munro, Liz Sandals,
Monique Smith, Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

**Regulations and private bills /
Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Tony C.Wong
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Khalil Ramal
Bob Delaney, Rosario Marchese, Jerry Martiniuk,
Ted McMeekin, Phil McNeely, Carol Mitchell, Bill Murdoch,
Khalil Ramal, Tony Ruprecht, Tony C.Wong
Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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