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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 15 December 2003

Lundi 15 décembre 2003

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 15 December 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 15 décembre 2003

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

ESTIMATES

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr Speaker, I have a message from the Honourable Lieutenant Governor, signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates and supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2004 and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN PARRY SOUND-MUSKOKA

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Community Living Parry Sound. On November 24, 2003, Community Living Ontario held a Celebration of Achievement Breakfast in Toronto. At that time, Community Living Parry Sound received the James L. Montgomerie Community Award. This award is presented each year by Community Living Ontario to an organization that has demonstrated a strong commitment to promoting inclusion and has worked to ensure that people with developmental disabilities live in their communities as fully participating citizens. Paula Mullen, manager of children's services, and Jo-Anne Demick, executive director, accepted the award.

The areas of achievement highlighted were in social, recreational, educational and the innovative respite services being offered. Community Living Parry Sound has demonstrated a dedicated and creative approach to enhancing the lives of children and families in the Parry Sound area. They respond to the needs of the community with respect, hard work and enthusiasm. Community Living Parry Sound is willing to embrace new ideas. Community Living Parry Sound is a vital part of the community and provides invaluable assistance and support for people with disabilities and their families. I would like to personally congratulate them for receiving this well-deserved recognition.

I would also like to recognize a group of volunteers in the Huntsville area. The Salvation Army food drive, through the generosity of the people of Huntsville, has raised 20 tonnes of food this season. This exceeds the donations received last year. The collection effort was led by the Huntsville Fire Department and supported by the Huntsville Air Cadets, Muskoka ambulance paramedics, the OPP, the Du-Ya-Wanna Snowmobile Club and Motorcyclists of Muskoka. I would like to congratulate the people of Huntsville and its many volunteers for their generous spirit.

GREENHOUSE INDUSTRY

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance for hosting a reception last Thursday. A special thank you to Cacciavillani farms, a greenhouse grower from Leamington, in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex. Their wonderful display of poinsettias certainly added to the festive season here at Queen's Park.

The alliance, located here in Ontario, represents the largest cluster of greenhouse production in North America. The greenhouse industry in Essex county and Chatham-Kent produced \$300 million of crops in 2001, and the almost 1,000 greenhouses in the Leamington and Kingsville area account for 83% of the total number of greenhouses in Ontario. This province claims more than half the greenhouse vegetables produced in Canada. In fact, Leamington has the largest concentration of greenhouse vegetable growers in North America. Flowers, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and a variety of other vegetables are grown here.

We know that agriculture is the second-largest industry in Ontario. The greenhouse industry has a farm gate value of over \$1 billion annually. This industry is crucial to Ontario's economy. The Dalton McGuinty government recognizes the importance of the greenhouse industry in Ontario and thanks the growers for their hard work and their contribution to our province.

CONFLICT IN IRAQ

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I rise in the legislature today to join with many people around the world to rejoice in the long-awaited capture of Saddam Hussein. There is an important local connection in my riding to the new freedom of the people in Iraq. I know of at least half a dozen people, my constituents—

for example, four people from Six Nations—who have been on the ground with US forces, fighting in Iraq. Several others have been on board a ship in the Gulf.

As far as those on the ground, brave men like Aaron White, Sergeant Neil Anthony, Clint Doxtator and Karl Green put their lives on the line in Iraq to help bring liberty to the deserving people of Iraq. All the while, our federal counterparts played it safe by watching their allies from the sidelines in Ottawa. Perhaps with new leadership, Canada will stretch out its hand to our friends in the United States and send some troops. Such a gesture is long overdue, and I can't think of anything more fitting for the families of my riding who are anxiously awaiting the return of their loved ones from both Iraq and the Gulf.

To all those who made the choice and the sacrifice to head overseas, I congratulate you on a job well done. You helped chase down a man who caused much grief to the people of his country as well as to people elsewhere around the world.

BERNARD WOLPERT

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): We are all, at times, catapulted from the comfort of our daily journey. Today I pay tribute to a person who, in an earnest, gentle and humble manner, changed my world. The person of whom I speak is Bernard Wolpert. Mr Wolpert, an exceptionally bright, well-educated man who immigrated to Canada many years ago to achieve his personal vision of success for his family, embodies all that is great about the people of Hamilton. He is a soft-spoken man in a world where constant noise challenges our senses to absorb anything.

He worked as an engineer in the once mighty Canadian Westinghouse office, which no longer exists in Hamilton, one of many large employers such as Firestone, JI Case, International Harvester and Procter & Gamble, all names synonymous with another time in history in the mighty city of Hamilton.

Bernard is a man whose faith empowers him, a man who walks his ideals rather than showcasing himself. He cares for his very ill wife in his retirement, with graciousness and the quiet humility of service, and yet he still found time to search me out to support the democracy he embraces.

Bernard demonstrates the human qualities that strengthen our community and make Hamilton great. Citizens like Bernard encourage all of us to move forward and also to help Hamilton achieve its destiny of greatness by creating the resiliency we all need in a tough economic time.

1340

PROPERTY TAXATION

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): The clock's rolling. I'll have to talk quickly.

I rise today to address an issue of tax unfairness which has been brought to my attention by the Ontario Private Campgrounds Association and a number of its members which operate campground facilities in my riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. These hard-working campground operators in my area have been informed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, which reports to the Minister of Finance, that under an omitted assessment notice sent out in November, the number of trailers in their campgrounds are now assessable and that their taxes would be going up accordingly. Worse still, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, in its zeal to collect more taxes, has informed the campground operators that this omitted assessment notice is retroactive to the 2003 tax year.

These hard-working small business owners in my riding and indeed across the province want to know why these assessments are going out now, after the tourism season is over and their books are effectively closed, and more importantly, why this new-found tax is retroactive to last season.

Hard-working campground operators are vital to the tourism sector. They want to know why they are being overtaxed and are being asked to pay retroactively. They are expecting an answer from this government. They will not be ignored.

ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): Since 1903 the Archives of Ontario have provided a window on the past for all Ontarians, connecting us with our ancestors, our communities and our government. The year 2003 is the 100th anniversary year of this great institution. I'm proud today to have an opportunity to pay tribute to the great work being done at the Archives of Ontario.

I recently received a publication called Documenting a Province, which celebrates Ontario's rich history. As this publication tells us, the archives hold an enormous wealth of material in trust for the people of Ontario: over 3.5 million photographs, thousands of maps and architectural drawings, not to mention records of the Ontario government and of private individuals and groups. The collections of the Archives of Ontario are truly a tribute to the past and a resource for the future.

I want to pay tribute to the Archives of Ontario on this important 100th-year milestone and thank all of those great archivists for keeping the rich history and heritage of this province preserved for generations to come.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I rise today to inform the House about a successful groundwater protection event I organized in my riding on Friday, December 12. In spite of stormy winter conditions, over 200 people gathered at the farm of Roy Nahuis to help me launch a petition on landfill site 41 in the township of

Tiny. The petition asks Environment Minister Leona Dombrowsky to place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation that she recently promised is implemented in our province.

Initially I had requested the county of Simcoe to grant me access to site 41 to look at the test well. I regret that the county denied me such access, but I, like the people who braved the weather to attend the event, was determined to make it happen, to give site 41 the profile it needs to get the minister's and the ministry's attention.

The media have played a vital, pivotal role in helping us deliver the message locally and to Queen's Park that site 41 could be subject to groundwater contamination if it proceeds as planned. The overflowing wells on the property of site 41, which have been captured on video, paint a telling picture and serve as a fair warning of potential groundwater contamination at site 41.

I will make sure that Minister Dombrowsky receives a copy of this video so she can see for herself the imminent danger of developing site 41 as a landfill.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms Monique Smith (Nipissing): I rise today to discuss the new direction that the government of Ontario is taking. This past Friday marked 50 days since the new government of Ontario was sworn in. In that time we have changed the direction of government and are putting an end to mismanagement and incompetence.

Let me highlight some of the positive changes that have come about in the last 50 days. The Tories hid a \$5.6-billion deficit. We are giving the people of Ontario the straight goods.

They ignored the problems in long-term care for eight years. We've already committed to a full review of the system.

They wanted to give millions of dollars to private schools. We took that money and put it where it's most needed—in public schools.

They allowed a \$3-billion boondoggle at OPG. We reasserted public oversight and control.

They whined and complained about the federal government. We negotiated \$330 million in SARS compensation and another \$771 million in health care funding.

They were jeopardizing public services to finance tax giveaways to large corporations. We're protecting those services by rolling back the giveaways.

We've encountered some unexpected obstacles since we took office, but the people of Ontario understand that we are taking responsible action in order to deliver the real, positive change we promised. I'm proud to be part of a government that puts the people of this province first, for a change.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): It's with great regret that I rise today to ask a very important question: What do you get when you have a government who

breaks their election campaign promises, a government who brings in the biggest tax increase in the province of Ontario? What do you get when a government spends its entire first six weeks seeking to vilify the former Conservative government? What do you get when you have a government sworn into office with no job creation strategy?

The verdict is in, and regrettably the answer is: 7,000 lost jobs. That's the first verdict in on this government: 7,000 fewer jobs. That means less hope, less prosperity, less opportunity for working families and the people of Ontario. It shows that when you send a message around the world that taxes are on the rise, it says that Ontario is not a place to invest and to create jobs.

It reached a new peak last week when the centre of capitalism in the western world, the New York Stock Exchange, would rather have the head of Red China ring the bell than the Premier of the province of Ontario. I think that's regrettable. I think it's unfortunate. I don't know whether the folks at the New York Stock Exchange believe that Red China is somehow a more business friendly environment, but for 7,000 families in Ontario this government is bad news for the economy.

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member from Nepean-Carleton referred to the People's Republic of China as Red China, and I take exception to that. I would like him to withdraw that comment.

Mr Baird: I withdraw "Red" and insert "Communist."

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Member for Nepean-Carleton, did I hear a withdrawal?

Mr Baird: Yes.

The Speaker: "I withdraw," you said.

Mr Baird: Mr Speaker, I said I would withdraw and insert the word "Communist."

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's an honour for me to introduce some gentlemen in the—

The Speaker: I'll take that, but the member for Toronto-Danforth was getting up on her member's statement.

QUESTION PERIOD

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Frasier, CSI, Law and Order, the West Wing—they are must-see TV, but they're not the only good shows gracing the small screen these days. On Saturday I watched the premiere of a new classic, Global TV's Liberal Lob of the Week. The new Focus Ontario feature exposes the worst examples of the Liberal softball questions that shield Dalton McGuinty from the tough questions he fears. If the Liberals stop the softball, opposition MPPs could ask McGuinty hardball questions about the environment, for instance, questions like, "Why did you betray your promise to protect the Oak Ridges moraine? Why won't you keep your promise to protect the Dufferin-Rouge agricultural preserve? Why won't you ban mega-hog barns that put our drinking water at risk?"

Why won't you just say no to dumping Toronto's garbage at Adams mine?"

I say to Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals, his Liberal Lob of the Week and his Liberal Lob of the Week TV stars, playing games with question period is bad news for the environment. Stop the softball questions and face the hardball questions Ontarians want answered, starting today.

1350

VISITORS

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wish to draw the members' attention to the members' gallery. We have several members here from the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association: Stephen Lee, manager, and Jong-Kyu Huh, president. Please join me in welcoming them.

MEMBER'S ANNIVERSARY

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to take this opportunity to announce a very important anniversary of one of our colleagues.

On December 14, it will have been 10 years ago that Bruce Crozier first took his seat in this Legislature as the member for Essex South. It's now known as the riding of Essex. In the 10 years that my friend and colleague has been here at Queen's Park, those of us who have worked with him have come to know him as a man of great integrity.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That wasn't a point of order, and I would ask members, when I do stand, if you could sit at the time. It's not a point of order, but again, what can I do when you're recognizing an individual like this?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

STRONG COMMUNITIES (PLANNING AMENDMENT) ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LE RENFORCEMENT DES COLLECTIVITÉS (MODIFICATION DE LA LOI SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DU TERRITOIRE)

Mr Gerretsen moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 26, An Act to amend the Planning Act / Projet de loi 26, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire.

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

Mr Gerretsen?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors): I'll wait for ministerial statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I rise today to announce that our government is taking much-needed action to protect our environment.

Under the Tories, perhaps no area of provincial responsibility has been so shamefully neglected as the stewardship of Ontario's environment. The Tories have left this province with an environmental deficit.

In less than a decade, Ontario has gone from being a world leader in urban planning to a place where rampant urban sprawl is chewing up valuable farmland at an unprecedented rate. Ontario's resources and opportunities have been squandered. Instead of clean air and land and safe water, the previous government gave us ineffective policies and insufficient funding and staff. Their vision for the environment was about as clear as the Toronto skyline during a smog alert. Ontarians understand that if they can't trust their drinking water because of government indifference, their quality of life suffers. Ontarians understand that if they spend hours stuck in gridlock because of uncontrolled sprawl, their quality of life suffers. And Ontarians understand that if these basics can't be managed correctly, if we can't maintain our critical infrastructures, then our economy suffers. The water we drink, the land that sustains us, the beauty of our urban and rural environments, these are priorities that matter to Ontarians because they are essential to maintaining our high quality of life. That's why we are changing the direction of government.

Our goal is nothing less than this: We will make Ontario a world leader in greener, more liveable communities. We will protect the health and safety of our citizens and build a quality of life that is second to none. The Walkerton inquiry found that the previous government's cuts to environmental protection contributed to that tragedy. One of the basic responsibilities of government is to keep our drinking water safe, a responsibility this government takes seriously. We will work hard to ensure Ontario has the cleanest, safest water anywhere in North America.

Today I am pleased to announce that our government will hire 33 new, full-time water inspectors, investigators and other compliance staff. We will do this to protect Ontario's drinking water. Drinking water protection, from source to tap, is a key part of our agenda for positive change. We are moving in a new and better direction by increasing the number of water inspectors by 25%. At the present time there are 81 water inspectors. With this announcement, there will be 101 water in-

spectors in Ontario. This is the first of many steps we're taking to protect our families and the environment and to fulfill the recommendations of the Walkerton inquiry.

This week, our government will make a series of announcements that will improve the quality of life in Ontario by protecting our environment. In the weeks and months ahead, our government will take real action that will help build cleaner, greener communities in Ontario. This is part of the real, positive change that Ontarians have demanded and that our government is delivering. And while the previous government pitted one group against another to protect the special interests of the few, our government will work together with all partners to protect the environment that we all share. Together we'll build an environmental legacy that will make Ontario the envy of the world once again.

LAND USE PLANNING

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors): I'm pleased to introduce a bill this afternoon that aims to empower communities to shape their own destinies. The bill, if passed, will give communities the much-needed tools to control their own planning. It will put the ability to guide urban development back into the hands of locally elected decision-makers. It will make for stronger communities which, as we all know, are good for our quality of life and our economy. It marks another important step in our agenda for positive change.

Under the previous government, all too often developers and the Ontario Municipal Board dominated the land use planning process. All too often it worked against the public interest. We have listened to the concerns of local governments regarding the land use planning process and we are acting on them decisively. For too long, municipalities have been frustrated in their attempts to control urban sprawl. We need to put a stop to this disorder by giving power back to municipalities.

1400

The McGuinty government is keeping its commitment to take Ontario in a new direction. We want to give communities the tools they need to grow smart. We're giving the people of Ontario a real voice in the way their communities grow and prosper. The principles of accountability and transparency should be returned to local planning.

This government values the important work local councils do. We know how decisions made at that level have an effect right here in people's backyards, and we know the kind of strong communities we can build when we work co-operatively with municipalities. This province's strength comes from the diversity of its communities. The McGuinty government is committed to bringing in a new era of co-operation between the province and municipalities.

The previous Tory government diminished the voices of Ontarians in their own communities. We are moving quickly in our agenda for positive change by taking steps

that would ensure that unwanted urban expansions couldn't be forced upon communities.

For too long, responsible planning decisions by municipal councils have been overturned by the Ontario Municipal Board. It had the effect of encouraging sprawl. It took decisions that should have been in the hands of local councils and put them in the hands of an unelected, unaccountable board. No more. Local people, local governments should decide what happens to their communities.

This government knows how precious our wetlands, greenspaces and rural areas are, and of their value to the well-being of our environment, to our health and to the character of this province.

That's why today I'm proud to introduce the Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act. The previous government ignored municipalities' concerns about the land use planning process. The proposed Strong Communities Act, if passed, will address those concerns by giving our democratically elected local governments the planning authority that rightfully belongs to them.

This act would make the Planning Act relevant once again. It typifies a new era of co-operation between the province and its municipalities. The bill, if passed, would help to address municipal concerns and substantially increase opportunity for public input into the planning process by increasing the number of days for municipalities to review substantial land use applications.

Under the Tories, the planning process was not a sufficiently open process. This bill would make government work for the people by making the planning process more open and transparent to Ontarians.

The Strong Communities Act, if passed, would help to ensure that locally elected officials remained in control of land use planning in their municipality. It would do this by eliminating loopholes, by ending the process that allows appeals to the OMB over applications that would alter urban boundaries.

This, by the way, is one of the steps in a series of very important reforms to the Ontario Municipal Board. Those reforms are badly needed. The OMB has proven in the past to be a large and expensive obstacle to smart growth. For example, in the last five years, municipalities in the GTA alone spent more than \$20 million fighting OMB decisions. In the township of Uxbridge, for example, property taxes had to go up just to pay for the lawyers it needed to fight a developer at the OMB. No longer. If passed, the Strong Communities Act would eliminate an applicant's right of appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board if a municipality does not give notice of a public meeting for an official plan amendment application within 45 days.

The previous government diminished the voices of Ontarians in their own communities. The McGuinty government wants to give Ontarians a real and significant voice in the way their communities grow and prosper. Our government intends to give municipalities and the OMB rules that would provide a clear direction for community planning.

The bill, if passed, would ensure that the will of the people of Ontario, as expressed through their local councils, is respected when we plan for the growth of strong and healthy communities. We all know that environmental protection and good planning benefit everyone.

There are rules in the provincial policy statement set out for responsible, sustainable community planning and environmental protection. Over the last eight years, those rules have been largely ignored. No longer. If enacted, the proposed Strong Communities Act would make sure that local planning decisions reflect these policies and reflect the public interest. The Ontario Liberals promised fundamental reforms to land use planning in Ontario, and today I'm here to deliver on that promise.

Eight years of eroding the public's role in deciding the future of its communities is over. We want to move quickly to ensure that legitimate local concerns cannot be brushed aside. The power to make important local decisions should be put back in the hands of communities. We want to put an end to the disorder in the land use planning process left to us by the previous government.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I wish to respond to this statement from our Minister of the Environment—I've just received it; it's titled Green Week. I will point out to the minister the importance of another not so much public relations as information-raising day, Earth Day, which is coming up next spring. I was involved in the first Earth Day in the early 1970s, as a teacher of environmental science. To this day, I and my colleagues continue to fight the fight, endeavouring not only to clean up our air, our land and our water but to ensure sustainability.

We as MPPs on all sides, as members of society and representing our society in Ontario, take responsibility. We have to focus; we have to have a mission, with respect to our natural environment, to protect the quality of that environment and to encourage conservation and cleanliness not only of water but of energy and other material resources, while at the same time continuing to do our best to clean up our air, our water and our land.

Certainly we, on this side of the House, envision an Ontario where human health, recreation and commerce—and industry, I might add—are sustained by clean air and by clean water and land. To fulfill this vision, all of us in this Legislature must continue to press this government to set clear policies, to set standards and rules to protect the environment, and to encourage conservation activities and sustainability within our social and economic climate in Ontario.

Certainly, along with monitoring the environment and enforcing these rules, it's incumbent on government to continue to look for more innovative approaches to complement the regulations and the continued hiring of additional staff, as we hear in this announcement today. We must look beyond solely an announcement on water

and solely an announcement about hiring more public servants. We must look beyond. We must consider building partnerships with communities, partnerships with industry, partnerships with organizations to find ever more flexible, practical and, I stress, cost-effective approaches and ways to strengthen not only environmental protection but also conservation. I remind this government, and I reinforce with this government, to continue in a direction to recognize that a healthy, natural environment is essential to the well-being of our families.

It's also essential to the ability of this province to attract investment and jobs. That was an approach that we indicated for the last eight and a half years. We as a society play an important role in making the province the best jurisdiction in North America. We're finding better, stronger and clearer environmental protection—

Interjection.

Mr Barrett: Are you saying I'm out of time?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Yes

Mr Barrett: OK, I'll wrap up. I understood it would be a separate response to the other minister. I'll defer to the member opposite.

1410

LAND USE PLANNING

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): Today we've received a wake-up call. We've received a wake-up call from this government in relation to making changes to the Planning Act.

I think one of the things that is critical in understanding even the word "planning" is that it requires decisions to be made with a long-term vision and a plan. I represent a community in part of York region, and 40,000 people move annually to York region. This requires long-term vision. It requires then a kind of legislative framework where one council that makes a decision is there and investors respond to that.

There may be a lag time before they are able to actually begin building. In the meantime, they can't be frustrated by the fact that they've made this investment. Now you have an objection of a problem that allows them to look at their options, and those have disappeared by this legislation. It doesn't make any sense.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You have to ask permission.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): Mr Speaker—

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I think there has to be a request for unanimous consent.

Mr Prue: Then I would so request, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Do I have unanimous consent for a five-minute response?

Mr Prue: I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Toronto-Danforth. Could I have unanimous consent for her as well?

The Speaker: Agreed.

Mr Prue: Thank you.

Everyone in Ontario knows that the Ontario Municipal Board needs to be reformed. Everyone knows that it is an anachronistic symbol of times past. We would commend the Minister of Municipal Affairs on this initiative. It is in fact a small move in the right direction, and we are generally supportive of what is contained in this bill, if only it went just a little further.

We need to strengthen our municipal governments. That's what we really need to do. This will help in some small way to strengthen those governments. But what governments really need are their new sources of revenue; the power to do their own planning; the power to enforce their own laws of their own jurisdiction. We need to recognize throughout that municipalities are mature governments in the scheme of governance in Ontario and in the scheme of governance in Canada.

Having said that, the board needs to be circumscribed, because it has simply gone too far over the last number of years. I am mindful that the government is talking about increasing the time frames. That is a good idea. It has become increasingly impossible for many of the municipalities to meet time frames of 90 days or of meeting time frames which are less in things that are not official plan amendments. We welcome those changes.

There is a problem, though. I want to tell you that we do not see in this bill what needs to be addressed. We see a problem with patronage appointees continuing to be appointed to the Ontario Municipal Board. It has been a problem for a long time, and we see that that problem will continue, because now the government has one of its own members chairing that particular board that is going to appoint people to the Ontario Municipal Board. We see a continuing problem, and it is in the government's bill that the governor in council will show provincial interest and will circumscribe what the municipalities want to do when and if they choose to exercise their own jurisdiction.

We continue to see a problem with the public consultations that have been promised, because to date in this new Legislature the committees of the government are stacked, of course, with Liberals, everything is time-allocated, and they are routinely ignoring the public input on every bill that has come forward to this date.

We continue to see a problem with the role of the Ontario Municipal Board and are mindful that the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal made many speeches of simply getting rid of it altogether. We're looking to see something being done in that regard.

We continue to see problems where this government has talked about greenlands preservation and has gone ahead with development in the Oak Ridges moraine.

We continue to see problems with this government promising rural protection under the Ontario Municipal Board and it has flip-flopped on the whole issue of the Richmond landfill.

We continue to see problems, but the direction you are taking is an appropriate direction. We will work with you, but we expect much more in the future.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): It sounds as though I'll have many other opportunities throughout the rest of the week to respond to statements by the minister. I do want to say through you to her today that the announcement of 25 new water inspectors today just doesn't—

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): It's 33.

Ms Churley: Whatever. It doesn't even come close to what we need. I'm looking forward to hearing the minister announce tomorrow or the day after that they will be bringing back up to 500 of the over 750 staff that the previous government let go. I'm looking forward to hearing the announcement that the drastic cuts, beyond the bone, to the Ministry of the Environment, the ministry that had more cuts than any other, all be put back into that ministry. Those are the kinds of things we're going to be looking for, because tough new regulation, if it's coming, doesn't mean the paper it's printed on, as we learned from what the previous government did, when the front-line staff are not there to regulate, to inspect and make sure that people are actually obeying the law.

The other thing we'll be looking for is an absolute no to Adams mine. We will be looking for a solution to the whole Port Colborne situation. We will be looking for a real commitment, a strong commitment to those coal plants being shut down when promised. We'll be looking for announcements about preserving our forests. I'm looking forward to hearing all of these things later this week.

DEFERRED VOTES

ONTARIO ENERGY BOARD AMENDMENT ACT (ELECTRICITY PRICING), 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA COMMISSION DE L'ÉNERGIE DE L'ONTARIO (ÉTABLISSEMENT DU COÛT DE L'ÉLECTRICITÉ)

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of 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): Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1417 to 1422.

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

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Duguid, Brad	Patten, Richard
Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Peters, Steve
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peterson, Tim
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kennedy, Gerard	Racco, Mario G.
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Brown, Michael A.	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Smitherman, George
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Colle, Mike	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Cordiano, Joseph	McGuinty, Dalton	Van Bommel, Maria
Craitor, Kim	McMeekin, Ted	Watson, Jim
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wong, Tony C.
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Orazietti, David	Zimmer, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	Parsons, Ernie	

The Speaker: Those against, please rise.

Nays

Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	O'Toole, John
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Chudleigh, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Eves, Ernie	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sterling, Norman W.
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Hudak, Tim	Munro, Julia	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 65; the nays are 20.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm asking for unanimous consent for each party represented in the House to have up to five minutes to congratulate coalition forces on the capture of Saddam Hussein.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? I hear a no.

ORAL QUESTIONS**PROVINCIAL DEFICIT**

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Premier. During the recent election campaign, you consistently bragged that you would set aside \$2 billion to balance the projected deficit. What have you done with the \$2 billion?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to thank the member opposite for his question, but I can assure him that the question that weighs heavily on the minds of Ontarians is: What happened to the balanced budget? They were assured time and time again that the books were balanced, but as we have learned, not only to our dismay but to the dismay of Ontarians, what we've been left with

is a \$5.6-billion deficit. I would think that when it comes to the great issues of the day, the single most important question is: Where in the heck did that \$5.6-billion deficit come from?

Mr Baird: Premier, your government has introduced legislation to require cabinet ministers to attend question period and, if they don't, they're fined. Perhaps we need a piece of legislation to require cabinet ministers and the Premier to answer questions or they would be fined.

Again, Mr Premier, you consistently bragged during the recent election campaign, "Don't worry; be happy." You said that you could handle a \$2-billion deficit. Again, I want to ask the Premier: Where is that \$2 billion and shouldn't you apply it to the projected deficit today?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite knows that we have moved very aggressively with our plan not to proceed with some irresponsible tax cuts that this government had planned to proceed with. We're not going ahead with the corporate tax cut; we're not going ahead with the private school tax credit; we're not going ahead with mortgage interest deductibility; we're not going ahead with the seniors' property tax credit. Those are irresponsible tax cuts.

What we are doing, given the circumstances that we have found, is acting responsibly, something that government failed to do for the last eight and a half years.

Mr Baird: As Paula Todd said to you on September 19, "No, no, no." You've already told them that that money is going to health care and education. On September 30, you said, "As you know, we've accounted for a \$2-billion deficit." After the election, on October 3, you went further and said, "We've accounted for a \$2-billion deficit."

Stand in your place, Premier, and answer the question: Where is that \$2 billion and why won't you put it against the projected deficit this year?

Hon Mr McGuinty: It's not just the \$5.6-billion deficit, either. We seem to find, on an almost daily basis, evidence of further irresponsibility on the part of this government, whether we're talking about \$800 million in accumulated hospital deficits or \$25 million for the children's aid society. We've discovered something, which the Minister of Energy will be speaking to shortly, with respect to what's happening—the real story—over at OPG.

What we are doing, for the first time, is changing the direction of government. We're going to act in a responsible way, we're going to live within our means and we're going to move ahead on our commitments.

1430

Mr Baird: Premier, I have in my hand a copy of the Liberal economic plan. In your plan you clearly promised the people of Ontario a balanced budget. You asked David Hall, a former senior economist with the Bank of Montreal, to both certify and verify your numbers. In his assessment, which you proudly reproduce in your plan, he says that you've set aside not \$2 billion but \$3 billion to deal with the financial challenges of the province. Premier, where is that \$3 billion?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The people of Ontario have now had a good opportunity to fully assess the state of the books left by the previous government. We've had Mr Peters provide us with an independent, objective report as to where we stand when it comes to government finances. The fact of the matter is we have been left with a \$5.6-billion deficit. That is the single most important figure that continues to weigh heavily on the minds of Ontarians.

Again I say to the member opposite, why is it that throughout an entire campaign period, notwithstanding which representative of the government spoke on behalf of the government, each and every candidate, each and every member of the government, maintained that the books were balanced and that we had no deficit whatsoever, but at the end of the day we discovered there was a \$5.6-billion deficit?

Mr Baird: Premier, you're not the Leader of the Opposition; you're in government. You get the car and driver; you get the corner office. Question period is the opportunity for you to answer for your campaign commitments. You and your government are continuing to play politics with the projected deficit.

Let's look at what your man, David Hall, is now saying. On November 15 he said, "What I said was that the Liberal financial plan was enough to turn a \$2-billion deficit into zero." Further, in his words, "Arguably, it could turn a \$5-billion deficit into \$3 billion."

You should stand in your place and tell this House, is your man David Hall wrong?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to take this opportunity to assure you, the members opposite and the people of Ontario that we are doing everything within our power to get our fiscal house in order and clean up the mess left to us by the previous government.

We are being straight with the people of Ontario. We have been saddled with a \$5.6-billion deficit. It is not something we sought, you understand, but it is something we are coming to terms with, something we're going to tackle. We're going to face our challenges head-on, we're going to do the right thing and we're going to act responsibly, given the circumstances as they've left those to us.

Mr Baird: Premier, you appear to be prepared to say you'll do anything except stand in your place and answer a direct question.

This is the Liberal plan. These are your numbers. David Hall is your expert. You promised a balanced budget. You promised to budget \$3 billion against a projected deficit. You are standing in your place, but you won't answer the question. This Liberal financial plan is worthless. It's not worth the paper it's printed on.

Premier, will you stand in your place and tell us what you've done with this \$3 billion, or is it another example of a billion-dollar boondoggle brought to you by the Liberal Party?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I appreciate the Mulroneyesque theatrics, and I would remind the member opposite where that kind of approach brought Mr Mulroney.

We are now, collectively as a province, confronted with a substantial deficit. But, as I said, it gets worse than that. We are now discovering on a fairly consistent basis that there is still more trouble beyond that particular deficit, whether we're talking about our hospital deficits, whether we're talking about what has been left over at the children's aid society or whether we talk about the real story behind what's been happening over at Ontario Power Generation.

I want to say to the member opposite and the members of the government, but more importantly to the people of Ontario, that we are rolling up our sleeves. We will not shrink from our responsibility when it comes to dealing with this deficit. We're going to work as hard as we can to put our fiscal house in order and create a strong economy and a caring society.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Baird: Again to the Premier, the time for playing politics with the Ontario economy is over. Your bogus deficit, your phony blame game, is starting to have a real effect on the province's economy. Let's look at what John Williamson, your friend at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, is saying: "The Liberal government has overplayed its hand." The government has talked up the deficit but has done little to deal with it.

John Williamson last week said that any deficit above \$600 million is a Liberal deficit. He said that the Liberals have already demonstrated their ability to raise taxes, but taxpayers wonder if they are equally capable of controlling spending.

Premier, will you stand in your place, do the right thing and take that \$2 billion and \$1 billion that you promised, that you budgeted for, and put it against the financial challenge of the province? Would you do that, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the Minister of Finance is anxious to speak to this matter.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'll tell you and the members of this House that I have a great deal of respect for my friend the head of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. But, frankly, in that release his credibility slips several notches. What he did—inadvertently, I am sure—is bring in an additional \$2.1 billion on the revenue side when you incorporate the incorporation of electricity into our overall balance sheet. What he forgot to do was to bring in additional expenses of \$2.8 billion. That's his trouble. He needs to do his arithmetic more effectively before he puts out press releases of that sort.

Mr Baird: The verdict is in, Minister. Under your watch we've seen broken promises. We've seen the largest tax increase in Ontario's history. We've seen no strategy on job creation. This inaction, this attempt by you and your government to vilify the former government instead of taking your responsibilities and getting to work on balancing the budget, is having real consequences on the Ontario economy. In the first month with you at the helm, we have lost more than 7,000 jobs.

My question is to the Minister of Finance. Will he do the right thing? Will he finally begin to deal with the

projected deficit and send out a positive message to job creation and the Ontario economy?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend talks about inaction. Has he been in this Parliament over the course of the past month? Right away we brought in a bill to start repairing our revenue base. That bill we hope will get third reading tomorrow. Today we have just given third reading to a bill dealing with hydro. We brought in a bill to change the Audit Act. We've repealed the education credit. We've repealed the seniors' education credit.

We are starting. I think this could be seen as one of the most activist sessions of this Parliament to get this province's financial house in order. You folks left a terrible mess. We've already begun to repair the damage.

1440

TORONTO YOUTH ASSESSMENT CENTRE

Ms Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. As you know, the Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy is authorized to protect the rights and interests of Ontario's children. It also seeks to ensure that children and youth in custody know and understand their rights and that those laws to protect them from abuse or harsh treatment are followed.

Minister, I understand that your office is in possession of the copy of the advocate's executive summary of the 2003 review on the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre. The advocate's office has identified a number of concerns in the area of peer-on-peer violence, staff-youth interactions and basic care. What is your ministry doing to address those concerns?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I want to thank the member for London North Centre for her question. I too share the concerns about what is happening at the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre, referred to as TYAC. It's in Mimico. It's an area that is of concern; it has been of concern to the child advocate. As a matter of fact, the child advocate issued a report to the former government in 2000, complaining about the facilities that are there. I am committed to safe, secure, humane treatment for the young people who are in our correctional services. I have met with the child advocate, I understand her concerns and I share those concerns.

I want to assure the member and the House that we will review the situation there. I've called on my officials to report back to me within three weeks as to how we can address those issues. The Dalton McGuinty government is committed to a seamless youth correctional facility that serves the needs of both the citizens of Ontario and those people who are in our institutions.

Ms Matthews: I look forward to your report, but the report determines that the only reasonable conclusion is to close the centre and transfer the youths to facilities that ensure their safety and a respectful, rehabilitative environment. What are you going to do about the advocate

calling on the government to close the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre?

Hon Mr Kwinter: The facility was opened in 1998. It was a facility that's on the same site as the Mimico adult correctional facility. It is totally, totally unsuitable for youth. I understand that. I have visited the facility, I've seen what is there, and we are committed to changing it. You can't build a new facility overnight. We are looking at the greater Toronto area youth centre. We have the plans in the works, and subject to fiscal constraints, obviously, we are determined to replace that facility and make sure that the facility we put in place will serve the needs of youth.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Minister of Children's Services, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. It's your job to be an advocate for multiculturalism around the cabinet table. It's your job to be a spokesperson for children. During the recent election campaign, you made a commitment to scrap the equity in education tax credit.

Last week, we had hearings in this place. Let's look at what some of the presenters said. Simon Rosenblum, the director of public policy for the Canadian Jewish Congress, said that to cancel the equity in education tax credit "in such a retroactive manner seems to us most unfair and mean spirited." Bernie Farber, the executive director of the Canadian Jewish Congress, said to cancel it "so retroactively was like a bully punching us in the stomach."

Would you stand in your place and tell us that you'll fight for the Jewish community in Ontario?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children's Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I thank the honourable member for the question, and I thank him for the opportunity to remind the public of what he did to those same groups during the last campaign, when he had the immigration policy under the crime platform.

We did have scrapping this tax credit for the private schools on our campaign platform, and we won a majority government based on it. The people have spoken. I am very close with many of the groups that you speak of, and they are not all in agreement with this critic, and the election results showed that. I find it very interesting that you would stand up and talk about immigration after the disgraceful way you treated the ethnic groups in this province for cheap political points during the last campaign.

Mr Baird: Again, every day another broken Liberal promise, and every day in question period no answers to reasonable questions. It's not just these groups, I say to the minister opposite. Let's look at what Muhammad Khalid, the education director of the Islamic Society of North America, said to the committee. He said that your decision to retroactively cancel the credit "is going to create mistrust of governments, and it is extremely unjust."

Let's look at what Toni Silberman, the chair of the League for Human Rights of B'Nai Brith Canada said: "Such an act can only be described as unjustifiably punitive to those who have made their family budgets and financial commitments contingent on receiving this credit."

Minister, families have made financial decisions. This small amount of money—\$1,400 a child—may not be a lot for you and I, but it's a lot for working families in Ontario. Your campaign spoke of no commitment to do this retroactively. You're not raising corporate taxes retroactively and you're not raising personal income taxes retroactively—it's bad public policy. Would you stand up for minority communities in this province, would you stand up for children and working families and say you'll reverse this punitive tax measure?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: The majority of children from those communities attend public schools, and I will make no apologies for supporting our public school system.

Let me tell you some of the things I heard during the election campaign from people who said, "My parents came years ago, and we are insulted by the Tory government's statements on immigration and on their crime platform." I can get you lists and lists of quotes from those people as well.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Answer the question.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I answered the question, sir.

The public system deserves our support. We ran on it clearly, and we won the election. Get over it, member.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Will the government side come to order.

LANDFILL

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question today is to the Attorney General. Dalton McGuinty committed during the election to drop the court appeal launched by the last government regarding the proposed Richmond landfill expansion. Leona Dombrowsky, the Minister of the Environment, delivered on this promise almost immediately after being sworn in. Subsequent to this, you served notice on the court of your intention to have intervener status. Would you clarify for my constituents the purpose and intent of your ministry becoming involved in this court case?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): The member for Prince Edward-Hastings is correct. The government inherited a number of legal matters—a number of decisions—and independent judgments have to be made as to how to proceed with each of them. The judgment in this case was to abandon the appeal, and the Minister of the Environment, Leona Dombrowsky, did just that.

A separate appeal proceeded, brought by Canadian Waste Services Inc. In that, the appellate decision is

going to consider the general legal principle as to ministerial discretion; namely, whether a court should give deference to a decision made by a minister, and the scope of the minister's discretionary authority. That's a general legal principle and has wide-ranging impacts on all ministries, on this government and on future governments. In the ordinary course of business, the Attorney General would make submissions in this regard. We're doing that through intervener status, so we can address those issues. But let me be very clear: The government has abandoned the appeal, period.

Mr Parsons: The need for megadumps such as this exists partially because the previous government eliminated all provincial support for blue box recycling and waste diversion. As a result, Ontario now has the lowest recycling rate in Canada. Ontario diverts only 25% of its waste, despite the Harris guarantee to reach 50% by the year 2000. Edmonton and Halifax both divert over 65% of their waste.

Minister, what will be done to boost waste diversion and lower the pressure for new landfills?

Hon Mr Bryant: The Minister of the Environment will want to answer this question.

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm always very happy to restate this government's commitment to assisting municipalities in reaching a 60% diversion rate.

I stated earlier today in the Legislature that we are committed to protecting our environment, that we are also committed to returning to a place in Canada where we set an example instead of being the worst example, the worst polluter. We are going to bring forward policies that other provinces will be able to look at with respect and begin to emulate once again. That left us in the last eight years. We intend to return that.

1450

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. Earlier today you said, and I quote, "We are rolling up our sleeves." That's in regard to dealing with the deficit. I'd like to ask you, Premier, since you have been elected, have you at any time given directions to your Minister of Finance and to the ministers in your cabinet to bring in a plan that would balance the budget by March 31, 2004?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the Chair of Management Board wants to speak to this.

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I want to assure the people of Ontario that literally the day I was appointed to cabinet, the Premier instructed me to go back to the Management Board and begin getting the fiscal house in order. We immediately put a freeze on discretionary spending; a freeze on hiring; we held back about a billion dollars of expenditures; we introduced advertising legislation to

prohibit the sort of abuse we found on spending money just last week.

I want to tell the people of Ontario that every day, as we're trying to deal with that, we find these surprises: \$800 million of hospital spending, borrowed money from previous years, children's aid societies having to borrow \$25 million, hospitals running deficits of \$400 million—literally a billion dollars of spending not on the books.

We've rolled up our sleeves, but we're dealing with a mess that had been left here by the previous government. We'll deal with it, but I want the people of Ontario to know that the mess we've got is extremely challenging in these tough economic and fiscal times.

Mr Klees: I find the answer evasive, as always. My question was very specific: Did the Premier, at any time since he took on his role as Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Please allow the member for Oak Ridges to ask his question.

Mr Klees: My question was very specific: Did the Premier, at any time since his election, give direction to his Minister of Finance and members of cabinet to get to work and bring in a balanced budget by the end of the fiscal year—yes or no? The people of this province deserve to know what your marching orders were to your Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Phillips: I repeat again to the people of Ontario, as soon as I was appointed by the Premier, he instructed me to begin action on dealing with a \$5.6-billion mess that was left by the previous government. I outlined for the House and for the people of Ontario that I took those five specific steps. I would tell the people of Ontario that we are being very firm on not approving any expenditures going forward. I would say to the people of Ontario, here's what we're dealing with: \$5.6-billion of mess. The hydro situation: far worse than anyone had ever dreamed possible.

Under the direction of my Premier, we will aggressively deal with the fiscal situation that we have found. We will solve the problem, but I just want to tell the people of Ontario once again that we have inherited an enormous mess from the previous government, much of it completely hidden from the public.

CONTAMINATION IN PORT COLBORNE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): My question is to the Premier, a very important question about people's health and the environment. A new study revealed startling news about health problems faced by the people of Port Colborne. As you know, Inco has polluted that town with nickel, lead and other toxins. We've been raising it with the previous government.

The report found high rates of acute respiratory infections, asthma, kidney and bladder problems, elevated coronary artery disease and circulatory problems. We pressured the previous government into promising swift action if this study found evidence of health problems. They have, but we talked to the people of Port

Colborne, and they told us that your government told them you're too busy to help them until next spring. I want to ask why you are making the people of Port Colborne wait until spring. Why don't you start helping them immediately?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I know the Minister of the Environment would like to speak to this.

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I am aware of the situation in Port Colborne. Representatives from the Ministry of the Environment have had an opportunity to review the community health assessment project. We continue to work with local health unit officials, as well as Inco, to ensure that the safety of the people in that community and the environment are managed to the very best of our ability.

We certainly appreciate the concerns that have been raised by the people, and we are doing all we can, in our power, to work with all the agencies to ensure that the safety of the community is put first.

Ms Churley: Minister, the people in Port Colborne said they were told that your government is too busy to deal with this until spring. The people of Port Colborne are paying for years of pollution with their health. Dr David Pengally, professor at McMaster University in Hamilton, said: "The hospitalization rates are high, and not just a little bit high. They are well over 50% higher than the rest of the province."

The people of Port Colborne can't wait. They need your help now. This is the next step, Minister, and I want you to say you'll start right away. Case by case studies will uncover exactly who is at risk and how to protect them. Don't make them wait until spring. Roll up your sleeves and get to work to help these people today. Will you do that, Minister?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: That the member opposite would say the people have told her this is one thing. I would invite them to contact me directly. I would very much like to have an opportunity to deal with them personally on this issue. Again, it's a file I have been briefed on. I am aware that members of the Ministry of the Environment, the health unit and the company, Inco, have been working to address this very serious health issue at Port Colborne.

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Mr Dominic Agostino (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister Consumer and Business Services. Serious concerns have been raised about the security of the birth certificate system in Ontario. Our Premier, then-opposition leader Dalton McGuinty, raised this issue to the government's attention in the fall of 2001. His warnings were ignored by the previous Conservative government, and problems still exist within the system.

Last year, we all recall that more than 500 blank birth certificates were stolen, and the action of the previous government was to simply try to keep that information away from the public as a way of trying to deal with the embarrassment of what happened.

Minister, I know you take this issue seriously, and we know that birth certificates are extremely important documents. Can you tell us what steps have been taken to the tighten security of birth certificates in Ontario and what steps you will take?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Obviously the security and safety of birth certificates is an important issue with our ministry. As a result of recent concerns that have been raised about the security and safety of those birth certificates, we contacted Mr Norman Inkster, the safety and security adviser for our ministry and for the office of the registrar general. Mr Inkster sent me a note today and indicated: "In my opinion, the staff and executives of the office of the registrar general continue to take a very serious and professional approach to addressing issues of security."

Regrettably, the previous government was warned as far back as December 2002 that same-day service—issuing certificates on the same day—does continue to pose a threat. He says: "In previous reports, I've taken the position that the provision of same-day services for the issuance of base documents such as birth certificates is unwise and poses an unnecessary risk."

The previous government regrettably ignored that advice, and I'm pleased to report that, effective at the end of the business day today, we will cease offering same-day service. We will still provide a high quality of service, but we're not confident that same-day service can ensure the safety and security of the birth certificate system.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Tories bad, blah, blah, blah.

1500

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Member from Nepean-Carleton, I don't appreciate the nagging and bickering that goes across. Will you refrain from that, please? Supplementary.

Mr Agostino: I'm pleased that the minister has already taken steps to try to deal with this problem. Minister, as we know, the previous government ignored a number of warnings on public safety, from water to energy. There were warnings about the security around blank birth certificates. We know about the 500 that were stolen that the government tried to keep from the public.

Our birth certificates must be secure from identity thieves or potential terrorists. Birth certificates are often a gateway to other documents that have become very valuable to people who want to use them for criminal activity. It is your responsibility, Minister, to ensure that these important documents are secure and are going to the right hands. What steps have you taken, and can you assure us that our birth certificates in Ontario are safe today, ensuring that they do not get into the wrong hands and only into the hands of people who deserve them and who should rightly get them?

Hon Mr Watson: We have one of the most secure birth certificate registry systems in Canada, if not North America. Our staff does a very thorough and very diligent job at ensuring that people who come in and

apply for a birth certificate are in fact the individuals who appear on the birth certificate itself. So I have great confidence in the system. You can't simply walk into the office of the Registrar General and ask for a birth certificate; you have to fill out the proper forms, and we have to verify those forms against the information we have in the registry.

So I have great confidence in the system, but I don't believe it's fair, in this day and age of concern over security, that we simply have a same-day service. It puts too much pressure on the staff and on the system, and it doesn't give us enough time to ensure the proper checks and balances in issuing a birth certificate.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I direct my question again to the Premier, and it goes to the heart of what I believe is really a credibility deficit that's developing in this province at the foot of his government. I asked a very specific question, and I believe the people of Ontario really deserve to know the answer. They want to know whether or not you, as Premier, felt it important to balance the budget by the end of the fiscal year as, by the way, you had promised. You had made that promise in the election campaign.

On two occasions, I asked a specific question as to whether or not you had directed your finance minister to bring in a balanced budget. You refused to answer that. I'm going to ask you one more time: Did you or did you not instruct your finance minister to bring in a balanced budget, to do the heavy lifting, to do what had to be done, to make the cuts that perhaps had to be made, but to honour a commitment to balance the budget? Did you or did you not?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I think the Minister of Finance would like to speak to this.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I guess I should just tell my friend from Oak Ridges that I invite him to be here in a couple of days when I will be presenting a fall economic statement and addressing the question that he asked in greater detail.

But let me tell him that he was part of a government that so misconstrued the real financial circumstances of this province, details of which—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could you withdraw that?

Hon Mr Sorbara: If you want me to withdraw the word "misconstrue," I'll withdraw that. They represented the financial circumstances of this province in a creative way. I will tell him that we've rolled up our sleeves, that we're examining every way possible to get this province's financial house in order, and we will do that.

Mr Klees: I am absolutely certain, Speaker, that you share my frustration and the frustration of every Ontarian at the Premier's unwillingness to answer the simplest of questions. He has to refer to the finance minister for a question the finance minister simply can't answer, and

that is whether the Premier—and this question I'll direct back to the Premier. Did the Premier instruct his cabinet and his finance minister to go to work and bring in a balanced budget by the end of the fiscal year, yes or no? This is to the Premier, not the finance minister: Did he?

Interjection: He's calling the shots.

The Speaker: Let me call the shots now and ask you to be quiet. Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Sorbara: If I wanted my friend from Oak Ridges to be privy to the discussions that the Premier and all of us have in cabinet, I would invite him to cross over to this side of the floor and then I would make strong arguments as to why he might be considered one day to participate in those discussions. But I would prefer not to.

I simply want to say to you, sir, that we are working diligently to get this province's financial house in order. Those folks over there took a unique approach to it: When they were running out of money, they'd sell an asset. They sold a \$10-billion highway for \$3 billion. That cost every taxpayer, every citizen of this province, \$7 billion, and that's just one of the mistakes. We're not going to make those sorts of mistakes.

AGRICULTURAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): My first question in this House is for the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Last Thursday, you signed the agricultural policy framework with the federal government. Farmers in my riding of Perth-Middlesex have faced a number of challenges this year, as you are well aware. They are looking for assurances that they are getting a fair deal, which the former provincial government was unable or unwilling to give them. Minister, can you tell the farmers in my riding if you were able to get the key concessions Ontario farmers wanted by sitting down with the federal government to hammer out a deal?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I thank the member for Perth-Middlesex for the question. First and foremost, I think it's important that we thank the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council. Under the leadership of Mr John Gillespie, they were able to bring together the agricultural community in this province to deliver a clear and consistent message to me, as Minister of Agriculture and Food, that I could deliver to the federal minister.

The agricultural policy framework was very important, not only from the business management standpoint but for the environment, science and renewal, and food safety and quality. There are a number of positive areas that are going to benefit the agricultural community down the road. By negotiating in good faith with the federal government, we were able to ensure that we have a good deal for Ontario farmers, a deal that Ontario farmers support and a deal that I believe is going to benefit many other farmers across this province, because we made sure that we wanted to put the interests and the needs of Ontario's diverse agricultural community first.

Interjections.

1510

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): There is a supplementary to come from the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh. Could I hear it, please?

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): Minister, the previous government wasted a lot of time playing the blame game. They were too busy pointing the finger at others to sit down and get to work at a good deal for the farmers.

Farmers in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh could not have waited much longer. The economic impacts of the mad cow scare, SARS, the blackout, the volatilities of crop pricing and other challenges left them in a vulnerable situation. For that reason, farmers are very happy to hear that a satisfactory agreement has finally been reached. Minister, will the agricultural policy framework benefit farmers in my riding who are still coping with economic challenges?

Hon Mr Peters: Some of the concessions that we were able to negotiate, as I said earlier, are going to benefit all the farmers. First and foremost is a one-year review of the program. Initially, the federal government only wanted to have a three-year review.

As well, and this is an issue that's going to help many in the industry right now, was the inclusion of negative margins. Negative margin coverage was very important to the agricultural community. As well, we're going to continue to deliver the companion programs in this province for a further three years. We have the commitment from the federal government that programs like market revenue and self-directed risk management are going to be reviewed. And as well, we were able to reduce the amount of the caps. The caps that existed within the program have been increased and, as well as putting the coverage in, instead of the farmers, we were able to include a letter of credit that the farmers are going to be able to use.

These are definite advantages to the farmers of Ontario, and I want to again thank the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council for their good work at making sure that Ontario's farmers' message is delivered.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question, once again, is to the Premier. The fact of the matter is, it should not have been a surprise to the Premier or his cabinet that there were challenges in the province of Ontario. There was SARS, West Nile, mad cow and we had an electricity blackout that affected the entire north-western seaboard.

The fact of the matter is that our government had given its marching orders to every cabinet minister to look at program review and to bring in a balanced budget by the end of the year. Once again, we were prepared to do what it took, in spite of those fiscal challenges that the province had to bring in a balanced budget by the end of the fiscal year. Did the Premier or did he not direct his cabinet to bring in a balanced budget by the end of fiscal

year 2003? Yes or no, Premier, and why won't you answer that question?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I simply can no longer resist the overtures. Let me say this. I'm not going to divulge the contents of the upcoming budget. I'm not going to divulge the contents of the statement to be delivered later in the week by the Minister of Finance. But I can tell you this, and I can provide this assurance to the people of Ontario. We will not gut public services. We will not sell off the furniture to pay for groceries. We're going to move in a progressive and responsible way to clean up the mess left to us by my friend and his colleagues.

Mr Klees: I take that to mean that the Premier is not interested in balancing the budget, that the Premier has, in fact, given direction to his cabinet colleagues to do whatever it takes to build up a phony budget so that he can continue to do what it takes to meet special interest needs without addressing the fiscal issues in this province. It's a sad day in the province of Ontario, but at least we have an answer to the question that I put earlier. How can he justify that?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could you allow the member from Oak Ridges to ask his question?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Both sides. Order.

Mr Klees: My question is quite straightforward. How can the Premier of this province justify not asking his finance minister and members of the cabinet to do what it takes to bring in a balanced budget for the province of Ontario? How can he justify that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: As my finance minister mentioned, I'm not going to make the member opposite privy to confidential cabinet discussions, but I can provide the following assurances to Ontario families. We will not endanger their health by firing water inspectors. We will not endanger their health by laying off meat inspectors. I can tell you that at all times, we will keep first and foremost in our minds the public interest, the interests of our families. And they've given us very specific marching orders. There's no doubt about that whatsoever. They want better schools, they want better health care, they want a safe and cleaner environment, they want a more productive economy and they want us to live within our means. We intend to do just that.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): My question is to the Minister of Education. Minister, last week this government announced a moratorium on the closure of rural schools. In my riding of Northumberland, five schools have been slated to be closed by the previous government's funding formula: Smithfield Public School, South Cramahe Public School, Castleton Public School, North Hope Central Public School and Dr L.B. Powers Public School. They're very important schools in my riding, and there are five of them.

The students who attend these schools, their parents, their teachers, and the support staff who work there are understandably anxious to hear about their future. Minister, can you tell the residents of my community what the moratorium means to them and to their kids?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I appreciate the member's question. Up until very recently, the view taken by the old government in Ontario was that a school was just a building, that it was a number of square feet per student. It didn't take into account what that school, what those parents committed to their sons' and daughters' education, what the teachers, what the principal had to offer by way of a good education. So we have decided to redefine schools to make sure that good schools can be taken into account, that good schools aren't shut down for the wrong reasons.

There was an obsession by the previous government to have real estate come into the hands of public authorities and less consideration for what schools did for the students, first of all, and for the communities. We'll be making revisions to that, in consultation with our board partners, and I can tell you that the announcement we made has been very positively received because people want to work together on behalf of students, and finally they have a government willing to do that.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): Minister, students, parents, communities and schools in northern Ontario face unique challenges. Northern schools and northern communities generally have smaller student populations and great distances between schools and communities. Because they are smaller, too often northern schools receive fewer resources, less support for students at risk and fewer staff. Closing schools just makes the problem worse.

Over the past few years we have faced prospective school closures in places like Assiginack, Webbwood, Desbarats and other communities across Algoma-Manitoulin. Minister, what does your announcement mean for northern schools and northern boards?

Hon Mr Kennedy: Thank you for the supplemental. What it means for northern schools and what it means for inner-city schools and rural schools that, up to now, have had big bull's eyes painted on their roofs, is that they're going to be considered for their educational value. They're also going to be considered on behalf of not only what they do for children but in terms of value they play in the overall plan that we have.

Some of the best-scoring schools in the province in reading, writing and math have been shut down under the awkward and badly planned decisions of the previous government. We're not saying to the member that no school can be closed down; we're saying that schools can only be closed for good reasons. They have to benefit the students who go to that school. We will have a funding formula, policies and guidelines that will fit the students of this province rather than the other way around.

Previously, the students of this province had to fit, as one grade 7 student said, an approach by this funny-

Conservative Soviet politburo that was one-size-fits-all that fit none. Now we will have policies customized for success for all the students, whom we have great ambition for in the province.

1520

MID-PENINSULA HIGHWAY

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I ask the Minister of Transportation to give the assembly the date when he'll be submitting the EA terms of reference to the Ministry of Environment for the mid-peninsula corridor.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member for his question. I will not be able to give him the exact date, but we are proceeding ahead with the full environmental assessment.

Mr Hudak: I appreciate the minister's answer and congratulate him on this important portfolio. I think the minister knows that this is probably the most important infrastructure project in the Niagara Peninsula in a generation. It will be an artery for investment in trade and tourism through southern and western Niagara.

I'm concerned that the minister and his government are not fully committed; in fact, they're slamming the brakes on the mid-peninsula corridor. In fact, three of their candidates in the last election—Mr Fuller, Mr Sullivan and Mr McMeekin—have all called for studies of alternatives to the mid-peninsula corridor, whether the need is there. In fact, Dalton McGuinty himself at one point said, "We want to look at alternatives."

That work was already done back in 2001. The report was done. According to an MTO-sponsored Web site, the following work has been completed: the Niagara Peninsula transportation needs assessment, the EA study design needs assessment review, public consultation and other reports. Will you give the House your undertaking that you will not repeat any of the work already done, proceed to the next step and submit the EA terms of reference—no repeating the work that's already been done?

Hon Mr Takhar: Actually, I have been on the record in this House saying that we realize the importance of this project. We are going to move ahead with this project. What we first want to make sure is that we assess all the impacts of this project, and that's exactly what we're going to do. I may ask this member, why didn't they move ahead with this project when they were in power?

GRIDLOCK

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. In a recent national survey, Steeles Avenue had the dubious distinction of being named the worst municipal roadway in Ontario and in Canada. In fact, Steeles Avenue turns up twice on the list of 20 of the province's worst roadways: in first place, the Yonge-Bathurst stretch, and in 10th, the Vaughan-Brampton-Milton stretch.

Steeles Avenue is a major artery for residents of the riding of Willowdale as well as for commuters throughout the GTA. It's congested, it's poorly maintained, drivers are frustrated and serious fatal accidents occur. The GTA has many, many streets like this. Steeles Avenue just happens to be the worst. What is the government going to do to fight traffic congestion on Steeles Avenue to ensure that the constituents of Willowdale and all GTA residents can commute downtown and north of the city in a reasonable amount of time and in safety?

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I think the member points out one of the problems we have: a specific gridlock hot spot on Steeles Avenue. Of course, we're going to take that into account as we move forward with our planning a coordinated approach. It is high time we took a comprehensive view of traffic and of gridlock, especially here in the GTA. That's why we are bringing together the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. The way things had been done previously just wasn't working. A patchwork of solutions to these problems, both road and transit, is not the way to go. Our approach is to do it on a comprehensive basis. Looking at specific hot spots like Steeles Avenue will certainly form one of the cores that we're going to be moving in.

Mr Zimmer: The problem gets worse; it get worse daily. The Eves government eliminated all public provincial support for public transit in 1988. The situation has gone downhill drastically since then. A study by York region found that commuting times have increased 50% to 60% since then. Without major changes by 2011, a trip from downtown Toronto to the edge of the city will take an estimated 70 minutes. That's longer than it takes to get to Kitchener, Barrie or Port Hope.

Time spent idling in traffic adds up. Gridlock costs the GTA \$2 billion a year in lost productivity. Workers stuck in traffic means our economy suffers. How can we alleviate that drain on our economy so that we can deal with the \$5.6-billion deficit and give the constituents the quality of service and the road safety they deserve?

Hon Mr Caplan: I can tell the member that this government is going to help to turn things around. For starters, we're going to increase investments in transit, as we said we would during the campaign, by allocating two cents of existing gasoline tax toward transit. This represents a significant investment in our public transit systems, and we are looking at details related to how and when these funds will begin to flow to our transit partners.

The challenge is to make this commitment while at the same time developing a plan to dig our government out of the hole left to us by the previous government. We're going to get our finances healthy once again. We're going to invest more in transit and roads. We're going to take a comprehensive approach to dealing with this province. We finally have a government in Ontario determined to tackle the problem of gridlock.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier, and it relates to the campaigning during the last provincial election; namely, that they were going to do government differently, that it was going to be open, that it was going to be transparent, that they would listen to people. The fact of the matter is that we have just come through hearings at which many, many people made presentations to the standing committee relating to the retroactivity of claiming back the tax credit for education.

I want to ask the Premier, does he believe that the people who were coming forward saying this is going to impose hardship on people of average income and even low income were telling the truth, and if so, how does he justify clawing back money retroactively from people who are investing in their children's education? How does he justify that? Were these people telling the truth or not?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): As we've mentioned before, our concern on this side of the House is those schools where some 96% of Ontario children are going day in and day out. We're concerned about the fact that those kids are in classes that are simply too large. We're concerned about the fact that there's a demoralized teaching complement today. We're concerned by the fact that there are thousands and thousands of kids who are on waiting lists for their special-education needs. Those are our concerns on this side of the House. I understand the member opposite's concerns. We are first and foremost for better public education for all our children.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Sorry, that's the end of question period.

PETITIONS

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I have a petition signed by parents at Seneca Unity School in Caledonia concerned about school closings.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Grand Erie District School Board has launched an accommodation study of the future of Caledonia's Seneca Unity Elementary School; and

"Whereas the Liberal leader has promised: 'A McGuinty government will put a moratorium on rural school closings until a fair funding formula is in place'; and

"Whereas Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty has promised: 'We will back that new formula with an additional \$177 million in funding for rural education';

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make good on the promise of a moratorium on school closures in Ontario until the fair funding formula is in place."

I sign this petition.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION
AND HYDRO ONE

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition, which I have signed and affixed my signature to. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows, and I'd like to read it into the record:

"Whereas the Epp report revealed the great extent of mismanagement that occurred at Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One. This mismanagement took the form of massive cost overruns with respect to the Pickering nuclear power plant and extremely generous severance packages to members of the board of directors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to introduce legislation that will ensure sound and fiscally responsible management of Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation."

I submit that today.

LANDFILL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received, over a period of time, the necessary approvals from the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at site 41; and

"Whereas as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on source water protection which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented by Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of Site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario.

"We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of Site 41 and the nearby water sources."

I present this petition on their behalf.

1530

CELL PHONES

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Please forgive me. My voice is failing me which is a shame, really.

"Whereas the safe operation of a motor vehicle requires undivided attention; and

"Whereas research has shown that the operation of devices such as cell phones distracts drivers' ability to respond and concentration on the task at hand; and

"Whereas close to two dozen government jurisdictions around the world have already passed legislation to restrict the use of cell phones while driving;

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

"That Legislative Assembly of Ontario enact legislation to curtail the use of hand-held cell phones as proposed in the private member's legislation introduced by John O'Toole, MPP for Durham."

I am pleased to endorse this as an endorsement of my legislation.

NATIONAL CHILD
TAX BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have a petition here from the city of Timmins that reads as follows:

"Stop the claw back: petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas one in five children in Ontario live in poverty;

"Whereas part of the national child tax benefit program the federal government gives as a supplement to low-income families across this country to begin to address child poverty;

"Whereas the money up to approximately \$100 a month per child is meant to give our poorest and most vulnerable children a better chance in life;

"Whereas in Ontario the Conservative government, and now the Liberal government, deducted the child benefit supplement dollar for dollar from those living on social assistance;

"Whereas this is leaving our province's neediest children without extra money they desperately need to begin to climb out of poverty;

"Whereas all children are entitled to a fair chance at life;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the provincial government of Ontario stop the claw back of the national child tax benefit supplement and ensure this federal money reaches all low income families in Ontario."

I sign that petition.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at Site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received over a period time the necessary approvals for the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at Site 41; and

"Whereas part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of Site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on source water protection which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented under Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of Site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario.

"We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of Site 41 and the nearby water sources."

I'll sign my name to that.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I have a petition with over 1,000 names of people who are concerned about not having their OHIP coverage on all diabetes supplies.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas type 1 diabetes ... is one of the most costly, chronic auto-immune diseases of childhood that affects every organ system and one you never outgrow, people with type 1 diabetes must take insulin to live;

"Whereas insulin does not cure diabetes, nor does it prevent its eventual and devastating effects such as kidney failure, blindness, nerve damage, amputation, heart attack and stroke, those with type 1 diabetes must take multiple insulin injections daily and test their blood sugar by pricking their fingers for blood six or more times per day. A family with a child diagnosed with diabetes at age three will have estimated expenditures on

average of \$3,600 annually and well over \$200,000 in a lifetime for insulin, syringes etc, and this expenditure is only for diabetic supplies, not for all health care needs;...

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

"All diabetic supplies as prescribed by an endocrinologist or medical doctor be covered under the Ontario health insurance plan."

I also add my signature.

LANDFILL

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received over a period of time the necessary approvals from the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at site 41; and

"Whereas as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on water source protection, which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented under Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario.

"We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of 41 and the nearby water sources."

I support and affix my name to this petition.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

"Whereas the county of Simcoe has received over a period of time the necessary approvals from the Ministry of the Environment to design and construct a landfill at site 41; and

"Whereas as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has indicated her intention to introduce legislation on water source protection, which is the final and key recommendation to be implemented under Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton Inquiry; and

"Whereas the Minister of the Environment has announced expert panels that will make recommendations to the minister on water source protection legislation; and

"Whereas the Ministry of the Environment will now be responsible for policing nutrient management; and

"Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide public hearings on water source protection legislation;

"We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario.

"We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of 41 and the nearby water sources."

1540

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to read a petition with respect to the equity in education tax credit. It 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 for 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 of Ontario as follows:

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

I sign my signature in support.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): This is a tobacco petition. Some 1,800 farmers came out for a

mass meeting Friday night. They're concerned about tobacco taxes.

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty has stated that he will increase tobacco taxes by \$10 a carton, force store owners to hide cigarettes and tobacco displays behind a curtain, and support a smoke-free Ontario;

"Whereas history has proven that increases in tobacco taxes cause increases in the smuggling trade for illegal black-market tobacco whose contents are neither regulated nor inspected; and

"Whereas forcing store owners to hide their tobacco displays unduly punishes both store owners and consumers for the purchase and marketing of what remains a legal product;

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

"That the government of Ontario reject the increase in tobacco taxes and the ban on the display of tobacco products, and protect the rights of consumers to purchase a legal, regulated product—tobacco."

ORDERS OF THE DAY

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 11, 2003, on the motion for an address in reply to the speech of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor at the opening of the session.

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the throne speech debate, and I welcome the opportunity to respond to the government's first speech from the throne.

The speech from the throne in many years in this place has been set by tradition as a document that sets out the government's vision and plan for the future of the province of Ontario, let alone the first throne speech of any particular government, which really should outline its long-term objectives as to what it hopes to accomplish during its term.

Instead, what we saw this year was an 18-page apology for the government's plan to abandon virtually every one of its campaign commitments. There's a blatant attempt to blame its back-peddling, its lack of commitment, its lack of will, on the former administration, specifically on a deficit that it would like you and the people of Ontario, this province, to believe that it inherited from the previous government.

It is obviously from the throne speech that job one for this government is not hiring 8,000 more nurses; it's not capping class sizes at 20; it's not respecting balanced budget legislation; it's not about hiring 1,000 additional police officers—all of which receive scant, if any, mention in the throne speech itself.

Job one for the McGuinty Liberal government is political spins. It is trying to flim-flam the public on the deficit issue and trying to demonize the former adminis-

tration and hold them responsible for every problem that goes wrong, whether it's a snowstorm or something else.

The pride of place these projects have in the government's agenda is evident from the amount of attention these specific initiatives received in the throne speech itself. There were 18 double-spaced pages, and the term "inherited deficit" is used some 12 times. The term "deficit" is used 21 times, Mr Speaker. I would invite you and other people in the province of Ontario to compare that to the throne speech of 1995. The circumstances were quite similar: A party that had been out of power for 10 years was coming back into power, and in that case we were looking at a deficit of \$11.3 billion in that year alone; this was on successive deficits of in excess of \$10 billion for five years in a row. The word "deficit" was used exactly once. It was not about apologizing why we couldn't do what we promised the people of Ontario that we were going to do; it was about how we were going to get on with the job of doing it.

In the first five pages of this throne speech, there are no fewer than 10 negative allusions, aspersions or, some would say, distortions of the record of the former government. The reason for all this self-serving propagandizing is obvious in the rest of the speech. It is nothing less than an orchestrated climbdown from Liberal election promises. In retrospect, the Premier and his advisors should have spent less time reading and quoting Henry Thoreau and more time reading Lincoln, who once cautioned, "We must not promise what we ought not lest we be called upon to perform what we cannot."

With all the complaining, negativism and finger-pointing, it seems to me that our Liberal friends are behaving the same way in government that they behaved in opposition. You could do them a favour, Mr Speaker, and have them briefed on the results of the election. Hello, over there on the other side of the House. You actually won the election. Now why won't you get on with the job of governing? The job is to govern the province of Ontario, to keep the promises you made to the people of Ontario, to look ahead, to make tough decisions and to make difficult choices.

If you want to see how that approach has been done, you can look at the 1995 throne speech by the then newly elected PC government. Like this effort that Mr McGuinty and his government tabled, that throne speech was tabled by a government formed by a party, as I said, that had been in opposition for 10 years. Unlike Mr McGuinty, we did not enjoy the advantages of four successive balanced budgets, nor 1.1 million net new jobs created in the province in the preceding five years. We did not enjoy a strong economy, among the healthiest anywhere in the world, and we did not enjoy a competitive taxation system. Nor did we enjoy a health care system that had an additional \$11 billion spent on it and had gone from 35% to 48% of the provincial budget. Nor did we enjoy an education system like post-secondary education that just had \$3.1 billion in vested in infrastructure.

Rather, that government faced a growing debt load, an economy weakened by a severe recession, an out-of-

control balance sheet, one of the worst taxation systems in North America, a demoralized private sector and frightened investors. On top of it all, the 1995 Conservative government was committed to one of the most radical and aggressive reform agendas in the history of our province. Yet in 1995 the government did not shy away from those challenges in its determination to keep its commitments, and this was reflected in the speech from the throne. The 1995 throne speech noted that it "could have been among the shortest in Ontario's history. The agenda is already clear, and it might suffice to say simply, 'Your government is doing what it said it would do, and it will continue'" to do so.

The 1995 speech stated, "On June 8, the people of Ontario voted for major change. The new government accepts that responsibility, and will deliver." Compare that to the language and sentiment of the 2003 contribution from this government. The language is full of qualifiers and excuses about the pace of change, about affordability, about sustainability; in other words, about every factor that the governing party wilfully ignored in making its election promises.

The most appalling and alarming statement in the entire throne speech is found at the bottom of page 5, where the government confesses, "This is not exactly the job your new government applied for," virtually an admission that they're not up to the job and it's a little too tough for them. That degree of naive self-pity is almost unbelievable. It's as if they thought they were going to Club Med and ended up in a boot camp somewhere. It sounds like they thought that governing this province was going to be easy. So what the heck? Go ahead and make 231 promises that cost billions of dollars we don't have; how tough can it be to govern the province? I think they're beginning to find out.

In the 1995 throne speech, the government of the day said that it was:

"Prepared to work hard.

"Prepared to give total commitment.

"Prepared to set priorities and stick to them.

"Prepared to lead by example."

1550

By comparison, the 2003 throne speech makes it clear the government is prepared to delay, prepared to postpone, prepared to abandon and prepared to ask others to adjust their expectations. In fact, the speech actually calls on the government's "partners in health care, education, and the broader public sector to temper their requests for more...." Strange that that party in opposition never once tempered their own demands for more for these very same partners. In fact, they did nothing to temper expectations on the campaign trail when they recklessly and irresponsibly made promises that inflated the expectations of every public sector stakeholder they could possibly find.

The Liberals are learning the truth of John Kennedy's observation that "Government is not a set of promises but a set of challenges." They're good at making promises, but it seems they are totally inept at meeting its challenges.

With respect to using the throne speech to set a clear agenda for action, the 2003 throne speech also suffers by comparison to past efforts. You simply have to go back to the May 2002 throne speech. For example, in that throne speech the government committed to the introduction of a multi-year base funding model for hospitals and school boards—done in the 2003 budget;

Review and reform the education funding formula, Dr Rozanski's report—done; in response to Rozanski, education funding was increased by \$895 million within the first 48 hours of the report being tabled, and a commitment made to exceed Dr Rozanski's recommendations of \$1.8 billion into public education;

Continue monitoring of textbook requirements on top of the \$65-million top-up of the money already annually paid for textbooks and learning resources—that was done specifically in response to a Rozanski recommendation of an additional \$66 million;

Additional support on top of the \$293 million already committed to help post-secondary institutions deal with the double cohort—that was done in the 2002 and 2003 budgets, and we financed the largest expansion ever of Ontario's post-secondary institutions: \$2.6 billion in capital and a multi-year increase in operating funding that would total \$3.1 billion by the fiscal year 2005-06;

Expansion of the Ontario Cancer Research Network—that was done in the 2003 budget—and an investment of \$1 billion in the Cancer Research Institute to eliminate the scourge of breast and prostate cancer.

Improve access to diagnostic treatment procedures—done. In the 2002 budget, 20 new MRIs and five new CTs were announced. Five of them were actually operational when the Liberals were elected to office. I'd invite people to compare that to the previous Liberal administration, from 1985 to 1990, which, in that entire five-year period of time, brought on five new machines.

Create a clean water Centre of Excellence in Walkerton—that was done and commissioned in the summer of 2003.

Additional resources to assist women and children at risk of violence and abuse—also done in the 2003 budget, which committed an additional \$31 million to victims' services and an additional \$164 million to children's aid societies.

These are examples of real commitment backed by real performance, not hollow promises backed by nothing but political spin. In 10 short weeks, this government is already famous for its no-can-do attitude. The government's most lasting contribution so far is the addition of the term "McGuintyisms" to the political lexicon, denoting an unkept campaign commitment.

The throne speech is nothing but a list of promises the government has broken and promises the government will be breaking. Ask this government to keep its commitment to live by the balanced budget law, it tells you, "You can't do that. You're going to have to change the law." The finance minister is more interested in inflating the deficit numbers to help pay off some of the special interest groups to which he appears to be indebted than

he is to actually getting down to work and balancing the books of Ontario.

No one is going to be ultimately fooled by this transparent political game, but the sad part of it is that it's the people of Ontario who will ultimately pay the price, not the government.

Ask this government to honour its commitment to hold the line on taxes, and it will tell that it can't do that either.

Seniors, working families, whom this party claims to have been very respectful of during the election campaign, seem to have been forgotten about since they ceased being a useful campaign slogan.

All job creators will pay more under this government. Think of the long-term impact that will ultimately have on, say, the automotive sector in this province or the agricultural sector, the second-largest economic generator in Ontario.

Ask this government to keep its promise number 71, to make sure the debt goes in only one direction—down—and what do you get? A whipped vote against the resolution introduced by my colleague, the member for Waterloo-Wellington, calling for the adoption of a 25-year debt retirement plan to make the province debt-free by 2029-30.

Ask this government about its commitment on a hard cap on class size—promise number 5 on the list of 231—and all you get is baffle-gab. The Minister of Education, who is currently present in the House, appears to disagree with his own Premier. At least he's beginning to acknowledge that perhaps we can't keep this commitment. Perhaps it was ill advised in the first place. But the Premier is still sticking to the fact that he is going to have a hard cap of 20 students in every classroom in this province within his four-year period of time. It will only cost \$3.6 billion, but what's \$4 billion or \$5 billion? There is no mention whatever in the throne speech of this major component of the Liberal education policy. No matter how they intend to pay for any element of the policy, it is estimated this will cost at least \$3.5 billion to implement, not the \$1.6 billion they indicated it might cost.

Threatening board chairs who dare to publicly disagree with you on this policy issue is not the way to cooperate with educational partners. School boards will be looking to the government early in the new year for some signal on the amount of funding they will be receiving to hire new teachers, and they have been very disappointed in the throne speech.

What about promise number 214, to protect rural schools? The government apparently thinks you protect rural schools by press releases and political spin-doctoring. So far their protection consists of the Minister of Education issuing a press release calling for a moratorium on rural school closings until September 2004—no additional dollars to address the unique funding pressures, no new governance model. There are not a lot of rural schools in the minister's riding—I understand that—which might explain his unfamiliarity with the subject. Compare that to what we were doing: imple-

mentation of recommendations of the Rozanski report, including recommendations of special benefits to small rural schools; \$20 million in additional transportation funding; \$140 million in funding to support school renovations; and education supports in small rural and northern schools. We commissioned the Downey report on small rural and remote schools. On the basis of this report, we provided an additional \$50 million annually to ensure that boards would be able to keep small rural and remote schools open—again, real commitment backed by real dollars, as opposed to a promise backed by a press release.

On health care, the throne speech offers nothing but platitudes. There is not a single mention, for instance, of promise number 133, to hire 8,000 more nurses in Ontario. There is no mention of the promise to increase the percentage of nurses working on a full-time basis, from 50% to 70%. The Liberal performance in this area will be benchmarked against our record: Since 1999, the previous government invested \$1.1 billion in nursing services alone. We committed to creating 12,000 new nursing positions and actually created 12,833—once again, real commitment, real performance, real results.

The throne speech was not a surprise to anyone who understands the real agenda of this government, but it must have been a disappointment to those who expected the government to actually deliver on some of its major campaign commitments. Instead they got nothing but rhetoric.

The government boasts about breaking down inter-provincial trade barriers that have been broken down by Premiers across this country since the early 1980s.

The government brags about increasing the minimum wage and then cancels tax cuts for the most modest income earners in Ontario. The net result will be less take-home pay by the people who receive minimum wage. Do they understand that? Why didn't you tell them that when you introduced your legislation? You're now going to prevent them from receiving the benefit of the Ontario tax reduction program, a program that has been in this province every year for decades and has resulted in over 800,000 taxpayers now no longer having to pay one cent of Ontario income tax. The very people of modest means whom you profess to be helping, you are now going to shaft by increasing their taxes retroactively. You're going to give them a few cents an hour over here, and you're going to yank more than that away in taxation. That's the truth. Why don't you have the guts to stand up and admit it in this House? Merry Christmas. I hope you're not on minimum wage.

1600

The government says it will treat seniors with respect and dignity, and then it claws back their existing property taxation credit. It even floats trial balloons about means testing seniors for the Ontario drug benefit plan.

It says it will take the first steps toward phasing out our coal-powered electricity generating plants. It does not mention, however, its campaign commitment to eliminate every single one of them in the province of Ontario by January 1, 2007. The people are watching this policy.

Environmentalists actually believe that you are going to do that, despite the fact that you know and your members of the select committee on this specific issue voted in favour of a report that said it couldn't practically or possibly be done before the year 2015. Why would you make a commitment that your own members on that committee know you couldn't possibly fulfill? Now you're turning around and deluding the people of Ontario. Fossil fuel plants generate 23% to 25% of all electricity in Ontario. If you're going to eliminate them all by December 31, 2006, where are you going to get the replacement of that 25% of Ontario's power? Do you just expect 25% of the people of this province to do without power? You're against nuclear energy. That's 40% of the generation capacity. So now we're up to 65% of the power generation capacity in Ontario. It's great for getting the environmentalist vote. Too bad you didn't tell them you never intended on delivering in the first place because it's totally impractical.

It committed to safety audits and anti-bullying programs, even though in opposition it voted against the Safe School Act. I understand our NDP friends have asked for an anti-bullying hotline number.

The moraine: Talking about the environment, we were talking about that a few moments ago. You knew very well, months and months before the provincial election campaign started, that Chris Hodgson, who was the then minister, who was out of this place for months before the election campaign started, had made an agreement with developers about the protection of the moraine. That agreement called—and you knew this—for 6,600 new homes to be built in certain parts of the Richmond Hill area.

Despite knowing that, your leader, several times, in fact even after the election, was still insisting that not one single—not 6,600 but not one—home would be allowed to be built on the moraine. He repeated that promise throughout the election campaign even though members of the media and others pointed out to him that it was a totally impossible commitment to deliver on. He even repeated it after the election.

So what do they do? Well, he's right, not one new home will be build; 5,700 new homes will be built on the moraine. He only broke that promise 5,700 times, and he added a minuscule amount of area to be protected and has given those same developers a licence to build thousands of new homes in the Seaton area of this province—that agreement from the government that professed, when they were on this side of the House, that you should make all these things public, make it open, make it transparent, let us see the agreement. Where's the agreement? Where's the commitment to principle?

This isn't the only area of people in the Ontario populace that has been somewhat deluded by the campaign promises made by this government. What about the people of northern Ontario? The people of northern Ontario were under the impression that as of January 1, 2004, all of northern Ontario was going to be a tax-free zone. Municipalities have been working with represen-

tatives of the provincial civil service at Queen's Park to draw up a list of new and diversification industries and businesses that could locate in various communities across northern Ontario. So what happens in the McGuinty government's throne speech? There's not one single word of that. They're not going to have a tax-free zone for northern Ontario, which would actually help northerners diversify their economy and stand on their own feet and have jobs for the young people; no, they're going to have numerous committees to offer advice and study things instead of having real change. Studded tires won't diversify the economy in northern Ontario, concrete taxation initiatives and incentives will.

What about tobacco farmers? What about the agricultural community? I can see that as a matter of public policy you might want to raise tobacco taxes. I can see that you might want to have that debate and that discussion. But surely if you're going to do that and that is your intention and you think this is in the best interests of Ontarians, at least you owe it to the people of the province of Ontario, and certainly owe it to tobacco farmers, to (a) talk about compensation and (b) talk about where those dollars raised from that tobacco tax are going. Are they actually going to help prevent cancer? Is that where every single one of those dollars is going, or is it going into the Treasurer's pocket in the consolidated revenue fund?

Another issue of public policy that I think is rather interesting is the whole issue of retroactive tax increases. I think this is a very, very serious matter of public policy that should be debated before implementing. The government certainly didn't run on retroactively increasing hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Ontario taxes.

Interjection.

Mr Eves: The Minister of Education is a little cranky about this, and well he might be; it would offend every single person who believes in a democratically elected government. Seniors and working families, whom they profess to have been working in favour of—parents who send their children to independent schools—are now going to have a retroactive tax increase. The last one I mentioned is probably the most startling. We have parents of modest income means. I heard the Premier in the House when we were talking about this a week or so ago, yelling about Upper Canada College. Well, I can say it's exactly that type of elitist fearmongering that really annoys people about partisan politics. The overwhelming majority of parents who send their children to independent schools, be they Christian schools, be they Muslim schools, be they Jewish day schools, and on and on, are people of very modest income means. They believe in a choice for their child's education, and they believe there should be a fair and level, equitable playing field. They have made decisions on sending their child, or children as the case may be, to independent schools, knowing what the law of the province of Ontario was and feeling that they could trust the government of Ontario to keep that law in place.

Although I don't happen to agree, I can see the government saying, "We want to change the direction." I

understand they campaigned on that. But to go back and retroactively increase taxes on those parents after they've already made those decisions about tuition is simply unconscionable. It is a terrible, terrible matter of public policy to retroactively increase anybody's taxes.

Related to that issue is the issue I mentioned a few moments ago, which is particularly galling, and that is the rates at which the most modest income earners in this province first start to pay income tax. There are already roughly 800,000 people, as I mentioned, who no longer pay a dime of Ontario income tax in this province, thanks to successive governments implementing the Ontario tax reduction policy.

To hit those people, who can least afford it, with a tax increase as of January 1, while you profess to be supporting them by minimally increasing the minimum wage, at the same time knowing you're going to take that and then some away from them is simply unconscionable. We have to continue to help the people at modest income levels in this province. For the life of me, I don't know why the Minister of Finance would choose to hit those people and take money away from them.

1610

A thousand new police officers—that was the campaign commitment. I didn't hear anything about it in the throne speech. There was a government that made a similar commitment in 1999 and delivered on that commitment within two and a half years. If you can't do it in two and a half years, at least you could give an indication of when you think you might be able to get around to keeping your campaign promise of 1,000 new police officers and when we can expect them. If you can't do it in two and half years, say it will take four years. We're waiting, and I'm sure thousands of law enforcement officers are waiting as well—the same with the commitment to 8,000 new nurses.

This government talks about a fiscal deficit. I don't think it's really a fiscal deficit we're looking at. But we do have a deficit in leadership, we certainly have a deficit in courage to make the tough choices necessary and we certainly have a deficit in commitment to keep Ontario's economy strong and to keep its taxation levels in this economy competitive. Even the current Prime Minister, Mr Martin, seems to understand that, but this government does not understand it. There's a deficit of imagination in the face of unique challenges. There's a deficit of accountability, expressed as a habit of rewriting the past to explain failures in the present and future. As I've said, the throne speech points to the most serious deficit of all, and that's a deficit of commitment on the part of the government, which clearly does not have the will to make the tough choices necessary to do the job.

What I see in this House every day and in the flurry of press releases we see is a government that is still entrenched in an opposition mentality. I would say to the government members over there, at least have the courage to debate, not to delay; have a positive commitment to change, not an excuse to abandon change; and please work hard at actually delivering for the people of Ontario, not at political spin-doctoring.

You may not pay the political price in the short term, but I'm here to tell you that in the long term the people of Ontario will not forget if you sell them short. The people of Ontario expect and deserve better than that. There are many difficult decisions you could make to improve the lives of Ontarians for many generations to come. Governing is not all about where we stand in the public opinion polls today. Governing is about making life better for about 12 million Ontarians and their children and grandchildren for many decades to come. So you may score some quick, short-term political hits, but I'm here to tell you, with 23 years experience in this place come next March, it is not going to do the people of Ontario, or quite frankly your own political aspirations, any good at the end of the day if you don't deliver on the commitments you made to those people.

I would encourage you, instead of just talking about rolling up your sleeves, as I see the Premier and the Minister of Finance doing almost daily in question period—when you roll them up, don't just roll them up to wash your hands of accountability or responsibility. I want to see those fingernails a little dirty and a little torn from your working to make ends meet. It can be done in this fiscal year. It won't be easy and it won't be pretty, but I can tell you that to sit there and make excuses—and now to have the Minister of Finance, the same Minister of Finance of course who said last year's books would be in deficit. Then, when he got a little rap on the knuckles by the acting Provincial Auditor, he said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I never should have said that; can't say that. They are actually balanced at the end of the day." That's pretty scary in itself, to have a Minister of Finance who doesn't know what the heck is going on in his own ministry with the finances of the province of Ontario.

At least have the dignity and the class to respect the Provincial Auditor's opinion at the end of the day. The Provincial Auditor says that's what public accounts are. The Provincial Auditor's opinion of where the previous year was usually comes out in August. This year it came out a little later, and I can understand why, it being an election year.

There are many things that can be done in the current fiscal year that are not being done. I understand the game of scoring short-term political hits. But I'm here to tell you that in the long term, not only the people of Ontario are going to pay the price if you don't change your attitude; so are you.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Mr Speaker, I would move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Orders of the day.

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Mr Speaker, I 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 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1617.

Evening debate reported in volume B.

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Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

CONTENTS

Monday 15 December 2003

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Social service agencies in Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Mr Miller	721
Greenhouse industry	
Mr Hoy	721
Conflict in Iraq	
Mr Barrett	721
Bernard Wolpert	
Ms Marsales	722
Property taxation	
Ms Scott	722
Archives of Ontario	
Ms Di Cocco	722
Landfill	
Mr Dunlop	722
Government's agenda	
Ms Smith	723
Government's record	
Mr Baird	723
Question period	
Ms Churley	723

FIRST READINGS

Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act, 2003, <i>Bill 26, Mr Gerretsen</i>	
Agreed to	724

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Environmental protection	
Mrs Dombrowsky	724
Mr Barrett	726
Ms Churley	727
Land use planning	
Mr Gerretsen	725
Mrs Munro	726
Mr Prue	727

THIRD READINGS

Ontario Energy Board Amendment Act (Electricity Pricing), 2003, <i>Bill 4, Mr Duncan</i>	
Agreed to	728

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial deficit	
Mr Baird	728, 729
Mr McGuinty	728
Mr Sorbara	729
Toronto Youth Assessment Centre	
Ms Matthews	730
Mr Kwinter	730

Education tax credit

Mr Baird	730
Mrs Bountrogianni	730
Mr Klees	737
Mr McGuinty	737

Landfill

Mr Parsons	731
Mr Bryant	731
Mrs Dombrowsky	731

Ontario budget

Mr Klees	731, 733, 734
Mr Phillips	731
Mr Sorbara	733
Mr McGuinty	735

Contamination in Port Colborne

Ms Churley	732
Mrs Dombrowsky	732

Birth certificates

Mr Agostino	732
Mr Watson	733

Agricultural policy framework

Mr Wilkinson	734
Mr Peters	734
Mr Brownell	734

School closures

Mr Rinaldi	735
Mr Kennedy	735
Mr Brown	735

Mid-peninsula highway

Mr Hudak	736
Mr Takhar	736

Gridlock

Mr Zimmer	736
Mr Caplan	736

PETITIONS

School closures

Mr Barrett	737
------------------	-----

Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One

Mr Berardinetti	737
-----------------------	-----

Landfill

Mr Hardeman	737
Mr Dunlop	738, 739
Mr Yakabuski	739

Cell phones

Mr O'Toole	738
------------------	-----

National child benefit supplement

Mr Bisson	738
-----------------	-----

Diabetes treatment

Mr Lalonde	738
------------------	-----

Education tax credit

Mr Hudak	739
----------------	-----

Tobacco tax

Mr Barrett	739
------------------	-----

THRONE SPEECH DEBATE

Mr Eves	740
Debate adjourned	744

OTHER BUSINESS

Estimates

The Speaker	721
-------------------	-----

Visitors

Mr Barrett	724
------------------	-----

Member's anniversary

Mr Lalonde	724
------------------	-----

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Lundi 15 décembre 2003

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2003 sur le renforcement des collectivités (modification de la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire), projet de loi 26, M. Gerretsen	
Adoptée	724

TROISIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2003 modifiant la Loi sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario (établissement du coût de l'électricité), projet de loi 4, M. Duncan	
Adoptée	728