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**Official Report
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**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 18 December 2003

Jeudi 18 décembre 2003

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 18 December 2003

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 18 décembre 2003

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

Ms Monique Smith (Nipissing): I move the resolution that, in the opinion of this House, members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should restore decorum and respect in the Legislature by wearing proper attire during routine proceedings in the legislative chamber, such that male members wear a jacket, shirt and tie as standard dress and female members wear equivalent contemporary business attire.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Ms Smith has moved private member's resolution number 6. According to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes.

Ms Smith: I rise today to speak to this resolution. While some people have seen it to be a trivial resolution, and some others have seen it to be a fashion statement and have chosen to make their own fashion statement today, I believe that this resolution goes to the very essence of decorum and respect for this Legislature and our institutions.

Since being elected, many members in my riding have started watching the proceedings of this place and have noted the lack of decorum and respect in this chamber. They have asked me about dress codes—why don't we have rules, why is that people are allowed to behave they way they are? They've asked me where the respect for our Legislature has gone. Every day our constituents are watching us on TV and we have school children and others visiting this chamber. We expect a certain level of decorum and respect in our classrooms from our students, and I believe that we should be showing that same kind of respect for this institution.

As we attend to business in our ridings, we are expected to attend in appropriate attire to formal functions, to civic functions, to funerals, to weddings. We attend in appropriate attire. In this Legislature, we represent our riding. In our riding, we represent the Legislature. I believe that this Legislature deserves respect and deserves a level of civility and decorum. We have years of history here, years of tradition to uphold.

I first came to this Legislature when I was seven years old. I came to see the speech from the throne with my

father, who was then the member for Nipissing. I remember being dumbfounded at the level of pomp and circumstance. When I was 12, I returned as a page. At that time it was a much more collegial and civil place, and there was a greater level of decorum and civility in this chamber.

There were, of course, exceptions and some fun notes. There was the member from Muskoka, who occasionally wore his plaid blazer and cheered the place up. There was the member for Grey-Bruce, who wore his white shoes and his white belt at the appropriate, and sometimes inappropriate, time of year. But they still maintained a level of respect for this institution and this chamber.

I returned again in 1985, when I worked for the Minister of Education, and in 1997, when worked for the leader of the official opposition. During those years I saw a decline in the level of respect in this chamber, and it saddened me. It disappoints me and it disappoints a number of members of my constituency to see the lack of respect in this Legislature.

In preparing for the discussion today I looked at dress codes and requirements in other Legislatures in order to inform the members of this Legislature what is happening across the country and where we stand.

Interjection.

Ms Smith: I do believe you need to be informed, Mr Bisson.

At the House of Commons there is no standing order setting out a dress code for members participating in debate, but the Speaker has ruled that in order to be recognized to speak in debate, on points of order or during question period, tradition and practice require all members—male or female—to dress in contemporary business attire. This dress code is observed. This may be a practice that we wish to adopt here in this Legislature, that in order for a member to be recognized, they should be properly attired.

In the Senate there is no specific dress code, but they rely on *Beauchesne*, a parliamentary document, which provides that a jacket and tie are required to be worn by male members.

In Alberta, there is no formal dress code; however, prior to the beginning of the spring session, the Speaker sends an annual letter to members addressing a variety of issues. It includes the statement that suitable dress is always the order of the day and traditional practices will be continued.

In British Columbia, male members are required to wear a jacket and tie. In Manitoba, male MLAs are

required to wear a jacket and tie and female MLAs are to wear corresponding business attire. In New Brunswick there is no official dress code, but they too rely on Beausnesne. In Newfoundland, men are required to wear a shirt, jacket, tie and trousers, and women are required to wear business attire. In Nova Scotia there is no formal dress code, but a standard is followed. And in Nunavut, the rules of the Legislative Assembly require that when in the assembly, every member shall be attired in a traditional dress or in a manner appropriate to the dignity of the assembly.

That, I would argue—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Smith: Member for Niagara Centre, perhaps you'd like to move over into the camera. Oh, he didn't get the boots.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Nipissing.

Ms Smith: I do hope that the cameras have been able to capture the member for Niagara Centre, who we fully expected would turn up in such attire today, of all days. It is a historic moment and I hope it will be captured in Hansard.

I just think that the member's attire today reflects again the fact that he has very little respect for the traditions of this Legislature.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

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Ms Smith: For the record, we should note that the member for Niagara Centre has appeared in a tuxedo today in the Legislature, but still sporting his cowboy boots.

In Prince Edward Island, business attire has been interpreted to mean, for male members, a jacket and tie, and for female members, generally accepted business attire. In Yukon, there is no formal dress code, but a standard is followed: When the Speaker is in the chair, the accepted dress code requires that all male MLAs wear a jacket and tie and female MLAs should wear comparable attire.

Those are the standards across the country. Those same standards are not respected in this Legislature. But as my colleagues to my left are prone to quote from various parliamentary procedural documents, I would also like to look at Marleau and Montpetit where they refer to proper attire: "Speakers have ruled that to be recognized to speak in debate, on points of order or during question period, tradition and practice require all members, male or female, to dress in contemporary business attire." In Beausnesne, Rules and Forms of the House of Commons of Canada, there is a discussion of decorum in the House: "Many Speakers have ruled that male members must wear a jacket, shirt and tie, and on rare occasions, such as Robbie Burns Day, have been permitted to wear a kilt. In general, Speakers have enforced conservative, contemporary standards."

Beausnesne also follows with a discussion on appearances in the chamber and states: "The concern of the Speaker for the appearance of the chamber during debate extends further than the dress of the members. While members are entitled to refresh themselves with glasses of water during debate, the consumption of any food in the House is strictly prohibited."

Why is it, then, Mr Speaker, that we stick to those rules—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We do have a speaker on the floor. I know this issue is generating some levity, but let's give the person on the floor our attention.

Ms Smith: While we do recognize that there are rules that everyone respects in this House, such as not eating in the House, such as bowing to the Speaker when we pass, there are other rules that have just been left aside. I find it quite disappointing that the members in the third party, the independent members of the NDP, would choose not to respect this Legislature and the traditions of this Legislature. I think it's important that we renew—

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): On a point of order, Speaker: I thought it was proper procedure to refer to members by their ridings and their ridings only. I thought that was proper respect for the rules of the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: That is proper respect. It's not always followed by almost everybody in here, so I would prefer that you do just that.

Ms Smith: I apologize, Mr Speaker. As always, I would like to uphold the rules.

Mr Hampton: On a point of order, Speaker: Are you saying there is a new rule?

The Deputy Speaker: I'm not saying anything of the kind. I said that you should refer to members by their position and/or their riding. I would prefer that you do that. I'm just saying that not everybody—almost everybody at some time or other doesn't abide by that rule. I wish they would.

Ms Smith: Finally, I would just like to note that in Ontario, our library has found for me that there is no official dress code but a general practice. They do, however, list a number of exceptions, most of which we see daily here in this House. I would just like the members of this House to take a moment and reflect on the history of the Legislature, on the fact that we do have traditions to uphold. I think it's important that we do uphold those traditions, the values of this Legislature and the respect that we have for our institutions. I would encourage everyone to support this motion.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): At the outset, the New Democratic Party wants to thank the author of this resolution. As you know, until we just recently acquired the most modest levels of funding, we've had but volunteers, no staff. Our one communications volunteer, our media person, Jeff Ferrier, has been double-, triple-, quadruple-booked and really has felt quite bad about the inability, on his part, to get us the publicity, the coverage in the media that we deserve. The author of this

resolution has made up for that modest shortcoming, and all of us thank her for her contribution to the coverage that New Democrats have received over the course of last week and indeed this week. Again, I apologize, because I may not have been here as often as I should have been, but I've been busy doing interviews—television, radio and print—around this issue.

I want to tell you, New Democrats are advocates of dress codes. We believe in standards. We believe in standards with respect to questions during question period and have decried the low standards that have been met by the government backbenchers. We believe in tradition and convention when it comes to where opposition caucuses are seated on the opposition side of the House. I won't belabour you with that lengthy point of order that was made a couple of weeks ago. We believe that this Parliament is an important place. We believe that we should sit, which is why we opposed this government's resolution that gave it a three-month vacation beginning tomorrow, through the months of January, February and March.

Yes, I very much believe in dress codes. I believe that people should wear Canadian-made clothing. I believe that people should wear unionized clothing, union clothing with union labels, so that you know that the workers, the women and men who sew those garments, are paid fairly and decently and treated fairly and decently in their workplaces. I tell you that I'm proud, as a member of this Legislature and just as a member of this provincial community, to have made every effort to ensure that, yes, the clothes I wear are Canadian-made, that they're union-made; that, yes, those drab white and blue button-down shirts are made by workers who get treated fairly and decently; and that, yes, the Boulet cowboy boots, Canadian-made, that I buy from Elio's down in Thorold—and I recommend Elio's boots to anybody here. It's worth the drive to Thorold. Go down to Elio's in downtown Thorold, who has the best supply and biggest stock of cowboy boots you've ever seen, Canadian-made cowboy boots, cowboy boots that are made by your neighbour, not imports—Elio's in Thorold.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Have they got cowgirl boots?

Mr Kormos: They've got boots for cow-women as well. Ms Churley-NDP, would be well advised—look, in this new era of political correctness, I'm supposed to say “cowgirl”? Not on your life. Yes, cow-women can avail themselves of boots at Elio's as well.

I'm proud of the folks at Lee Wah Laundry in Welland, down on Hellems Avenue. The Lees were immigrants to this country many, many years ago, but have worked hard, raised their own family, sent a son, with a lot of hard work, through university and on to a professional career. Why, Mr and Mrs Lee, yes, continue to launder and press my white shirts and my rather drab blue oxford cotton shirts—Lee Wah Laundry on Hellems Avenue in Welland. I'm proud of them. They're the sort of people who I say set standards that I want to aspire to. I'm proud of the folks down at Blake's Men's Wear at

the Seaway Mall in Welland, where I've been shopping for, heck, I guess 40 years. Blake's Men's Wear, at the Seaway Mall in Welland, and Benny in particular, who fits me for suits and jackets—

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): Not the tux, though.

Mr Kormos: Not the tux. This tux, I've got to tell you, is courtesy of my colleague. It is a union-label tux. I'm very proud of Mr Prue for owning a tux that has a UNITE label in it, those women and men working in the needle trades.

Mr Hampton: Fair wages, safe working conditions.

Mr Kormos: It's fair wages, safer working conditions.

So I'm proud of my relationship with Blake's Men's Wear in Welland, and I encourage people: It's worth the drive to Welland, to go down to Blake's Men's Wear at Seaway Mall, Gord Blake carrying on the tradition of his father, Larry Blake; Benny, who's just an incredible guy, a great guy. Again, they sell good, Canadian-made clothing, union-label clothing, and that's why I shop there.

See, those are the sorts of standards New Democrats believe in. We believe in standards of fairness, we believe in standards of quality, quite frankly, in this Legislature, and I say to you that people here should be judged more on what they contribute to the debate, more on how aggressively and passionately and with how much dedication they pursue their jobs here, how fearless they are. Yes, New Democrats believe in standards for politicians, and we've had it up to here with gutless politicians. We've seen far too many of them, far too many politicians who campaign on one promise or a dozen or two or three dozen—

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Ms Martel: Or 231.

Mr Kormos: Or 231, and then once elected proceed to break each and every one of them in a systematic way.

So while I thank the author of this resolution for putting the NDP on front pages of papers and on television and radio coverage this week—again, I have folks who just shake their heads, saying, “Haven't the Liberals got better things to do?” Indeed, then they say, “I suppose they do, because only yesterday they broke their promise of the two-cent-a-litre gas tax transfer down to municipalities, which has socked it to municipalities,” which, as the member from Trinity-Spadina would say, whether he's suited with suit and tie or whether he's here in a clean, crisp white shirt, regardless, would say that this government whacked municipalities. From Toronto all the way down to the smallest town in this province, this government has whacked working women and men.

This government continues to insult the lowest wage workers in our society by giving them a crummy 30-cent increase in their minimum wage, which only takes them up to 1997 levels. By time the year 2007 comes—and who knows whether they'll even keep that promise, with the record they've established so far; in four years' time, who knows what promises they'll keep? But we know that minimum wage workers, because of this government

and its anti-worker policies, are going to be even further behind.

I say to this government and I say to the author of this resolution, it would have been so nice to see a government backbencher with guts, who'd stand up and condemn this government for not moving promptly on increasing ODSP benefits, which have remained stuck for over eight years now, leaving persons with disabilities mired in despair and poverty.

Shelley Martel and this caucus have been working hard on the issues of kids with autism.

Interjection: The member for Nickel Belt.

Mr Kormos: Yes, well, I call her Shelley Martel and she's from Nickel Belt. She has been working hard in this Legislature, along with New Democrats, on behalf of the rights of kids with autism. This Premier, Dalton McGuinty, promised those kids that they'd be funded for their treatment once they turned six. He has broken that promise too, and indeed he's got his hired guns in court whacking those families that are forced to use the courts to try to obtain some relief. Don't talk to us about standards; don't lecture us about dress codes, because we believe that it's the substance that's far more significant than the style or the form.

I say New Democrats, whether there's seven, whether there's 17, whether there's 28—

Interjection: Or 57.

Mr Kormos:—whether there's 57, New Democrats are going to work provincially, New Democrats are going to work federally, to fight for those people who need fighting for, to speak for those people who need speaking for, to stand up for those people who need help standing up for themselves and to stand up for those people who have been dumped on, trashed on, shoved aside, marginalized, beaten up on, whacked, for far too long by the Tories and now by the Liberals. Don't tell us what to wear while we're doing it, because we're going to do it one way or another, regardless.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a few remarks to make on this proposal, a proposal that I've given careful thought to, and at this point I have an open mind on it. I look upon the standing orders of this House as a set of guidelines intended to encourage debate and to promote freedom of expression, a set of guidelines that are here to contribute to the quality of the decisions that we make. I read them closely and I ask, what is decorum? Where in fact are the boundaries of respect?

The standing orders and the behaviour they're intended to promote are there to outlive the intended or the unintended behaviour of one or a few members, whether it be in this Parliament or in any future Parliament. I ask myself, and by extension the other members, can a standing order or should a standing order define, and if it defines, by extension should it enforce, a dress code? This gives rise to a number of interesting implications. Would, for example, further study of this bill lead to a hemline code for women? Would there be, for example, in this House or in committee, debate on the exact

measurement of the hemline and in fact on which measurement the hemline should be done? Should it be done in British or in metric?

It would lead to, for example, a number of not-so-hypothetical cases. Consider, for example, the case of the member for Simcoe North. The members here present know that when the member for Simcoe North wears a dress shirt and a tie, we expect in his questions, comments and interjections a sharp edge. Yet when we see him in the evening, in a more relaxed mode, wearing his turtleneck, we find from the member of Simcoe North a far more genteel and collegial attitude. Would, for example, a dress code discourage the member for Simcoe North from this?

I also ask members to consider the case of the member for Whitby-Ajax, always a well-dressed man. Should the member for Whitby-Ajax, a man whose dress code we find impeccable, choose to show up in the summertime and wear Bermuda shorts for a late night sitting, would a dress code discourage or prohibit this?

I ask consideration of my friend the member for Oak Ridges, whose choice in wardrobe has always been impeccable. Should the member for Oak Ridges choose to commemorate some event regarding the 1970s by wearing a polyester leisure suit—an event that I freely admit would be somewhat less probable than the freezing over of Hades—would this in fact be a violation of the dress code?

Dress code regulations, then, give rise to gamesmanship. Would a future or present whip with a list of real or perceived infractions of the dress code—hemline, necktie and polyester infractions—sit at his desk, awaiting a challenge just shortly before a vote? Would the offenders be named if found in violation, and if the allegation is found to be unfounded, would a commensurate member of the party making the allegations be required themselves to be named? Governments have fallen for less.

Such a proposed amendment, with all its implications for this and future governments, should be studied in much greater depth. In the meantime, it is worth noting that, whether dressed up or dressed down, the proposed amendment should be judged not upon its surface implications, but perhaps upon its contribution to the quantity and the quality of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member from Perth-Middlesex. I'm still working on these.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Yes, Mr Speaker, and still proud to be from Perth-Middlesex. I rise on this motion and I find it quite interesting. I want to tell a little story to the people back home and to the people here because, as I've mentioned many times, I'm a business person who graduated in music and performance, who went into business—perhaps a renaissance man.

One of the things I had to deal with in our business, where we were required to set the tone in a small business of what would be proper business attire—in our culture, one wears a suit and a tie and, over the years, I

must admit, particularly in rural Ontario, there's less of an emphasis than there was many, many years ago about wearing a suit and a tie. But on the other hand, we're not running a \$70-billion government either. We're not representing 12 million Ontarians either. So I think the standard would be higher.

I remember a young lady who was a co-op student. She came and worked at our firm. It was around the time when a very famous Canadian, Shania Twain, had just come on to the scene and Shania was an influence on many young women in this province and throughout—

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: Yes, that's the point I was going to make. There was a new standard for young women, where it was acceptable for them to wear attire where their midriff was exposed. I think we all remember that, and I could tell you that many of the male members of this House remember that. I want people to know that I'm proud of Shania Twain. But this young lady, who was a co-op student from university, came and worked at our office. One day, she showed up at our business office, our place of business, and she was wearing this new style. Of course, we had to deal—we have a small firm; we didn't have a dress code. Being the senior partner of the firm, it was decided that I would have to speak to this young lady about the question of her attire. Of course, that is a very dangerous situation, Mr Speaker, I'm sure you could imagine. In a politically correct world, how would a middle-aged man like myself bring up this issue? What I told her was that we were going to introduce a dress code, and do you know what that dress code said? "No belly buttons. In our office, no belly buttons." Do you know why? Because I told the young lady that if she were able to wear attire which allowed her to bare—

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The Deputy Speaker: I remind the member to direct your remarks through the Chair.

Mr Wilkinson: Sorry, Mr Speaker.

I remember I said to her—and here was the reason; it was fairness—that if she were allowed to bare her midriff in our office, then all of us would be able to bare our midriffs in our office, and that would not be a pretty sight. A bunch of balding, paunchy, middle-aged men in our office baring their midriffs would show a lack of respect to our clients, a lack of decorum, so we decided that—nothing wrong with her navel—

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: That's right. But again, we had to show respect to our clients.

The question here is whether or not we're going to show respect to the good people of Ontario, people who tune in. I don't believe in political correctness, but I was listening to the member for Niagara Centre, and I was shocked because he went on and said that the most important thing is that we should wear Canadian clothing in this House, we should be wearing union-made clothing. With the greatest respect, if that is the case and that is his passionate belief, I don't believe a motion has ever

gone into this Legislature requiring that. I don't think that's ever happened. I could be wrong, but I don't think that's happened. So if we believe in something and we don't come into this House and actually make a motion, then one can talk and talk, but nothing changes. I think it's very important in this House in regard to this motion.

I would ask other members, all members from all parties, are we going to set a higher standard for ourselves or are we going to set a lower standard for ourselves? We have to marry that with the concern of a member that perhaps they need to have a different dress code than the rest of us to be effective. But it's the strength of your oratory that determines whether or not you are heard in this place and whether or not you can influence this place. In this House, as the Speaker has ruled, every seat is a good seat.

Our concern is that once we lower these standards, eventually this place will become irrelevant, and that would undermine democracy. That's why I'm proud of the member for Nipissing and her reminder that in the federal House the Speaker does not recognize people who do not have proper attire. I think that would be a fair and reasonable way to deal with it. The Speaker needs to have a motion that is fair, and I think that if we go ahead with this motion, that will allow the Speaker to have that discretion. Thank you to the members opposite for debating this today, and I look forward to the vote later on this morning.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I hope I am suitably attired for this debate today. I'm pleased to join in this debate on decorum in the Legislature. To be honest, I can't believe we're here discussing the dress code here in the Legislature.

I know the member for Niagara Centre does have a sort of trademark style: his nicely pressed union white shirts that he wears in here, and I suppose he has cowboy boots on, although I haven't noticed those, and I don't think they come on the camera in the Legislature here very often. Personally, I don't think it really affects his work in the Legislature, and it certainly doesn't offend me. If he were wearing his tank top and sandals, maybe I'd have a different opinion about it, but I don't think there's really a need for a dress code based on the way all of the people in this Legislature currently dress. I am certainly not in any way offended by the way the member for Niagara Centre dresses.

The member from Nipissing was talking about having conservative standards in here. Well, my father was a Conservative member for many years in here and he was noted for how he dressed, and it wasn't really that conservatively; in fact, he was known for his Royal Stuart tartans, a fairly bright red plaid. He wasn't exactly a fashion statement, but it was his trademark. In fact, I wore that red plaid jacket at his funeral just because he was so well known for that jacket.

But I have to say that surely there must be something more serious and appropriate we could be discussing here. Perhaps we should be setting some standards for question period. I think we should have some standards

about answers in this place because, really, I haven't heard too many answers in this session of the Legislature. I think I could count on one hand the answers that were real answers to questions. I know I've asked three questions of the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, and he's given me the same answer for all three questions—and they were on three different topics. It was “\$5.6 billion, blah, blah, blah.” That was the answer, as our finance critic was so eloquently saying last week. So I think there could certainly be some standards for question period.

In terms of tradition, I do think it's unfair where the third party has been placed in the House this session, with the government rump separating us from the other part of the opposition. I think it's more traditional that the opposition parties all be together.

I really do think that there should be something else of more importance that we could be discussing. I'm sure the member from Nipissing must have some important issues in the riding of Nipissing: perhaps northern tax incentive zones or the ONTC or how the municipalities are going to deal with nuisance bears or the Lake Nipissing fishery and the water quality in Lake Nipissing. I understand there are invasive species. I understand there have been some spiny water fleas found in Lake Nipissing. Maybe she could have a private member's bill to deal with the threat that is to the fishery—or taxation. I'm sure that the past member from Nipissing, our Premier Mike Harris, likely didn't introduce a bill like this. I haven't checked and researched, but I highly doubt that this was something he debated.

In terms of the decorum part of her private member's bill, I personally would like to see more decorum in this place, from a fairly practical perspective: just that it gets a little noisy in here. At times I find it difficult to hear responses and questions. So I personally would rather see it quieter. I think there are a lot of people out in the general public who are slightly aghast at how much heckling goes on in here from time to time. I would be in favour of the Speaker using his discretion in enforcing the rules a little more tightly and trying to keep things a little quieter in here. I think that would be a good thing. I think the general public would agree that would be a good thing. I don't think it's necessary to have a private member's bill to bring that about.

In conclusion, I would just like to wish all my constituents back in my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka a very Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy holiday season. This is the last day of the Legislature, and I will be voting against this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): My fellow parliamentarians, I think there are a number of issues that need to be deliberated upon here in this idea of a dress code brought forth by the MPP from Nipissing. First of all, as a new member, as a rookie legislator here in this Parliament, as you know, we were treated to a number of seminars and orientation days in which we were taught about not only the grandness of this building and its

deliberations, but we also learned about some of the wood carvings, the chamber protocol, and how to address the Speaker or how to negotiate ourselves in this chamber. It was with a great sense of pride, solemnity, grace and dignity that I think most of us, certainly the new incoming Liberal caucus members, conducted ourselves in this place. I think it's in that spirit that the MPP for Nipissing has actually brought forth this resolution.

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I would like to say, first of all, as Premier McGuinty has just authorized \$700,000 worth of funds for the third party, I'm glad to see that that money is now being put to good use by increasing or upgrading the dress code level of some of the NDP members. I'd also like to note for a moment that the MPP for Niagara Centre, in a true display of vanity—and as a physician, I'm licensed to actually diagnose narcissism—thought that this entire resolution was about him and about his particular dress code. But it's not, sir. There are larger issues, weightier issues and, frankly, I feel that this is really toying with the full weight of parliamentary democracy, whether it's in this chamber or other chambers provincially, federally or within the British Commonwealth.

I ask you, what does dress or attire actually signify? It signifies a code of respect, a way of conducting yourself, the fact that you may be considerably very serious about what you're attempting to accomplish. Yesterday, for example, we authorized the expenditure from the consolidated revenue fund of something on the order of about \$25 billion. This is a serious and weighty place. The decisions we make affect lives, whether it's dealing with some of the issues regarding autism, as the MPP from Nickel Belt has raised, or the minimum wage and so on. So there are a number of issues that I would take exception with.

The other thing, as well, is just a matter of the actual level of respect of the MPP for Niagara Centre, newly found and newly acquired probably an hour ago. I bring your attention to the Hansard of December 4, 2003, and I begin to quote as he was impugning the reputation of the Deputy Speaker in the chair. This illustrates to this chamber the level of actual respect that seems to emanate from the MPP for Niagara Centre:

“That leads me to believe that it must be about the money, because the Deputy Speaker earns an additional salary of \$12,616. I don't begrudge that. The Deputy Chairs of the committee of the whole also earn an extra \$9,291.” And it goes on: “I've heard the phrase, ‘It must be about the money; it's just the money; it's about the money and nothing else,’” and it goes on in that vein.

I say to you that those of us who have come to this chamber representing with honour and dignity and feeling the full weight and sense of parliamentary democracy—it's for that reason that we're moving forth this particular resolution.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): It's unfortunate that our friends from the independent NDP have walked out of this chamber at this time. But what's in front of us is, in a sense, a serious matter. In my

view, it reflects a broader issue. When I decided to run as a candidate—many of us who are new here, over 30 of us, took this position very seriously, and our leader took it very seriously, and called upon us to run for office, to run on a platform and to get elected and bring serious debate and discussion and decision-making to this chamber. That's what I ran on, that platform.

Lately, a few of my friends, including my father, will watch this program on television and they'll say to me, "Who's the guy in the white shirt?" I've had to explain to my father that it's the member from Niagara Centre. "Why is he walking up and down with a white shirt on?" I've had to explain to my father, "Dad, that's the way he wants to dress." My father goes, "Doesn't anybody have any rules in the House, in the chamber, about this?"

My father and mother, similar to the member from Niagara Centre, are immigrants. He mentioned in his speech that his parents were immigrants; my parents were immigrants too. They came here and worked hard. They've retired. They're at home now, and my father watches this once in a while, and he'll ask that question to me again and again and again, "Who's the guy with the white shirt?" I just find it somewhat disrespectful. We have rules here that have existed for centuries, and I'm learning the rules myself. To come in with a suit and a tie is something that, I think, makes common sense and should be permitted.

I'm good friends with, or at least I'm friends with or have a talking relationship with the member for Beaches-East York.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): We're pals.

Mr Berardinetti: We're pals. At Christmastime he'll wear his Christmas ties. When we were on Toronto city council he wore some of the most colourful Christmas ties. Nonetheless, he had a tie on, and usually a suit. It created a sort of jovial atmosphere, yet it blended within a certain decorum or a certain way of presenting ourselves at council. The same should apply here.

I strongly feel that the motion brought forward by the member from Nipissing makes sense. It's reasonable. It brings a level of equality in here such that even though we have differences in how we debate, differences in our philosophy, differences in how we approach the problems of the province, at least we come here together dressed in a suit and tie, or the female equivalent of a suit and tie. As a lawyer, I know that if I went before a judge—I support a dress code and I think it's important that this resolution carry today.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm really pleased to join the debate here this morning. We're spending one hour of debate of private members' time on a dress code. Every member has the opportunity to use their time, but another time may not come around for this member, who knows, until the next session. I can say there are more important issues to deal with, but I'll deal with the motion as it stands.

Routine proceedings is what this applies to, which is members' statements, reports by committees, introduction of bills, motions, statements by the ministries and

responses, deferred votes, oral questions and petitions. So the resolution is to apply to the routine proceedings. It doesn't apply to debate in the House. It doesn't apply to night sittings in the House. It doesn't apply to committees of the assembly. So it's a very restricted motion.

There's also an issue here, and the Speaker may have to decide this on an interpretation issue, but it says, "Male members must wear a jacket, shirt and tie." Now I don't know whether a tie means a tie that I have or whether that applies to a bow tie. I'd hate to see the member for Essex be not properly attired, because, with his bow ties, he's one of the better-dressed members in this House. We'll have to see.

Interjections.

Mr Tascona: They're saying a tie is a tie, so there we go. You're in, Mr Speaker.

We look at this in terms of what we're debating here. They want more respect with respect to decorum and business attire, but there's no mechanism of how we do this. There's no direction in this motion as to what we're trying to accomplish. They're just saying that the Legislature should address this issue.

In the standing orders, which deal with the conduct of business in this House, standing order number 1 says that the Legislative Assembly and the committees of the Assembly conduct their business according to the standing orders. As you know, there is nothing in the standing orders with respect to decorum and how you dress in this Legislature, because what they deal with is substance in terms of how we deal with the business, and that's set out in standing order 1(b):

"The purpose of these standing orders is to ensure that proceedings are conducted in a manner that respects the democratic rights of members,

"to submit motions, resolutions and bills for the consideration of the assembly and its committees, and to have them determined by democratic vote

"to debate, speak to, and vote on motions, resolutions and bills

"to hold the government accountable for its policies; and

"collectively, to decide matters submitted to the assembly or a committee."

In any contingencies, you go to the conventions, which are matters dealing with democratic rights. The focus of our standing orders is to deal with democratic rights and conduct in the House.

1050

I'm debating here right now and people are speaking while I'm trying to debate. This is a place for debate; it's not a place for conversations in the House. I say that what we're trying to focus on here is conduct in the House. That's what's important in terms of substance, and the Speaker is in charge of that. It's up to the Speaker in terms of how the House is going to conduct itself. That's not an easy job, because when you're dealing with—in essence, what's in the standing orders is conduct to enforce and respect your democratic rights. That's what's important. When you listen to question period,

you can't hear a speaker or you can't hear the questions because members are yelling and whatever. It would also apply to trying to enhance the debate when you are the speaker. There are people trying to speak, and then other people are having a conversation. They should have the conversation outside, in terms of respect for the House.

There are other things that I think the member from Muskoka-Parry Sound was talking about in terms of conduct in the House and the respect you have in the House. There are other matters in terms of ministers not responding to your question, and you can't get back at them because they haven't responded to the question, because we have limited time with respect to question period.

You also have ministers' statements. I responded to a minister's statement the other day with respect to human rights. I got the minister's statement at the same time that the minister was making the statement. Is that respect for the other members in the House, to encourage debate? I don't think it is. The fact of the matter is, the standing orders don't provide for that, but I think common courtesy and respect for the democratic process here would be that if ministers are going to do a statement and they know who the critic is, they should provide that statement. It's all printed up, they're reading it, and they should provide that statement before they make it. Then the other members from the recognized parties can get up and comment on that statement.

The same thing applies to government bills. There is no requirement in the standing orders to give advance notice of a government bill. "On the introduction of a government bill, a compendium of background information shall be delivered to the critics of the recognized opposition parties." It doesn't mention when. What is happening is that they are being delivered at the same time the bill is happening. How is that fair in terms of getting intelligent debate in a democratic process?

Those are things which I think are more important than speaking about how someone decides to dress as they come in here. What's important is the substance of the debate. This is supposed to be a debating society in here with respect to legislation. It doesn't help when ministers don't provide their statements, when the government doesn't provide their bills, and then we're expected to get up and comment on something we've never seen. That's just not something that is going to enhance debate in this House. It's not going to advance democracy as set out in the standing orders.

There are important issues and I think the member from Niagara Centre pointed that out, and the member from Muskoka-Parry Sound did also. There are important issues that have to be addressed.

I guess every member can use their one hour of time with respect to a private member's bill, but it doesn't come up too often. I've been here about eight and a half years and I've been lucky to get maybe four to five private member's bills in the time I've been here. It's very valuable and scarce time. I would like to see the government live up to their commitment to provide

private members with more time. I was on the Legislative Assembly committee and we recommended that. There should be more time for private members to do issues that concern them, so they can get that out there. That has not been provided at this point in the Legislature.

There are important issues that should be addressed. There have been promises that have been broken with respect to hydro. There is no more funding coming out for health care or education, because the government says they've got a deficit. They don't know how to handle it. The main thing is they don't know how to handle government. The bottom line is, they're not giving health care more funding and they're not giving education more funding.

There are serious issues out there in my own riding with respect to the hospital that serves the entire area of Simcoe county. We need another hospital in my riding. That's what's important in terms of health care for my constituents. Across the province our population is growing older. We need more long-term care facilities and more beds for the aged. That's something that should be debated and discussed in this Legislature. It's a pressing problem.

We have a situation with respect to autism that the member from Nickel Belt has worked on very hard. It's a very important issue, with respect to funding IBI treatment for children who are older than six years of age. I have a constituent in my riding who has three children of very young ages who are autistic. The funding that's needed for autism is an issue that should be debated in this Legislature, rather than just being put aside to question period and trying to see if the government is going to live up its commitment with respect to autism funding. They made the commitment that they would provide more funding for autistic children to give them the treatment they need. That promise hasn't been kept.

The gas tax, which was mentioned earlier by the member from Niagara Centre, and the two-cent transfer down, is an important issue for everybody here, whether you live in Windsor, whether you live in Barrie or whether you live in Oakville—whoever relies on public transit. The municipalities are cash strapped. They need more money for public transit. That was the method that was going to provide the public transit system we need. That is now another broken promise, with respect to the funding the municipalities need. The provincial government is not going to act on its promise about the gas tax.

We have a litany of broken promises—important issues that should be debated in this Legislature—but what we're focusing on here right now is proper dress attire. That is something that I think is really in the discretion of the Speaker. The Speaker knows how to handle the House in terms of what's important. What's more important is what the standing orders stand for and what we abide by; that is, they're interested in conduct and procedures, they're interested in the debate, they're interested in making sure the government is accountable. They make sure we have an efficient operation of

government in terms of the conduct here, so that when people ask questions, the minister responds and people can hear what the minister is saying, and that when we get into debate, we don't get into yelling and people can speak and make sure they're heard with respect to what they want to talk about. This is what it's about; it's a debating society.

There are things we're going to need to do with respect to the standing orders, and I know the government has mentioned that. They're going to do things to give private members more power, which will require changes in the standing orders. That's what's important here, not how someone decides to dress. I think it's their conduct—how they conduct themselves in this Legislature—that is the substance that's important here. For us to focus on saying, “This is what you're going to wear if you're a female; this is what you're going to wear if you're a male,” is all well and fine. But I leave it to the discretion and confidence I have in the members of this assembly, to their common sense, and to the discretion the Speaker has to deal with how this House is going to conduct itself in a very important manner. That's what's important. Respect in the Legislature between members is what's important. I don't believe respect is dictated by what you wear. There are limits, of course, but I haven't seen that in this Legislature.

When we talk about what's important in terms of legislation and what we're trying to accomplish in this House, I don't want to leave the viewing audience here thinking, “What are they doing here? Why is the MPP for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford up there talking about how someone dresses? We didn't send him down there to talk about how someone dresses. Doesn't he have something better to do?” Well, just to be clear, it's the member from North Bay's private member's resolution that we're debating here in private members' business today. It's not what we would have put forth, I don't think. What I would put forth when I get to my private member's resolution or bill would be the pressing issues, in terms of what I think is important for my riding and what I think is important that we should deal with in this Legislature.

I think it's certainly within the discretion of the Speaker. Certainly the House leaders can deal with the standing orders, if they feel they should be changed. But there's nothing in this resolution that will do anything different or give us direction on where to go.

1100

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Nipissing has two minutes to reply.

Ms Smith: I'd like to thank my colleagues from Etobicoke North, Perth-Middlesex and Scarborough Southwest for their comments on my resolution this morning. I'd also like to thank my colleague in the official opposition, the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, who spoke about his father. Unfortunately he was not here when I spoke about his father, but I would like to remind him that I was a page here when I was 12. I knew your father and appreciated his plaid blazers.

I'd also like to thank the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. I note that he commented about chatter in the

House, how this is a place for debate and that we should be shown respect. I would ask that he share that thought with his seatmate, the member for Durham, who notoriously speaks through all of our comments and statements on a regular basis.

I also found it interesting to note that the members of the official opposition are against a dress code in this House. However, they were in support of uniforms in schools. It's an interesting double standard that they propose.

I'd like to respond as well to my colleague from Niagara Centre. I do agree that there are a number of important issues we could be discussing. I find it interesting, however, that you noted that the flood of publicity this has caused for you has led you to be out of the House and not able to debate the important issues we've been debating here for the last week as you've been out doing your media. There have been important issues, and we have been here debating them. But we're glad you're here today.

I would like the members here to take away from this debate a couple of important points. Tradition is important. This Legislature is important. We should maintain a level of respect, a level of civility, a level of decorum. I have respect for this Legislature and its traditions, and I know that most members in this House do as well. I would just like to remind the member for Niagara Centre of his quote from November 24, when he said in this Legislature, “Convention is important in this institution; not to say there isn't evolution, of course not, but convention and tradition are important.”

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario condemns the previous government for its neglect and mismanagement of the Family Responsibility Office and directs the current government of Ontario to clean up the mess and hold deadbeats to their family responsibilities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Craiton has moved private member's notice of motion number 4. The member has 10 minutes for his presentation.

Mr Craiton: I'm pleased to see my motion being debated in the Legislature today. For too long our children have suffered because previous governments have neglected the responsibilities laid upon them. The very title of the office we're seeking to change, the Family Responsibility Office, is our first clue that families in Ontario depend on us to help deal with what is already a very difficult situation. In this motion, I call on the government to clean up the mess in the Family Responsibility Office. I have committed to the people in my riding of Niagara Falls, the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and the areas of Thorold South and Port Robinson that we will deal with the mess we have inherited and fix the problems that plague this vital agency.

I'm sure all members here have heard the problems first-hand from constituents, eager for someone to help

them deal with this mass of disorganization. My office has been inundated on a daily basis with people frustrated by the problems they are encountering at the Family Responsibility Office. I'd like to outline some of the problems my community office in Niagara Falls has dealt with in the short time since I was elected as an MPP two and a half months ago.

People wanting to speak to representatives at the Family Responsibility Office can expect at least an hour's wait on hold before their call is answered. One woman we worked with had to take an entire day off work just to try to get through to a representative at the Family Responsibility Office. This is unbelievable, and it's outrageous.

The Provincial Auditor found that more than 13,000 calls placed to the Family Responsibility Office have received a busy signal each day and go unanswered. Eighty-nine per cent of all calls made to the Family Responsibility Office are blocked by a busy signal—unbelievable. I guess it's only the lucky ones who wait for hours on hold who might get through.

Each time a call is made to the Family Responsibility Office, a different person looks on the computer and talks to the individual, so the parent who is waiting to receive much-needed funds from their former spouse never speaks to the same representative each time they call in. What does this say about the priority of our children and families in Ontario? Often letters and faxes sent to the Family Responsibility Office are either never answered or only acknowledged when they become obsolete.

Another person who contacted my office expressed how frustrating it is to provide the Family Responsibility Office with information about where her former spouse is working or where he has moved to, only to have that information ignored, and an opportunity to collect money owed passes by this family that desperately needs this financial support. This woman was owed more than \$300,000 in arrears from her former spouse. The Family Responsibility Office is unable to pick up the fax and get the information processed in a timely fashion. This is absolutely outrageous.

It is apparent to anyone who looks at this situation that the Financial Responsibility Office is understaffed and poorly managed. Therefore, it is this government's responsibility to fix the problems before more families fail to receive the support they need and we have more families and children living in poverty. Too many of our children are being neglected by parents who brought them into this world.

The problems with the Family Responsibility Office are not new. The Provincial Auditor found that caseloads have doubled, from 630 per worker in 1994 to an appalling 1,129 cases per worker in 2003. While the number of incoming calls increased significantly during that period, the number of workers have actually decreased by 20%. I'm quoting facts taken directly from the auditor's report in 2003. I was astounded to read some of the things the auditor found as he conducted his audit of the Family Responsibility Office. I know that my community must

not be alone in the number of complaints and requests for assistance that we are given on a daily basis.

The Provincial Auditor found that there is \$1.3 million of support money in arrears. Let me repeat: \$1.3 million in arrears. This is outrageous, and is our first indication that the enormous underlying issues have contributed to the poverty of families that have gone without.

I have pledged to my community of Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Thorold South and Port Robinson that I would bring these concerns to Queen's Park and work on their behalf. I'm proud to raise this important issue in the House. I'm hoping that by doing so, I'll be helping and we'll be helping all the families that are so desperately in need.

Our government must start to get tough on parents that shirk their moral, financial and legal obligations to support their children. By refusing to provide adequate support, parents are abusing their children. As a government, we must take more of an effort to hold these deadbeat parents accountable. When our children suffer, our society as a whole suffers. It must become a priority for all members of this House to take a stand on supporting this motion.

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): The member from Niagara Falls raises a fundamental question. He asks whether we believe there should be a Family Responsibility Office or not. In the absence of the FRO, is their any risk or sanction for defaulting on one's family responsibilities? With some 180,000 family responsibility cases under administration by the FRO, serial defaulters can hide in a forest of anonymity, of sheer numbers. Most recipients of family responsibility payments use these payments to get by, not to buy themselves life's finer things.

1110

FRO statistics show that only one third of all payers are in full compliance. I say to single mothers who struggle in the snow with bags of groceries that if Ontario says it will help you collect the funds due you, legally negotiated and mandated, then Ontario should be serious about it.

We either have a Family Responsibility Office or we don't. And if we have a Family Responsibility Office, then we either believe in it or we don't. And if we have a Family Responsibility Office and we believe in it, then we either make it work or we don't. If we don't make the Family Responsibility Office work, then what is there to differentiate this government from its predecessor?

Those who receive benefits from the operation of the Family Responsibility Office number among the weakest and most vulnerable members of our society.

The member from Niagara Falls condemns the previous government in his motion. The track record of the FRO condemns the previous government in its sorry litany of statistics:

—While the number of caseworkers has been cut by 20%, the cases under management are up by 50%.

—Caseworkers' loads have doubled, from an average of 600 per caseworker to more than 1100, while case-

loads in Quebec are 400 per caseworker and caseloads in Alberta—Tory-governed Alberta—are 335 per caseworker. This is not a question of faulty political ideology; it is more a question of systemic managerial incompetence by the former government.

—Outside Toronto, nearly 90% of telephone calls made are blocked—never answered; a busy signal. People whose lives teeter on the edge of desperation must reach a point of unmanageable frustration when their cries for help cannot or will not be answered.

—One third of FRO cases, that is, 60,000 cases, are in non-compliance. There is no significant downside for defaulting on FRO commitments.

Fortunately, the 2003 annual report of the Office of the Provincial Auditor of Ontario offers a few recommendations, recommendations that this government should consider seriously and act upon:

“In order for all necessary case documentation to be available on a timely basis for administering cases and for advancing telephone inquiries, the Office should ensure that:

“All necessary case documentation is scanned,” as it is not now;

“Scanned documents are of an acceptable quality,” which they are not now; “and

“System downtime is minimized,” which it is not now.

“To ensure the office fulfill its responsibilities to collect and forward support payments to families, it should ensure that it receives all the required information for registering and enforcing support obligations on a timely basis and properly initiate follow-up action when it does not.” It does not now.

“To help ensure that effective and timely enforcement actions are taken, the office should review its case management practices and consider assigning responsibility for each case to an individual caseworker.” We have heard from the member for Niagara Falls that each time someone calls in and asks, “What is the progress of my case?” there is no one that can say, “I know your case. I’m on top of it. I’ve done something.” It’s just a file in a computer. Each time you get a different person; each time you have to reinvent the wheel. There is nothing like having an assigned caseworker. We use assigned caseworkers in other aspects of social services. Why cannot the Family Responsibility Office use an assigned caseworker?

The Provincial Auditor says, “To help improve the administration of family support cases in a timely and effective manner, the office should establish criteria and standards for manageable caseloads and staff accordingly to ensure that the standards are met.” The FRO has been the victim of benign neglect and perhaps not-so-benign neglect. Maybe it would help to simply put some more people at it. Staff has been cut by 20%. We should restore some of those staff.

“To help ensure that client inquiries and enforcement actions are dealt with appropriately, the office should ensure that all caseworkers conduct the necessary follow-up work on a timely basis”—again a question of appro-

priate staffing, a question of dedication of appropriate resources.

Thank you, Speaker. I’ll allow some other members time to speak on this resolution.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I’m just going to speak very briefly to leave some time for my colleague the member for Niagara Centre. I’d also say that the member for Nickel Belt is unable to take part in this debate but would like to. As you will recall, it was the member for Niagara Centre and the member for Nickel Belt who, during the early years of the Tory government, in 1995, when the caseloads at the FRO and everything was falling apart, broke into the new offices to discover that the computers were all sitting in hallways and nothing was being done. They played a huge role in at least getting public attention paid to the terrible situation of that office at the time.

I commend Mr Craitor for bringing this forward today. I just want to point out that posting pictures of the deadbeat dads, although it is a good idea, is not going to resolve the problem. I believe, as I listened to his comments, that he’s aware of that. What is needed here is fundamental: To fix the systemic problems within the FRO, it needs resources, plain and simple. I think he’s acknowledged that as well. You can fiddle around with how casework is actually done, but if you don’t have the front-line workers there to answer those phones—and I agree with him that it should go back to the way it used to be, where caseworkers are assigned specifically to the same cases.

Under the previous Tory government, that has happened across the board in social services, in welfare and other areas. It’s creating huge problems to not have a consistent worker who knows your situation, who knows your case. In fact, it’s not cost-effective to do it that way, because each time somebody does manage to get through, they’re dealing with a whole new person who has to reinvent the wheel in some ways.

I want to point out in my couple of minutes here that after the speech by the finance minister yesterday talking about a deficit, which we believe—the evidence is there—the government knew about anyway and made these promises, I’m really, really concerned that the extra resources are needed now, not after consultation—we know what’s needed. As Mr Craitor pointed out, we need the resources put into the FRO right now.

So I am going to support this resolution today and will pledge to work with Mr Craitor—he can work on the inside of government; I can work on the outside with my colleagues—to make sure that the needed resources, enough resources, are put back into that office now, tomorrow, to stop this pathetic, unbelievable actually, situation for mothers and their kids.

We have to remember when we are speaking about this to not just think about numbers and statistics. We are talking about children, some of whom are going hungry because they are not getting the money they deserve. So let’s keep the faces of those kids in mind as we try to force, pressure the government into putting those resources that are badly needed back in the FRO.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I am really pleased to stand here today and speak on the motion brought forward by the member for Niagara Falls. He has touched on a systemic problem that many of our offices, as in our constituencies, are inundated with. I would say that 60% of the complaints that come into my office are about the dysfunction of the FRO offices. In April 2003—over the last four years, I have certainly brought to the attention of the minister and the Ombudsman a number of the issues relating to this office. It is a dysfunction.

1120

What I asked my constituency office to do is to actually record what the complaints are, coming forward from people who are using this office. Let's remember that government offices such as the FRO are supposed to be there to serve the public. These are some of the problems that have come to my constituency office that we have encountered with the FRO service.

Oftentimes, the constituents can't get through to speak to a client service representative on the toll-free number. They just can't get through to speak to any individual. Updating by the finance department has, on many occasions, been very slow. Lifting of federal garnishments is often an oversight. These are situations we've had to deal with, and these are very significant impacts on people's lives.

There have also been many times where new court orders or amended court orders are not actioned for several months. In other words, people go through all the pain of getting the court orders changed, yet months go by before those are actually implemented. Again, it creates financial hardships for the recipients.

There are also many times where we found a lot of lack of attention to detail. It's a systemic problem, and it may be created because we don't have the technology in place that we require; possibly we have cut the people who are working in FRO offices so much that they're unable to handle the workload. As we've seen from the Provincial Auditor's report, the caseload is something like 1,400 per individual working at the FRO office. That's way, way too big a caseload for any individual to be able to handle.

I'm mentioning these specific issues because even the Ombudsman spoke to this; I believe it was in his 2002-03 report. What he said in his report of that time was that the Family Responsibility Office consistently generated the second-highest number of complaints to his office. This is an Ombudsman trying to restore a level of fairness in how a service is delivered.

He goes on to say, "The FRO performs a uniquely significant service for individuals and families who rely on its enforcement of support orders for their income." I have certainly seen come through my office a number of cases whereby the families in question on the receiving end of support had to go on welfare because it had been months and months and they had not received any kind of support they were entitled to. So there's something wrong with the system.

The member from Niagara Falls has certainly touched a nerve, touched on an area that we, as government, have to take a look at and really try to address so we have an office that will be functional, will be effective and will do its job in facilitating these areas, these issues much better than it is now.

One of the interesting parts is that it's all about being able to manage this service in a way that's more effective. I've certainly had constituents complain that they've submitted information to the FRO office—I mean, these are just examples of why it doesn't work at times—and there's no confirmation of the information having been received or actioned. Many times, I know we have had to submit the same information over and over again, because it seems to get lost in a big, black hole.

I want to commend the newly elected member from Niagara Falls. We have to deal with this mess. It's not just a fiscal mess. I believe it's a function of government to make sure that its services are provided effectively and appropriately, because after all, government is here to serve the public.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join in the debate with respect to the resolution. I think the member for Sarnia-Lambton concluded in the proper way that this is what government is for. I just want to remind the member opposite for Niagara Falls that you are the government. You're not in the blame game any more; you're in the game of fixing problems that you think exist. The fact that this is not a government bill, that there has been no government action on this, speaks volumes.

Of course we share the principle that deadbeat parents should be held accountable. Who doesn't share that principle? That has been a tremendous problem not only for the previous government in trying to deal with it but back to the 1980s. I'll take the member back for a little history lesson if he doesn't know how this originated. Prior to 1987, it used to be that child support payments and their enforcement was through the court system exclusively. It was the courts that got the judgment and it was the courts that also enforced that judgment. When the Liberals were elected in 1985, then Attorney General Ian Scott in his wisdom felt that the court system was good for getting judgments but not so good in terms of enforcing those judgments. It was Ian Scott who took it upon himself, with the Liberal government of the day, to bring in government involvement to make sure there would be a better enforcement mechanism.

Unfortunately, because the problem, as the member stated, is the accountability of deadbeat parents, it's easy to get that judgment but not so easy to enforce that judgment. That's where the problem lies and where the work needs to be done. Let's be honest: Maybe we'll never solve this problem in terms of people trying to evade payment. Yes, there is a human cost to children and the people involved. That is a human cost on all of us that we have to deal with, because we're in a just society. We have to own up and face that we have to help the people. People who have a deadbeat parent situation may

have to go on welfare, look for other sources to support their family.

So the blame game from the member for Niagara Falls isn't helpful here. What's helpful here is that the government, the minister responsible, brings in legislation or changes regulations now to deal with an issue that he feels so strongly about. Accountability is what's important.

Ian Scott, the Attorney General of those days, brought about a mechanism for enforcement through the government that was not as successful as it could be. It was fine-tuned somewhat by the NDP government, but that didn't solve the problem, because there were too many people who were not paying and there was a lot of pain because people were not paying.

It was the PC government that established the Family Responsibility Office and introduced tough new enforcement methods for non-payments such as suspending drivers' licences, using private bill collectors and reporting defaults to credit bureaus, to name a few methods of enforcement. The result was a 50% increase in the amount of money collected since 1994-95. FRO collected a record \$555 million in court-ordered support payments during the 2001-02 period, a 50% increase since 1994-95, when we collected \$368 million in court-ordered support payments. We're moving in the right direction in terms of getting the judgments enforced. Ninety-five percent of court-ordered support payments received are processed within 24 to 48 hours, as compared to up to 10 days before our government reformed the system.

1130

We increased the number of court-ordered support payments deposited directly into the recipients' bank accounts. This has improved efficiency. That's what it's all about: getting the money to where it's supposed to go. I tell the member, it starts from the court system when there is a judgment. From that judgment, it has to be enforced.

Other improvements made by the Family Responsibility Office since 1998 included: expanding the availability of automated client information telephone lines to 24 hours, 7 days a week—that is an improvement; expanding the use of electronic payment methods; increasing the speed and accuracy of processing payments; and allowing employers to make payments on behalf of payers through the Internet—methods to improve the way payments are made.

The NDP objected to any user fees being associated with FRO. To deal with that, there was only one fee that was paid by the support recipient, which is \$25 for their payment record. This is only charged if they need more than the one free copy that they receive. If the participants keep track of their payments and receipts or use the automated telephone line, they will never need this document. In cases of financial hardship, they may ask the director of the Family Responsibility Office to waive the fee, so the fee was not ever an issue with respect to this particular document, which is the payment record.

I believe the government enforcement mechanism, whatever you want to call it, whether it's the Family

Responsibility Office or another name, has improved. It's more effective. It's a more accountable system that focuses on getting money into the hands of women and children. That is the major focus; that's what it's all about. Sure, there are mechanisms for the debtor not wanting to pay and evading service. That's the challenge.

These changes were necessary because there were backlogs—if you can believe it, member, because you weren't here—and inefficiencies in the Liberal and the NDP governments. That's why this is an ongoing problem. The Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act is simplifying and streamlining the collections system, making it easier for children to get the money they are entitled to, regardless of where the parents live. I've been in this Legislature for over eight years. I think that everybody who has been here has had issues with respect to the Family Responsibility Office, but one of the major issues is deadbeat parents who leave the province, and also deadbeat parents who can find ways—even though they're in business and have a brand new truck, somehow they can evade, because they're in private business or in their own business, making any payments. Even when you can suspend their drivers' licence, you can do things with their credit bureau, they're still not paying. It's the human will not to protect your children which is the problem here. I don't understand it; I don't know how anyone could understand it but you have a court system that works to make sure you get the judgment. What the government is trying to do is to make sure that that judgment is enforced. Some people don't want it to be enforced, and they'll find all kinds of different ways to do it, so don't blame the people who are trying to make sure that they get the money. Take a little focus on the people who aren't paying it. That's what the exercise has been about in terms of trying to get these people to pay.

Between September 1997 and March 2002, the PC government suspended almost 16,000 drivers' licences, which led to the recovery of \$190 million in outstanding court-ordered support payments. Obviously, that was a mechanism that worked. It's kind of obvious, but it's a mechanism that worked. It's not the mechanism that solved all the problems. One would think that that would be enough, but obviously it wasn't.

Overall, there have been aggressive enforcement measures introduced during the prior eight years that have been more successful in getting monies to families and children than were used under the former governments. If this government's going to come up with new and better enforcement mechanisms to make sure the money goes to where it belongs, that's what this is all about. It's not going to happen through your resolution, because that's what it is—a resolution.

When you look at the two parts of the problem, or how the system works, there isn't a problem with respect to getting the judgment, and there's not a problem, it would appear to me, when we say that 95% of court-ordered support payments received are processed within 24 to 48 hours, as compared to up to 10 days before the FRO system came into place. So let's look at the facts here.

The problem is what other mechanisms you can use. We're using the interjurisdictional court support order payment system. We're using suspending drivers' licences. We're using different methods, as I indicated, to try to get payment made.

What's important here is, you look at what your government promised to do. Don't play the blame game here. You said during the campaign, under your Growing Strong Communities—and I'm joined here now by the member from Durham—"We will crack down on deadbeat parents and make them pay up. Withholding family support payments is a serious crime. It makes the lives of single parents even tougher, and it hurts our kids. We will not watch children suffer while deadbeat parents shirk their responsibilities." Well, who would? That's all motherhood.

"Deadbeat parents in Ontario owe more than \$1 billion to their partners and children. We will use innovative new techniques such as Internet tracking to find deadbeats and recover the money they owe. We will pursue aggressive enforcement measures such as suspending drivers' licences for anyone missing two or more support payments." We're already doing that.

Yes, there is an issue in terms of finding the deadbeat parent. That's the main issue—to find them. The bigger issue is to find their money, whether it's in a bank account or wherever else they put it. I know a personal situation of a mother of three children. The father has left the country; he's gone somewhere else. Believe me, the work that she's had to do, and without lawyers, to try to get the money to support their children—that's the problem in terms of that deadbeat parent: trying to find them and get that money.

I am all ears to find out what you're going to do with, as you say in your campaign, "innovative, new techniques such as Internet tracking to find deadbeats and recover the money they owe." Well, you're going to have to do a little bit more than that. I'd like to see what the government's going to do with respect to bills. I think what they could do—they can do it immediately, they can do it through regulation, they can do it through order in council to bring in other mechanisms. They don't have to wait. They could have done it a month and a half ago—they've been here that long—in terms of implementing their promises. That's what's important, because it's the regulations in that statute for the Family Responsibility Office that are going to be the teeth of what you're going to accomplish.

To the member from Niagara Falls, of course one wants accountability in the system. You got elected on promises that you're going to do something about it. It's your job as a backbencher not to come here and say, "Oh, the previous government didn't do a good job; we're going to do better." Why don't you go to your government minister and say to them, "What are you going to do? We don't need a bill. We want the regulations changed now."

If we're all going to vote on this here today, one would expect that the minister is going to come up with

something immediately because the Legislature has spoken. We all know that the ministers have their own discretion in terms of how to deal with a resolution. They can deal with that resolution and not respond to that resolution for up to six months.

The member from Durham, in his wisdom, is here. I want to mention that the member on the previous bill mentioned decorum, that we have to be very careful about how we conduct ourselves in this House, but the member from Durham is very nicely dressed today, and I think he is looking very good. So I'm going to conclude; because he's so properly dressed, how can I continue?

1140

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I heard that member's final comments. John is not the one. Mr O'Toole is certainly not the one who needs advice about decorum. As the one person in this assembly who, digitally or otherwise, lets himself be known, I've always known Mr O'Toole to be a person of great decorum indeed. I regard him as number one.

The resolution warrants support. However, take a look at what's happening here. I want to tell the Liberal members, you won the election. You see, this is the "blame the previous government" syndrome. What you're doing is not rocket science. Of course, you worded the resolution in such a way that maybe Tories will feel uncomfortable voting for it, because it says "condemn the previous government."

Look, this isn't news. Back in 1996, the member from Nickel Belt, Shelley Martel, concocted a scheme to break into the Family Responsibility Office and persuaded me to go with her, against my better judgment. Well, I didn't want to; she made me. At 7 in the morning, we go in there with a cameraperson, and we find the place in total disarray. We find the place inoperative. What happened, as you know full well, is that the government of the day, one Attorney General called one Mr Charles Harnick, my former friend, had shut down 10 regional offices and tried to consolidate them in North York, up at the MTO building.

Shelley and I had been hearing stories week after week, and had been raising them in the House, about the fact that this office was inoperative, literally not hooked up. So we go there. You didn't have to break into the place. It wasn't much of a B and E, because you walked in. There was no security; the doors were unlocked. The hallways—first floor, second floor, third floor, fifth floor etc, and the videotape confirmed this—were strewn with files in unsecured cardboard boxes that anybody could access. We indeed did.

Then when we got into the rooms, which were supposedly operative, there were all sorts of uncrated computers and/or computers uncabled, unconnected, phones that weren't hooked up, there was no dial tone—the place was in a thorough shambles, no two ways about it. The sad thing was that Shelley and I, and other New Democrats as well, had been confronting the Attorney General of the day, one Mr Harnick, about this, who had been insisting that it was up and running, that it was

operative, that we were, oh, making a mountain out of a molehill etc. The videotape spoke for itself, and a darn good thing we did videotape it, because my bacon was in the fire there for a few minutes. The videotape proved to be valuable in more ways than I had anticipated.

Since 1996, we've had auditor's report after auditor's report, year after year, confirming that the FRO—FSP, as it was originally called—simply wasn't up to snuff. I remember the lacklustre efforts to somehow try to distract attention away from the de-funding of it, the de-staffing of it, by saying, "We're going to implement new enforcement methods." Look, it's not about the enforcement mechanisms; it's about ensuring there's enough staff there with the tools to do the job that they've got to do to handle the court orders that are being filed and make sure they're properly processed. Deadbeat parents—let's be careful; deadbeat parents are deadbeat parents and, as the former speakers indicated, they're adept at evading responsibility.

The problem is, it isn't the deadbeats per se who are causing the real problems. They're problematic, of course, inherently, but it's the fact that the office still doesn't have adequate computer systems, still doesn't have adequate levels of staffing to deal with the load of support orders that they have to administer—end of story. It's not about finding more enforcement mechanisms; it's about getting staff and resources into that office, and it's about reconsidering the prospect of restoring regional offices. Please.

So to the author of this resolution, in your response—yes, once again, à la Jerry McGuire, it's about the resources that this government is going to give the FRO to do that job. They've been grossly underfunded. They were crushed and broken by the previous government. I acknowledge that. I think that's clear, and increasingly clear every year when the auditor releases yet another damning report about the status of the FRO.

Shelley Martel and I determined, back in 1996, that you've got to get the place up and running. The auditor says, once again, that they still haven't got current computer resources. It takes money. Now we've got a government that is saying it's not going to keep any of its election promises, that it's looking to cut another \$4 billion from services being provided to the public. More cuts to the FRO? What are you going to cut next? You certainly haven't indicated—and I look forward to the author of this resolution telling us—where this government is going to find the necessary funds to get the FRO back up and running, where it's going to find the necessary funds to, if need be—and I believe it is necessary—restore some of the regional offices.

Show us the money, Mr Craitor. It's not enough to condemn the previous government. The electors did that. It's your turn now. Show us the money.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I rise today in support of the motion of my colleague the member for Niagara Falls. Experience has taught me over the years that quite often before you can start to fix something, you

need to understand the issue and admit that a problem even exists.

In this case, the conduct and the efficiency of the Family Responsibility Office was brought to my attention very shortly after being elected. Being newly elected, I took over the office of my predecessor, the former Speaker of the House, Oakville MPP Mr Carr. Even though the business of government may have ground to a halt for the election period, the problems people experienced on a daily basis kept going and the phone continued to ring. Having no staff hired at the time, I began to answer the phone myself and set about the task of solving some of the problems.

Quite early, I began to hear the term "FRO" and quickly learned that it stood for the Family Responsibility Office. It also soon became apparent that the name of this office was rarely or never used in a positive sense. Ordinary people talked of being left on hold for long periods of time, calls not being returned, files being lost or simply mixed up. Sometimes people would hang up in frustration. Cheques would go uncollected. Families or children would simply go short on food or rent or clothes until somehow the Family Responsibility Office got around to sorting out their personal information.

What people claimed they met when attempting to deal with the Family Responsibility Office was a system in which it appeared that provincial employees were sincere but hopelessly overworked. Employee morale appeared to be at an all-time low. The staffing of this office under the previous Tory government was simply inadequate to the task at hand. Clients knew it, staff knew it, members of the Tory government at the time knew it, and yet nothing appeared to be done to correct the situation.

Once again, the previous government appeared to have left the most vulnerable people of our society to fend for themselves. While appointed executives were being paid outrageous sums of money to drive OPG further and further into the ground and the province further and further into debt, the most vulnerable people, the people who could have used our resources the most, were denied access. It seems the previous government simply ignored and mismanaged an office that was designed to help people when they needed it most. Single moms and dads, children of separated families, victims of deadbeat moms and dads were left to fend for themselves with a system that had no hope of coping with the problems and tragedy these people faced on a daily basis. Provincial employees have informed me that the Family Responsibility Office has now become the quagmire that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board used to be.

It was clear from my first experience that something was amiss and needed to be fixed. I finally tracked down the number of the MPP liaison for the Family Responsibility Office. This call was made in about mid-October. I was greeted by a recorded message that said something to the effect—and remember, this is in mid-October—"This is"—blank—"the MPP liaison for the Family Responsibility Office. It's Thursday, August 14. I'll be

out of the office for a few days.” This is in mid-October that I’m making this phone call. Can you imagine, if you’re a client or a mother or father trying to feed or clothe your children and you get greeted with a phone call like that? That is simply inexcusable.

Although I was newly elected, I certainly knew something was seriously wrong and needed to be fixed. That’s why I support the motion that’s on the floor today. It sheds the light of day on this issue. It’s an issue that I believe needs to be addressed. It goes a long way to showing how serious our government is, not only about balancing budgets and living within our means, but also about how we plan to protect and assist the most vulnerable members of our society. I would ask that the entire House support this motion.

1150

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): It’s my pleasure to speak to Mr Craitor’s motion this morning. I would say, even to the member who has just spoken, that it is a job. In fact, in our constituency office for the riding of Durham we have a full-time person, Fern Sargent, for whom I have the greatest respect. She has developed a terrific relationship with the Family Responsibility Office and with our particular case manager. It is really an extremely important relationship to try to form to make sure the court orders are executed.

I believe the ministries—it was under the Attorney General, and now it’s under community and social services—are trying to get the technology up to date, but really it comes down to a broader societal issue. As we were saying among ourselves, we’d like to see something that speaks to the issue of society and the challenges that families face today.

That doesn’t seem to be very popular, but when I look at the Family Responsibility Act, and when I look at family law generally and some of the court orders, the awards from those hearings are onerous responsibilities. I’ve spoken with Senator Anne Cools, who is kind of a noted expert in this subject area, and am very supportive of some of the actions she has put forward.

I really feel that resolving the issue of custodial and visitation rights is also part of this whole game. There’s a family breakdown, and when the family is broken down and there are children involved, certainly the hearts of all of us in this House go out to the children, not just at this time of year but at all times of the year.

I don’t see anything specific in Mr Craitor’s resolution this morning that is going to change the status quo without society putting more emphasis on family first. In families, indeed both parents have responsibilities, but in that societal unit the children should be first. I’m a parent of five children, and my wife and I have sacrificed many things so our children could have things. What we need to do is speak to strengthening the family in our community and in society broadly.

I think this is more politics than policy. I don’t see anything here that any government wouldn’t try, to make sure the Family Responsibility Office is charged with linking the payer with the recipient. When we came to

government, I can tell you, the office was in even more disarray. Quite often, people try—we’ve got interjurisdictional court orders that are now in force.

I wish you’d look at your challenge, because at the end of the day we’re all here to try to help families and children. The minister isn’t here to hear these comments, but—

The Deputy Speaker: The member’s time has expired. Further debate?

The member for Niagara Falls has two minutes to reply.

Mr Craitor: First I want to acknowledge all those who have spoken from both sides. As a new member here, I do appreciate a lot of the comments and a lot of the history that I am not aware of. There have been some positive things done by the previous government, and I’m going to acknowledge that.

The motion was put forward with an intent of sincerity. For me as a new member, it was my way of trying to bring something forward that I sincerely believe in. Prior to becoming a member of provincial Parliament, as a member of city council I was receiving calls, and parents would come and see me thinking I could do something at the city level. I always said to myself that if I ever had the opportunity to take that issue forward—and I do now—that I would and in any venue that I could. If it meant bringing it forward as a motion, to me that was a good start, and I’ve started that way.

It will not be something I will let go of. It’s not something that’s done for political reasons; it’s something I believe in on a personal level. I have a number of very close friends, one in particular, who I know extremely well and talk to on a regular basis, who is going through this. Her husband is currently in the United States, so I’m aware of the difficulty she’s had to deal with in trying to get those monies from him.

The auditor’s report has 25 pages and 20 recommendations that deal with this. That tells me how significant this matter is and how important it is that our government work on it, and I make the commitment for the length of time I’m here. Hopefully, it will be a short time before we can deal with this and get working on trying to improve the system. I ask all members to support the motion I’ve put forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The time allowed for private members’ public business has expired.

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will deal first with private member’s notice of motion number 3, by Ms Smith.

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

All those in favour will say “aye.”

All those opposed will say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We’ll deal with this after dealing with the second item.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY OFFICE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Craitor has moved private members' notice of motion number 4.

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

DECORUM IN CHAMBER

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Call in the members. This will be five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1157 to 1202.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will please rise and remain standing until recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Levac, Dave	Qaadri, Shafiq
Arnott, Ted	Matthews, Deborah	Racco, Mario G.
Arthurs, Wayne	McNeely, Phil	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	O'Toole, John	Sergio, Mario
Brownell, Jim	Oraziotti, David	Smith, Monique
Caplan, David	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Tascona, Joseph N.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Parsons, Ernie	Van Bommel, Maria
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peterson, Tim	Wilkinson, John
Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Klees, Frank	Pupatello, Sandra	Zimmer, David

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

Nays

Baird, John R.	Duguid, Brad	McMeekin, Ted
Barrett, Toby	Hampton, Howard	Miller, Norm
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Peters, Steve
Bradley, James J.	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Colle, Mike	Martiniuk, Gerry	Sterling, Norman W.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 30; the nays are 18.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

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

The House recessed from 1205 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CANADIAN THOROUGHBRED RACING

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I rise today to pay tribute to a great Canadian athlete, not Wayne Gretzky or Lorie Kane or Beckie Scott or even Mike Weir. This athlete is unique. His name is Wando, the brilliant three-year-old chestnut colt whose patience and a powerful late kick earned him a spot in Canadian thoroughbred racing history this past August when he won the final leg of the Canadian Triple Crown. Winning the Breeders' Stakes, the Prince of Wales Stakes and the Queen's Plate, defined as the oldest thoroughbred race in North America

and the most prestigious race for Canadian-bred horses, is indeed an amazing feat.

Congratulations go to owner and breeder Gustav Schickedanz of King township, who is carrying on his proud family tradition of breeding the best of horses, a tradition that goes back for many generations. Schickedanz said of his champion horse, "He runs a beautiful race. He just gallops for home." Patrick Husbands, the jockey who rode Wando to the Triple Crown, said, "He's a great champion." Congratulations also go to Patrick Husbands and to the talented trainer, Mike Keogh.

This has been a great year for Canadian thoroughbred racing. It's an industry that employs roughly 60,000 people in this province and generates some \$1.6 billion into the economy. Congratulations to all of the men and women involved in this great industry.

GOOD CITIZENSHIP AWARDS
FOR JUNIORS

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): Today is a great day for a number of special students from 20 Toronto schools. They are receiving the Good Citizenship Award for Juniors. These students were selected by the teachers at their respective schools for having demonstrated the following positive character traits: kindness, respect for other people's feelings, being helpful toward younger children and the elderly, and conducting themselves in a responsible fashion toward their parents, teachers and peers.

The awards were introduced in 1978 and were designed to encourage responsible citizenship among our community's youth. This year's winners represent the qualities we would all like to see in today's youth. They are the type of children who serve as wonderful role models for their peers.

The recipients for the good citizenship awards are, from St Nicholas of Bari Catholic School, Dalila Madeira and Joey Ricardo Khemraj; from St Rita Catholic School, Carolina Canto and Dwayne Roach; from St Sebastian Catholic School, Tia Marie Samaroo; from Stella Maris Catholic School, Tiago Real and Stefania Matarazzo; from Alex Muir-Gladstone, Scott Terceira and Kimberly Gaudet; from Dovercourt Public School, Elizabeth Khuu and Bernie Longange-Kingiela; and from F.H. Miller Junior School, Nirmala Ramprasad and Andy Nham.

We wish them well as they start their life's journey.

ONTARIO KOREAN BUSINESSMEN'S
ASSOCIATION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I rise today about a meeting I had with members of the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association. One of the men I met with was the president, Mr Jong Kyu-Huh, who said the OKBA represents 2,400 corner stores across Ontario, all of which are upset with recent tobacco tax hikes imposed by this Liberal government.

Tax hikes on cigarettes create a scary climate for store owners and their employees. My Kyu-Huh informed me that increased tobacco taxes translate into more smashed windows, more frequent armed robberies, break-ins, and female employees who do not want to work past 9 pm for fear they will become a victim. Stores are no longer being robbed for money; they're being robbed for cigarettes. The situation, according to Mr Kyu-Huh, is getting worse day by day.

The majority of us have figured out and we understand that tax cuts create jobs and fuel the economy. Mr McGuinty has ignored and continues to ignore this concept. I wonder if Mr McGuinty is going to ignore store owners and their employees who are working in fear of their lives due to Liberal tobacco tax hikes.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Increased cigarette taxes do not work, and neither will smoke-free Ontario nor requiring store owners to hide their display. I truly believe these issues have no bearing on curbing smoking habits in Ontario.

STUDENT POETRY CONTEST

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell):

I am proud today to have the opportunity to talk about a group of grade 11 English class students of l'École secondaire L'Escale de Rockland.

These students took part in an open letter and poem contest called Operation Mighty Plume. As such, they wrote poems and letters to Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan. A committee read all the letters and picked one that was going to be read in front of soldiers from the 30 nations serving in Afghanistan on Remembrance Day.

The poem of Mona Mreiche, a student from L'Escale in my riding, was selected, and Rockland native Corporal Peter Bowles told the L'Escale students that the poem had people in tears. Mona received a plaque and an ISAF nametag. As well, all the students who participated received certificates signed by the base commanding officer, as well as letters from the Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

I am proud of these outstanding and caring youth of my community and I commend them for their commitment to our forces in Afghanistan. On behalf of L'Escale students, the staff and myself, I want to wish a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to our Canadian troops overseas. God bless them all.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):

At this special time of year when we as Christians celebrate the birth of our Saviour, I want to draw your attention to two events in my riding that I saw as incredible displays of the awesome power of God through nature.

On November 28, a fierce winter storm brought down trees that succumbed to the heavy wet snow load. Those fallen trees knocked out power lines as they fell across some back roads, leaving them impassable. I encountered this personally on my way home from Pembroke. Much

of my riding was also left without electricity for up to 72 hours.

Only one week later, trees that were pushed to the breaking point earlier were now covered in the most spectacular coat of hoary frost, sparkling in the morning sunlight, that I have ever seen in my entire life. The area around Killaloe literally took my breath away. Within a period of one week, we saw evidence of His power and might, followed by His wonderful beauty and kindness, leaving no doubt as to who is really in charge.

Merry Christmas to the people of my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, to the members of this Legislature and to all Ontarians.

1340

LIBERAL CAMPAIGN PROMISES

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I want to take this opportunity to remind the government and also to remind people watching that it's the end of the session. We have now come through what is the first session of the new government, and I just think it's rather interesting to recap where we are at this point in this government's agenda.

I ran in a special place I call northern Ontario, where we had a Liberal platform that talked about the things that were going to happen in northern Ontario. I just want to report that many of those things that are contained within the Liberal platform are nowhere to be seen on the government's docket when it comes to Orders and Notices or any of the legislation that we dealt with.

I think, for example, of my good friend Mr Bartolucci, now the Minister of Northern Development, who in the run-up to the election said, "We have a northern platform. We're going to bring in studded tires." Rick, where are they? We're looking for studded tires; they are nowhere to be found. We haven't seen the Minister of Transportation once get up in this House and say they are ready to bring studded tires back into the province.

The four-laning of Highway 69: Remember that one? My friend and colleague the member for Nickel Belt, Madame Martel, myself and other northerners support the whole concept of moving to four lanes on Highway 69. We were supposed to have an announcement by now, and all we've got is basically that they're going to extend the highway in a couple of places and put a few bridges in. Where is the four-laning for Highway 69? It was in the campaign platform.

Then we've got the Adams mine: They were going to kill the Adams mine once and for all. It's alive, it's well, and it looks like it might go ahead. I'm just saying, oh, Lord, not another broken promise for Christmas.

McMASTER UNIVERSITY

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): Christmas came early to Hamilton yesterday. It's with extreme pleasure and pride in McMaster University's medical school and the city of Hamilton that I acknowledge the magnanimous gift of \$105 million to McMaster by

Michael G. DeGroot and his family. This is the largest single gift in Canadian history. The medical school will be renamed in his honour, another Canadian first.

Some \$64 million will be placed in an endowment fund for health care, medical research and education, and will provide a multitude of projects, one of which is \$15 million to a centre focusing on pain resulting from strokes; \$10 million will go to a centre on cancer focusing on molecular determinants; and \$10 million will go to a centre on infectious diseases. Mr Speaker, \$41 million will go toward building labs and expanding McMaster University Medical Centre.

Mr DeGroot has been a very generous contributor to McMaster in the past and is continuing his generosity toward Hamilton in an unprecedented way. His donation will positively affect Canadians and the world community for many, many years to come. On behalf of the people of Hamilton and the broader Hamilton community, we thank Mr DeGroot and his family for his contribution. McMaster University is already very good; now it is going to be the best.

AUTISM SERVICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I rise in the House to call on Premier Dalton McGuinty to keep his promise to parents of autistic children. Prior to the election, Premier McGuinty wrote to these parents and vowed to extend intensive behavioural intervention treatment to children six years and older. He described the current cut-off age as “unfair and discriminatory.”

Now the Liberals are backtracking and refusing to keep this commitment. They have forgotten the promise to families and children in our province, and, most shamefully, they are avoiding the serious implications of this broken promise.

Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals across the way are making a habit of breaking promises. They have broken their promise on the Oak Ridges moraine. They have broken their promise on freezing hydro rates. They are now breaking their promise on balancing the budget. It appears that the McGuinty Liberals are taking particular glee in pointing fingers and blaming everyone else for the reasons why they have broken their promises. As they play the blame game, children in our province are suffering. Parents have to endure heavy legal costs to fight the government in the courts for necessary medical treatment for their children.

It appears the Liberals are more committed to creating a crisis than they are to keeping their commitment to the families of autistic children.

On behalf of these families, I call on the Liberal backbenchers, members who are from the medical profession, to tell Premier McGuinty to do the right thing and keep his promise to the families of this province.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I rise today to say that I'm really surprised that the NDP supported

private schools. During the campaign, the candidate running for that party—we sat next to each other and it's one of the things we agreed on. A month ago, the NDP were asked to choose between private schools and public schools, and they supported private schools. On the second reading they were asked the same question, private schools or public schools, and they chose private schools. In the committee they were asked the same question and the same result, they supported private schools. Last night was their last chance. They were asked again, and they voted for private schools.

Our public schools desperately need funding after years of Tory mismanagement. Already the McGuinty government has put \$112 million into improving literacy among our most vulnerable. When we moved to cancel the private school tax credit, where was the NDP? How can we take anything the NDP says seriously? We on this side of the House have always been against taking money away from public schools, and we are cancelling the private school tax credit for a good reason: We think the money will be better invested in public schools. I thought the NDP would vote in favour of Bill 2, but sadly, the NDP failed and they supported private education.

VISITORS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm sure everybody here would like to know that my mother, Myrtis Churley, who hails from Bay de Verde, Newfoundland, is with us in the gallery today.

Interjection.

Ms Churley: She's better behaved than I am, no doubt about it.

I also want to take this opportunity to introduce Chuck and Robin Konkell, the parents of the wonderful Laura Konkell, who is the page from my riding. They're in the gallery with us today as well.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): In my short reign, that's the best point of order I've heard since I've been here.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just wanted to say that most of us thought that Ms Churley's mother was actually her sister.

The Speaker: Member for Timmins-James Bay, is it on a point of order?

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On my point of order—but first of all, we know who's running for leadership around here, sucking up.

On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just want to clarify for the members of the assembly this is Madame Churley, and this is Madame Churley-NDP who sits in the assembly; we want to be clear.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: On this last day of this group of the pages' term in the House, I would just like to

acknowledge all the parents of the pages who are here, and specifically, from Don Valley West, Susan and Frank Hayes and Caroline, Katie's sister, and William and Jean Stadelman, who are here for Katie Hayes's last day.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You have taken away some of the thunder from speech, I also wanted to extend my best wishes to the pages. This is their last day. They have complained to me that they wanted an extension of two more weeks here, and I said to them to blame it on all the members here. I just want to wish them all the best and hope that they have learned a lot.

I should tell you a little confession. I asked them for a grading of the members. It's still in the envelope; I haven't told anyone yet. I want to thank you so much for the work you've done and for your contribution here. All members acknowledge it.

1350

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TRUST BENEFICIARIES' LIABILITY ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA RESPONSABILITÉ DES BÉNÉFICIAIRES D'UNE FIDUCIE

Mr Baird moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 35, An Act respecting the liability of beneficiaries of a trust / Projet de loi 35, Loi concernant la responsabilité des bénéficiaires d'une fiducie.

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

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): This limits liability for the beneficiaries of a trust. It was originally contained in the budget bill that died on the order paper with the calling of the election. I appreciate that the Minister of Finance has agreed to have a look at the bill, as has my colleague Michael Prue, as to whether it might see expeditious passage in the spring.

MUNICIPAL AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES MUNICIPALITÉS

Mr Hudak moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 36, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 respecting the election of the head of council for The Regional Municipality of Niagara / Projet de loi 36, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités à l'égard de l'élection du président du conseil de la municipalité régionale de Niagara.

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

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): This bill will give the taxpayers of Niagara the ability to vote for the chair of the regional government. As a strong believer in direct democracy, I'm always looking for the best ways to engage citizens in our political system. I believe that

making this position elected by the people of Niagara is an important evolution in our municipal system.

As members know, the regional chair provides leadership in key areas like policing and public health. I'd like to see that individual get a mandate from the folks of Fort Erie, Smithville or Welland, rather than simply the 30 councillors at the regional headquarters.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE CONSEIL EXÉCUTIF

Mr Baird moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act to amend the Executive Council Act / Projet de loi 37, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Conseil exécutif.

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

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): This bill will require Dalton McGuinty and his cabinet members to answer questions in the Legislature, and if they don't answer the questions they'll face a fine of \$500 a shot.

I appreciate this government's effort to require ministers to be here. This bill goes further. It requires them not to just be here but to answer questions on behalf of the people of Ontario.

VISITORS

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children's Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration):

On a point of order, Speaker: The family of our wonderful page Gideon is here: his mom, Yoni Kwinter; his brother, Adam; and his grandmother, Rose. Of course, he is the grandson of our wonderful colleague Monte Kwinter.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I have two bills to introduce. One I'd like to introduce is Bill Wrye, who has been acting as the executive assistant to the House Leader. He's been working very well with all members and I want to thank him for all of his support over the past few months. We're lucky to have him here.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): In the form of a bill?

Mr Baird: I have a second bill.

BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉQUILIBRE BUDGÉTAIRE

Mr Baird moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 38, An Act to amend the Balanced Budget Act, 1999 / Projet de loi 38, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1999 sur l'équilibre budgétaire.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): This will require a balanced budget this year.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

Those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1356 to 1401.

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

Ayes

Agostino, Dominic	Dunlop, Garfield	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Arnott, Ted	Eves, Ernie	Parsons, Ernie
Arthurs, Wayne	Flaherty, Jim	Peters, Steve
Baird, John R.	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peterson, Tim
Barrett, Toby	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Gravelle, Michael	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hardeman, Ernie	Racco, Mario G.
Bountrogianni, Marie	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Hudak, Tim	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Kennedy, Gerard	Rinaldi, Lou
Bryant, Michael	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Martiniuk, Gerry	Smitherman, George
Cordiano, Joseph	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	McGuinty, Dalton	Tascona, Joseph N.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dombrowsky, Leona	Millroy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Duguid, Brad	O'Toole, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Oraziotti, David	Yakubuski, John

The Speaker: All those against, please rise.

Nays

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

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 78; the nays are 6.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr Baird: I just want to thank all the Liberal members for supporting my bill. It means a lot to me.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In a spirit of co-operation, I would move for unanimous consent for second and third reading today.

The Speaker: Do I have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

MOTIONS

THIRD PARTY STATUS ON SUBCOMMITTEES

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous

consent to move a motion on third party status on subcommittees without amendment or debate.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Let's settle down a bit, please.

Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that the third party representative on any standing committee shall become a member of the subcommittee on committee business.

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

REFERRAL OF BILL 8

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that the order for second reading of Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act be discharged and the bill be referred to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

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

REFERRAL OF BILL 31

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that the order for second reading of Bill 31, An Act to enact and amend various Acts with respect to the protection of health information be discharged and the bill be referred to the standing committee on general government.

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

COMMITTEE SCHEDULE

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move the following motion authorizing committees' work without amendment or debate.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that the following committees be authorized to meet during the winter adjournment in accordance with the schedule of meeting dates agreed to by the whips of the recognized parties and tabled with the Clerk of the Assembly to examine and inquire into the following matters:

The standing committee on finance and economic affairs to consider matters relating to pre-budget consultation;

The standing committee on general government to consider Bill 31, An Act to enact and amend various Acts with respect to the protection of health information;

The standing committee on government agencies pursuant to its terms of references as set out in standing order 106(e);

The standing committee on justice and social policy to consider Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act;

The standing committee on the Legislative Assembly pursuant to its terms of reference as set out in standing order 106(f);

The standing committee on public accounts to consider the reports of the Provincial Auditor;

And, with the agreement of the whip of each recognized party, the time allotted for consideration by the committees may be amended;

And that the committees be authorized to release their reports during the winter adjournment by depositing a copy of any report with the Clerk of the assembly, and upon the resumption of the meetings of the House the Chairs of such committees shall bring any such reports before the House in accordance with the standing orders.

1410

The Speaker: Mr Duncan moves that the following committees be authorized to meet during the winter adjournment in accordance with the schedule of meeting dates agreed to by the whips of the recognized parties and tabled with the Clerk of the Assembly to examine and inquire into the following matters—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense?

Interjection: No.

The Speaker: —The standing committee on finance and economic affairs to consider matters relating to pre-budget consultation;

The standing committee on general government to consider Bill 31, An Act to enact and amend various Acts with respect to the protection of health information;

The standing committee on government agencies pursuant to its terms of references as set out in standing order 106(e);

The standing committee on justice and social policy to consider Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act;

The standing committee on the Legislative Assembly pursuant to its terms of reference as set out in standing order 106(f);

The standing committee on public accounts to consider the reports of the Provincial Auditor;

And, with the agreement of the whip of each recognized party, the time allotted for consideration by the committees may be amended;

And that the committees be authorized to release their reports during the winter adjournment by depositing a copy of any report with the Clerk of the assembly, and upon the resumption of the meetings of the House the Chairs of such committees shall bring any such reports before the House in accordance with the standing orders.

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

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order—

The Speaker: Member for Durham, I was in the middle of actually putting the question, you know.

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

ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion to adjourn the House later today without amendment or debate.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr Duncan has moved for unanimous consent. Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: Notwithstanding the order of the House dated November 26, 2003—and that this has been shared with all the other caucuses—when the House stands adjourned today, it shall stand adjourned until March 22, 2004.

Interjections.

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

Hon Mr Duncan: Mr Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put a motion that reads as follows:

That the House recognizes that six committees will be meeting over the spring session, three of them travelling extensively throughout the province, and that the House recognize and applaud this as a distinct change from the previous government's practices.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

SAFE DRINKING WATER SYSTEM

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): This government has made it very clear that we are committed to the environment and that we will implement all of O'Connor's recommendations as we develop a strong source-to-tap program to protect Ontario's drinking water. Today I am pleased to announce three further actions to keep our clean water promise to Ontarians.

First, our government is placing an immediate one-year moratorium on new or expanded water-taking permits for uses that remove water from watersheds. The moratorium covers southern Ontario and those northern Ontario watersheds that are covered by a conservation authority. A regulation has been filed today giving this

moratorium the force of law. The moratorium will be in place until December 31, 2004.

Second, I am pleased to announce that we have finalized the membership of two key water source protection committees. A 21-member implementation committee will provide advice to the government on tools and approaches in watershed-based source protection planning, and a 16-member technical experts committee will advise on threats to water, how to manage risks, the effects of water-taking and the link between groundwater protection and surface water management.

Third, I will release a white paper in February outlining a basic framework for source protection planning. The white paper will guide our public discussions and help us draft effective source water protection legislation. The moratorium on permits to take water covers water bottling and other products that remove water from watersheds. No one may apply for a new or expanded permit in identified areas while the moratorium is in effect.

The moratorium does not affect the water we need for our homes, it does not affect farmers who need water for their crops and livestock, and it does not affect any of the existing permits that allow our lives and businesses and industries to go on normally. The moratorium is designed to prevent uses that would transport millions of litres of water out of local watersheds with no consideration for the long-term effects on the environment. The McGuinty government will no longer allow the province's water to simply be given away for free.

This moratorium will provide us with time to review and improve the process for issuing permits to take water. We will not grant new permits of this kind until we are certain there is enough water in the watershed for this and future generations.

Commissioner O'Connor has said that protecting water sources is a major component of a safe drinking water system. In fact, he's made 22 recommendations on this issue, and our government will meet every one of those recommendations. Nothing is more basic to life, the quality of life, than an adequate supply of safe and clean water. The McGuinty government is committed to protecting the waters that serve as the source for our drinking water.

Today's initiatives give us an excellent opportunity to strengthen the system for issuing water-taking permits and will help us develop source protection plans for all watersheds in Ontario. The people of Ontario want to be able to trust the water that comes out of the tap. We are helping to restore that trust.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD PROGRÈS DU GOUVERNEMENT

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I rise to inform the House on the progress this government has made since it was sworn in a mere 56 days ago.

On October 2, Ontarians chose change, and change is what we have delivered. That change has been real, it has been positive, and it has been the kind of change the hard-working people of this province want, need and deserve.

Au cours de cette session, nous avons entrepris de changer la direction suivie par le gouvernement. Nous ne nous sommes pas arrêtés là.

1420

We have set Ontario on a historic new course, a course that will improve the quality of life for all Ontarians.

Let's take a look at what the previous government was doing and what our new government is doing.

They sent millions of dollars to private schools; we announced \$112 million to help public school students who are struggling to learn to read, write and do their math.

They fired water inspectors; we're hiring water inspectors.

They gave us sprawl; we've introduced changes to our planning laws that will encourage smart growth.

They closed schools; we've called for a moratorium on school closures.

They wasted millions of dollars on self-promotional government advertising; we've introduced a law, the first of its kind in Canada, to ban that waste.

Instead of helping farmers, instead of getting relief for SARS, instead of obtaining more money for health care, instead of acquiring funding for highways, they pointed fingers at Ottawa, played politics and played the blame game; we have ushered in a new era of working constructively with the federal government, and because of that I am proud to announce there is now new money for farmers, for SARS, for health care and for highways.

They were taking money out of our public schools to give seniors an irresponsible tax cut; we're keeping money in our public schools by cancelling that irresponsible tax break.

They were taking money out of our public schools to pay for a tax giveaway for private schools; we're keeping money in our public schools by cancelling that irresponsible tax break.

Ils ont mis en danger nos services publics en accordant d'autres crédits d'impôt aux grandes sociétés; nous protégeons les services publics en reprenant la dernière portion de l'allègement fiscal des sociétés.

Le vérificateur provincial nous a dit que le gouvernement provincial lui avait mis des bâtons dans les roues; nous avons présenté une loi qui lui octroie de tous nouveaux pouvoirs.

Les ministres du gouvernement précédent manquaient souvent la période de questions; nous avons présenté une loi qui exige de nos ministres d'assister régulièrement à la période de questions.

They ignored the mess at Ontario Power Generation with costs at Pickering going through the roof and income falling through the floor; we've given people the facts, we have reasserted public control and we have

moved to open up OPG and Hydro One to public scrutiny and accountability.

They didn't raise the minimum wage, ever; we're increasing the minimum wage, already.

They fired meat inspectors; we've hired meat inspectors.

They resisted setting up a public forum about what happened at Ipperwash; we've launched a public inquiry.

They used energy as a political football despite knowing the truth about Ontario's financial position; we are taking responsible action on energy pricing.

They sent university and college tuition skyrocketing; we have announced a tuition fee freeze.

They pushed privatization of our medicare system; we have introduced a law, the first of its kind in Canada, to ban pay your way to the front of the line health care.

They were for private ownership of hospitals; we've taken their P3 hospitals and turned them into publicly owned, publicly controlled and publicly accountable hospitals.

They avoided accountability in health care; we are at the leading edge in Canada with our commitment to increase public scrutiny.

They snuffed out local democracy by replacing large school boards with supervisors; we are replacing the supervisors with local democracy.

They allowed the wholesale raiding of our water supplies; as you heard just a moment ago, we are introducing a regulation to put an end to that.

They presided over skyrocketing auto insurance premiums; we've introduced a freeze on applications for new rate hikes.

They hid a \$5.6-billion deficit from the public, from the people of Ontario; we are going to work with the people of Ontario on a responsible plan for the future, one that will transform government so it is responsible to people and responsive to their needs.

I'm proud to say that we have already taken significant action to tackle the deficit that we have inherited. By cancelling the previous government's irresponsible tax measures, including those aimed at large corporations, private schools and seniors, and by increasing tobacco taxes, as we promised, we have generated savings of \$795 million in 2003-04, \$2.8 billion the following year, and \$3.7 billion in 2005-06.

On top of that, we have imposed a government-wide hiring freeze, with the only exception being public safety, and put immediate restraints on discretionary spending. Our measures to ban the waste of taxpayers' dollars on partisan, self-promotional government advertising, to curb the reliance on highly paid consultants, and to give the auditor the power to audit hospitals, school boards, universities and colleges will generate still more savings.

The actions that we have taken on the deficit and the many real positive changes that we have introduced so far are more than just a start. After eight years of mismanagement, these changes represent an historic new course for Ontario.

De ce côté de la Chambre, nous sommes très fiers de cette session. Elle marque des améliorations réelles dans la vie des gens que nous avons le privilège de servir, les habitants de l'Ontario.

But as proud as we are of the past year, we are even more eager to tackle the job ahead in the new year. On the day that I was sworn in as Premier, I talked about hope. I said it would be our mission to build a government that inspires hope in all Ontarians.

The hopes of Ontarians for their province are profound. They want a prosperous economy that offers opportunity for all, not just perks for a privileged few. They want a fair and just society where people treat each other with respect and dignity. They want public schools that develop the best citizens by teaching our children values and the best workers by equipping them to compete with the world and win. They want a health care system that is second to none and that treats no citizen as second-class. Their hopes for Ontario are intertwined with their hopes and their dreams for the children they love and the country they cherish.

Their hopes are our hopes. That's why we're going to get there together. And together is how we're going to get there: not by dictating to people but through a dialogue with them, because hope is not something that you impose, it's something you share; not by flinching from being honest about the choices we face; not by hiding the challenges or pretending they don't exist, because there's a big difference between hope and wishful thinking; not by hacking and slashing across the board, never mind the consequences. That would be mindless. Hope is thoughtful. Finally, not by simply sticking with what we know. Hope, by definition, never settles for the status quo.

We're going to succeed by working with the best partners in the world: the hard-working, caring, creative people of Ontario. Together we will be ambitious enough to choose those services that matter most of all and be the best in the world at them. Together we'll be courageous enough to admit what we can't do any more and decide to let it go. Together we'll be precise enough to target our resources where they will do the most good and honest enough to say no to those who need help the least. Together we'll be bold enough to do what we can do to help the many, never shying away because we fear the reaction of a few. We're going to take the creativity of Ontarians, their clear-eyed realism and their unbridled optimism, and we're going to transform government so it provides the important public services they need to succeed and their children need to flourish.

On October 2, Ontarians chose change: real, positive change. That is what we're delivering, and we've only just begun.

1430

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I would just say in response to the statement made by the Premier in the House today that I believe we live in the best province in the best country in the world. I believe that we have the best health care system, bar none; the best

public education system, bar none; the best environment, bar none—not to say that none of those things cannot be made better.

That's why all 103 of us in this place come here, regardless of our political differences and our differences in philosophy, to try to make the province of Ontario a little bit better place for every Ontarian in which to live, work and bring up a family.

To respond to the blatant partisanship of the Premier today I think would give dignity to remarks which I believe don't deserve any.

SAFE DRINKING WATER SYSTEM

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant):

Once again, it's with great interest that I respond to the Minister of the Environment's second statement during what she has anointed Green Week, in this case a one-year moratorium on water takings. I do recognize that this moratorium does not affect the water we need for our homes, it does not affect farmers, farmers who need water for not only their crops but also their livestock, and it does not affect any of the existing permits that allow our homes and our businesses to continue on.

I applaud the new environment minister for trying and I would hope the member from St Catharines would agree with that. I applaud the minister for launching Green Week, for trying to establish herself as a strong voice on behalf of the environment.

Unfortunately, this is all we see—it is a try—as far as a muster during what has been called Green Week. Essentially, it's not an awful lot to write home about. It seems to be competing with democratic renewal week and it's competing with economic statement week. The minister is competing with her seatmate in municipal affairs for the environmental agenda.

What do we have here during Green Week? What can we as MPPs take into the schools to talk about? There is a focus, I grant you that. We can go into the schools, we can talk about this moratorium. We can go into the schools and we can talk about 25 water inspectors hired, the announcement from the minister at the beginning of the week. Perhaps the 25 inspectors could go into the schools during this Green Week.

I will point out that during Green Week there has been no mention of air pollution. Maybe that's convenient. We're going into the wintertime; there's not necessarily the public concern about smog right now. So I suggest there's a bit of a cynical approach by ignoring air pollution during Green Week.

A member nearby has asked me, "Where is the mention of landfills or land deposits of waste or waste diversion?" There's no mention of this during the Minister of the Environment's Green Week. We will wait until next December for the next Green Week to find out those issues.

Many people are questioning why you would launch Green Week in the middle of December. I look out over Queen's Park. It was very white on Monday; we may want to call it White Week. Then we had rain on

Tuesday; things turned very brown. Perhaps it's a recognition of approaching global warming that our Minister of the Environment has identified the middle of December as Green Week.

They seem to be a little leery or perhaps scared to admit to the people of Ontario that they have no plan for the protection of the environment, other than the mention of Green Week. I wonder how much interest there is across the province of Ontario with respect to this week, Green Week. Are people actually doing anything, and is this government actually doing anything, to live up to the expectation that people have that this is an environmentally friendly government?

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I, too, received a copy of the Premier's statement, but I believe I received an earlier version of it. The version that I received goes like this:

Promise to protect the Oak Ridges moraine from development: promise broken. Promise to cap hydro rates until 2006: promise broken. More money for health care, hire 8,000 nurses: promise broken. More money for schools, cap class sizes: promise broken. Stop P3 private hospitals: promise broken. Respecting democracy and MPPs: promise broken. Stopping the Adams mine: promise broken. Freezing and rolling back auto insurance rates: promise broken. Two cents of the gas tax to cities and municipalities: promise broken. Keeping hydro in public hands: promise broken. Ensure that autistic children receive the treatment they deserve: promise broken. Reduce the tolls at Highway 407: promise broken. Public inquiry into tainted meat: promise broken.

Then there were some lines that were scribbled out, and I think I should refer to those too: "Introduce legislation to control urban sprawl," but then it has, in brackets, "with loopholes large enough you could drive a convoy of Mack trucks through."

Then it says, "A moratorium on school closures," but, in brackets, "Give them no new money so they can keep the school open."

Then it says, "Ban government partisan advertising," but there's a bracket that says, "There's no penalty in the legislation," so if the government does it, there's no penalty. There's another loophole that says, "But if it's broadcast from Buffalo or Detroit," or one of those places, you can see the new Premier saying very much the same things that Mike Harris used to say on those television channels.

Then there's another one: "The Provincial Auditor will get much more responsibility," but no staff or money to do the job with.

Then there's: "Introduce the law to require ministers to consistently attend question period," with a loophole so large that the legislation is completely useless.

Then there's this reference to keeping hydro in public hands, but what we see is a continuation of the Conservative deregulation and privatization of hydro, which is the real disaster.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Stop the clock for a minute, please.

OK, go ahead now, member from Kenora-Rainy River.

Mr Hampton: Then we heard from the colleges and universities, which said, "Now the tuition fees are frozen, but the government isn't giving us any additional money. What do we do?"

Then there is the note on P3 hospitals, which says, "If you take the words 'lease-purchase,'" which are in the Conservative definition of P3 hospitals, "and you stroke them out and you substitute 'mortgage,' in the Liberal dictionary that means it's no longer a P3 hospital."

The media are already starting to tune in on this. The media is starting to refer to the Fiberal Premier, the Pinocchio Premier and the broken promise Premier.

The Speaker: The member for Kenora-Rainy River knows he has mentioned unparliamentary words. Would you mind withdrawing them.

Mr Hampton: I withdraw.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I just want to quickly comment on the so-called source protection introduced today. I don't have time to point out all the holes, but the big one is that there's no moratorium on taking water out of the Adams mine. That's still allowed in this legislation. It does not apply to water taken from pits and quarries. That means 26 million litres a day could be drained from the mine for a year, and then 8.6 million a day for the following years. You know what happens if you don't stop that permit? You won't be able to adequately test the water in the mine to see if putting garbage there would be safe or not. We were expecting a moratorium and that permit to be pulled today. What happened?

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ORAL QUESTIONS

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the Premier: Would you please itemize exactly all the actions your government has taken to date to get rid of \$2 billion worth of a deficit for this year, which you said you could easily do in your campaign document?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I would be pleased to respond to the Leader of the Opposition and outline some of the measures we've taken in Bill 2 and others. I'm disappointed to report once again that we did not gain the support of the Leader of the Opposition or the members of his party when we took that aggressive step so early on. As a result of our legislated tax actions, in this particular year we're generating \$882 million in savings; in 2004-05, \$3.2 billion in savings; and in 2005-06, \$3.831 billion in additional savings. We have moved quickly; we have moved aggressively. My only dis-

appointment is that we did not have the support of the members opposite.

Mr Eves: We're not talking about 2004-05. You said several times during the course of the provincial election campaign, you have said it since then and you said it in your campaign document printed many months ago, that in this fiscal year you could deal with a \$2-billion deficit and still have \$1 billion left over. You said as recently as September 20 on Global's Focus Ontario, "We've got a fully costed four-year plan. It's independently verified and certified. The commitment that I have made is that upon forming the government, we will establish an action plan complete with start date and end date."

When are you going to deliver on the \$2 billion in this fiscal year, as you've said for many months now you could do, and reduce the deficit by \$2 billion?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me reassure the Leader of the Opposition and the people of Ontario that we will not bring the approach to this fiscal challenge that the members opposite brought when they formed the government. They cut without a plan; they spent without a plan. We've now been left with the worst of both worlds. We have a fiscal deficit of some \$5.6 billion, with another \$2 billion in additional risks, and beyond that we suffer from a public service deficit. Student achievement is not where it should be, health care waiting times are far too long, and we're having a record number of smog days in this province. They have left us with the worst of both worlds: a fiscal deficit and a service deficit. We will not bring that approach to dealing with the deficit they've left the people of Ontario.

Mr Eves: "Ontarians don't need more talk. They know what Dalton McGuinty promised—better health care, better schools, a cleaner, safer environment and stronger, healthier communities. He pledged to lead them to his promised land. Now is the time for him to lead, not to take another opinion poll. Ontarians elected this government to solve problems, to improve public services and programs—not to waste time."

Not my words, Mr Premier; your favourite newspaper, the Toronto Star's words in their editorial today. They are saying that Ontario needs action, not talk. That is exactly what the people of this province need today. Quite frankly, the statement by the Minister of Finance yesterday was nothing but platitudes and words. There are no specific, concrete actions that your government is taking. What actions are you taking to deliver on the commitments you made during the provincial election campaign?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me take the opportunity to remind the Leader of the Opposition and the members of his party of some of the additional measure we've taken beyond Bill 2 itself.

We have in place a government-wide hiring freeze. We've placed restraints on discretionary spending. We've eliminated partisan, self-promotional government advertising. We've reduced wasteful spending on highly paid consultants. We've provide the Provincial Auditor

with additional powers to audit our hospitals, our schools, our universities and the like.

We are moving aggressively, but I will not do what the Leader of the Opposition is telling us to do between the lines. We will not fire water inspectors. We will not fire meat inspectors. We will not compromise the quality of life and the quality of services to which the people of this province are entitled.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the Premier: Over the last two weeks, on about 20 different occasions, I've asked you a very specific question, and you have on each occasion refused to give an answer.

As our leader indicated, even the Toronto Star—historic occasion today in their editorial—is challenging you to get to work. Will you today stand up in your place and, in front of everyone in this House and the people of Ontario, ask your Minister of Finance to get to work, as even the Toronto Star is challenging you to do, and do something? Do what you were elected to do, show some leadership, because, as the Star indicated, “Just imagine the outcome of the election if McGuinty and the Liberals had campaigned on that uninspiring theme” of doing nothing.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Finance is anxious to speak to this.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I've heard this question from the member from Oak Ridges over and over again. I don't know where he's been, but in the 56 days that this government has been in office, we have made tremendous strides in a whole host of areas, some of which the Premier outlined earlier.

I want to just put it to my friend from Oak Ridges that I understand so well why he and his party want to downplay the size of the financial circumstances we inherited, because in effect his fingerprints, the fingerprints of the Leader of the Opposition as well, who was finance minister for six years and Premier for a year and a half, are all over the mess that we inherited.

In a period of 56 days, we are setting this province on a new course, and I want to tell him that he should just stay tuned and stand by, because for us better schools, better health care and a cleaner environment are what we are going to achieve. Just stick with us, my friend.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?
Interjections.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): It was my privilege to make the largest single payment, \$3 billion, against the public debt, that's right.

I listened carefully to the statement yesterday from the Minister of Finance, the economic outlook and fiscal review. He'll see the numbers on page 39: the economic growth predicted by the Ministry of Finance and by the minister—this is real GDP, not nominal—3.1% in 2004, 3.6% in 2005 and 3.3% in 2006. When you look at the spending projections this year, \$68.5 billion in round numbers—I'm sorry, that's actual for last year, but the

current fiscal year is \$75.153 billion. That's an increase in spending of almost 10%. They are anticipating spending money over the next several months—the people of Ontario, the families of Ontario, don't have the luxury of increasing their spending 10% a year.

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I say to the minister, what steps have you taken to control spending by all of these folks here in their ministries so that you can keep spending less than a 10% increase?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I want to thank the member for Whitby-Ajax for making the case for me. He talks about spending this year of \$75 billion. That is significantly higher than the former finance minister brought in, because after the budget was introduced in March in that auto parts place, that government increased spending by almost \$1 billion—pre-election spending in order to get elected. In addition to that, their hydro cap cost this province \$1 billion and we're coming to grips with that, but let us not hear the member for Whitby-Ajax saying, “Why is it in the last three months of the fiscal year, we haven't eliminated all of the mistakes that they made?” I just say to him, it will take us—indulge us—just slightly longer, but we'll get there.

Mr Flaherty: The people of Ontario will look at the spending done by this government over the course of the next several months and we'll keep a close eye on your spending as you come back in the new fiscal year.

But let's look at the big numbers. According to your own document yesterday, on the basis of the private sector consensus economic projections, Ontario can anticipate average revenue growth of about \$4.1 billion annually. Now, minister, are you telling the people of Ontario that annually going forward, you will be unable to balance the books of this province with an annual increase of \$4.1 billion?

Sometimes you can't be Santa Claus. Sometimes you've got to be a bit of a Grinch with these ministers here, but surely you can balance the budget with an annual increase of \$4.1 billion.

Hon Mr Sorbara: This is from a member of this Parliament who was part of a government which increased spending over the past three years by \$10 billion. Now, I want you to keep that number in mind because their real target was a very different target indeed. Their mantra, what drove them, what was more important than everything else, was their tax cuts over the past eight years. They destroyed the revenue base of this province, but then, having done that, could not resist pumping the expenditures in the past two years to give us the structural deficit that we inherited and now have to cope with. Well, I'll tell my friend from Whitby-Ajax, we will not take any economic lessons from you because your pattern has almost destroyed the financial basis of this province. That's why you were defeated on October 2.

FISCAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier, but I'll give the Minister of

Finance some advice: If he acknowledges those tax cuts were too steep, then take some of the money back.

Premier, in October Erik Peters issued his review, and he said that Ontario risks a \$5.6-billion deficit. In making his calculation, he calculated that revenues for the year would be \$67.2 billion. Yesterday, in the Minister of Finance's economic outlook, he said that revenues have dramatically improved. He said they've improved by \$2.3 billion. They're now up to \$69.5 billion. If revenues have improved by \$2.3 billion, how is it that you still claim to have a \$5.6-billion deficit?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Chair of Management Board is very anxious to speak to this.

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I think the leader of the NDP needs a briefing on the changes that the auditor has instructed for the reporting of the finances. You've got to get yourself the annual report that was published just a few weeks ago. You will find that that is the statement of the fiscal situation.

The auditor now has ordered the Ontario electrical financing authority to put their revenue and expenses in the province. That accounts for over \$2 billion, and that explains your problem. I suggest that before you ask many more questions, you get a briefing on the financial situation from the Provincial Auditor, so you can understand why there is \$2 billion more of revenue in this year's and last year's statements.

Mr Hampton: I want to thank the Chair of Management Board, who said to the government last spring, before they made all the promises, there was going to be a \$5-billion deficit.

I happened to read what the auditor said, and what you've done is bring in the debt interest on the stranded debt for hydro. But what you don't acknowledge in this is that as a result of raising hydro rates from 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour to 5.5 cents a kilowatt hour, there's going to be significantly more revenue. In fact, those debt interest costs will very quickly be paid.

My question is simply this: It's very clear that the \$5.6-billion deficit that Erik Peters was referring to—you now have more revenue, yet you still want to claim a deficit so you can avoid keeping your election promises. Why don't you forget the accounting hocus-pocus and admit you never intended to keep those election promises and you're trying very hard now to manufacture a deficit so you can use that as an excuse not to keep the election promises?

Hon Mr Phillips: I think the people of Ontario expect a reasoned debate on these matters. I would just say that you really have to get hold of this. This is the annual report. It's perhaps the most important document that the auditor publishes. In it he spells out, leader of the NDP, why the Ontario electrical financing authority's revenue and expenditures are now part of our financial statements. I would just say we now find \$2.1 billion of revenue and \$2.8 billion of expenditures.

Before we have an informed debate, it is important for all members to take the time to read the financial

statements and realize there's been a fundamental change in the way the finances are reported, as ordered by the Provincial Auditor, and that took place about four weeks ago. I would just urge all members, and particularly the leader of the third party, to get up to date on that. That explains the significant increase in revenue and part—

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: To the Premier: I want the Premier to acknowledge that after you've raised hydro rates from 4.3 cents to 5.5 cents, and raised transmission rates, you're in fact going to get an amount of new revenue that will more than take care of those debt interest costs. The only reason those debt interest costs were dragged into the financial statement now was so you could continue to go around and say, "Oh, we've got a \$5.6-billion deficit and we can't afford to keep our promises"—promises like you were going to stop development on the Oak Ridges moraine, promises like you were going to provide municipalities with two cents a litre of the gas tax, promises like you were going to hire 8,000 new nurses. Admit it, Premier: What you've done is cook the books so you've got an excuse not to fulfill your promises.

Hon Mr McGuinty: He's got it all wrong. I just couldn't be any more simple and straightforward than that. He's got it all wrong. We don't have to do anything when it comes to making the case about the state of the accounts of this province. The party opposite, the former government, did as much damage as any government could possibly do with respect to destroying confidence in the public accounts.

What we are doing is giving the people of Ontario the straight goods and we're going to bring a decidedly different approach to dealing with this matter. The former government artificially depressed demand for a number of years and then they took their foot off at the end. They put all kinds of money out there, and now we've been left with the worst of both worlds. We've got a fiscal deficit and we've got a public services deficit. We're going to bring a new approach to dealing with this. That's what the people of Ontario elected us to do, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

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Mr Hampton: Once again the Premier tries to avoid answering the question. If you had brought Hydro's debt interest costs into your budget in March next year, I'd have said fine. But I'd have also insisted that you show the effect of the hydro rate cap, and that would have cancelled out those debt interest costs. That's why you're bringing it in now and not then. You're bringing it in now because your argument that you've got a \$5.6-billion deficit doesn't hold water. You needed to find \$2 billion in added costs in a hurry so that you could continue to go out there and use this excuse. If you had waited until March, you would have had to have shown not just the debt interest costs but the new revenues from hydro rate increases.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Hampton: Admit it. You never intended to cap school class sizes. You never intended to turn over the

two cents a litre of gas tax. You never intended to provide help for autistic children. What you're doing is cooking the books, just as the Conservatives cooked the books to avoid keeping promises that you should be keeping right now. Admit it, Premier.

Hon Mr McGuinty: On the matter of hydro rates, the leader of the NDP knows full well that those new revenues don't begin to be generated until April 1, which is the next fiscal year. If he doesn't know that, he should surely understand that.

Secondly, you would think that if he were truly committed to ensuring that we tackle this deficit and have additional revenues that we could invest in better quality public services, this leader and this party would have supported Bill 2; and, in particular, a leader and a party that pretend to be there on behalf of public schools would surely have supported Bill 2, which says we're not going to put money into private schools and instead we're going to make that money available for public schools in Ontario.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the Premier. Ontario taxpayers and the international bond-rating agencies are still reeling from yesterday's admission that you're breaking yet another promise. Look at the headlines in the morning papers today: "Sorbara Delays Action on Deficit." "Liberals Hint at Deficit Until 2006-07." "Deficit 'a Long-Term Problem.'" "

Before the election, you promised Ontario taxpayers that you could and you would balance the budget. Stop the charade, stop the blame game. Stand in your place and recommit you and your government to a balanced budget next year. Would you do that, Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Minister of Finance, Speaker.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I read with interest much of the commentary. I want to point out to my friend that our commitment to balance the budget next year is as strong as ever. What is interesting and challenging for us is how much more difficult it will be because of your drunken spending in the last eight months of your mandate and because of the extent to which over the course of eight years—

Interjection.

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

Hon Mr Sorbara: Let us change the word "drunken" to "excessive."

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Just withdraw.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Our work is more challenging because of the extent—

The Speaker: Minister of Finance, I didn't hear—

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'm sorry. I thought I did say, "I withdraw."

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Are we ready now?

Our work is more challenging because of the extent and the excessiveness of your government spending, particularly over the last 18 months you were in office. That does not change our commitment to get us where we have to go, and that is to a sound financial balance sheet in this province. That's where we're going.

Mr Baird: The minister will forgive me for reading his document yesterday, which presents a number of scenarios that they want to consult on, and he doesn't want to prejudge that consultation.

Let's look at what the Toronto Star, the largest newspaper in Ontario, says: "Just imagine the election outcome if McGuinty and the Liberals had campaigned with this uninspiring theme." It says there is a "sorrowful chorus of violins." It says, "Ontarians didn't agree with all Mike Harris did, but they liked that he followed through on promises." He didn't make excuses. It goes on to say, "Ontarians don't need more talk," they need a Premier to do what he promised.

Will you stand in your place and admit that leadership starts at the top? Before we undergo this charade of public consultations, will you commit yourself and your government to a balanced budget? Will you do that, Minister?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'll tell my friend from Nepean-Carleton that the leadership in Ontario now is not going to replicate the leadership of the previous government. Your mantra for eight years was, "Cut taxes at any cost." Our mantra is very different: to improve the quality of public services.

The work we've been left to do is challenging. It may not be sexy and it may not be what you want in terms of where we're going. But I'll tell you, my friend, that the work we have to do will lead us to balanced budgets, will lead us to financial responsibility and, most important of all, will lead us to better schools, cleaner air and a better health care system. That's where we're going.

QUINTE HEALTH CARE CORP

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Last February, Quinte Health Care Corp received funding for the construction of a new wing at Bellwood general hospital. Our community has worked very hard to fundraise the local portion of it, and site preparation has in fact begun. I'd ask if you can confirm for the residents of Prince Edward-Hastings that your ministry continues to support this project?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm very pleased to take the question from the honourable member, who works so hard on behalf of his constituents. On this matter, I'm pleased to inform all members of the House, and especially the constituents in the member's area, that we remain committed. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the government of Ontario remain committed to the project underway in Belleville. I would just ask that

member the same thing I asked of the member from Peterborough last week on a similar question: One of the challenges we face in Ontario is cost escalation on these projects, and I encourage him, as the local member, to make sure he takes a keen interest and plays a continuing role to try to do all that can be done to make sure these projects move forward within the budgets that have been allocated.

Mr Parsons: Minister, as you're aware, Quinte Health Care Corp was formed some five years ago by the amalgamation of the hospitals in Picton, Belleville, Trenton and Bancroft—hospitals a hundred kilometres apart. As with any new organization, Quinte Health Care has achieved a great number of successes and encountered some challenges. Some time ago, the Prince Edward county council requested a meeting with the former Minister of Health. That never happened. I would therefore ask if you would meet with representatives from Prince Edward county council to discuss local health care issues.

Hon Mr Smitherman: This unique alliance of hospitals stretches over a very broad area. I've had opportunities to speak to both the member from Prince Edward and the member from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington about the challenges of health care. I'd be very happy, as soon as time permits—I would think in the first quarter of the new year—to have an opportunity to meet with the local representatives to discuss what we can do to make sure small communities like Picton, as an example, have the health care they need to support that community, both the local residents who are there all the time and the many thousands of people who enjoy vacationing in that area, particularly during the summer season. It would be my delight to meet with them.

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HIGHWAY 69

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I know that as an opposition member you advocated for the quick completion of the four-laning of Highway 69 from Sudbury to Parry Sound. What is your government's timeline for the completion of this important project?

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): I want to thank the member for the question. It's a very important question, it's a very timely question and it's a question I'm very proud to answer.

I want to say that our government, in its first two weeks, took more action to ensure there would be the completion of Highway 69 than the previous government did in its eight years. I want to commend our Minister of Transportation for actively working with the federal Minister of Transport to sign the SHIP agreement so we can get 50-cent dollars to ensure this project moves ahead in an expeditious time fashion. What we won't hear from our Premier and our government are commitments we're not prepared to live up to, as you did.

Mr Miller: The question was fairly specific. It was about the timeline. The SHIP agreement was signed for the section of Highway 69 south of Parry Sound that the past Premier, Premier Eves, had signed. May I remind the minister that a few short months ago you were demanding a timeline and you demanded to know the money allocated to this project. I'd like quote from your own home newspaper, The Sudbury Star: "Bartolucci's Crash 69 committee demanded the four-laning of Highway 69 south as soon as possible. The Tories promised to do it in 10 years; Bartolucci countered that wasn't good enough and demanded to see money allocated to it immediately and to see an actual timeline for the highway's completion."

How much money is allocated to the completion of the four-laning of Highway 69 from Sudbury to Parry Sound and when will the job be complete?

Hon Mr Bartolucci: I wish he would have read the whole article because in that article they might have referred to the fact that government, the Premier who is coming in right now, went to Sudbury in November 2001 and said, "I will commit \$100 million in the next project specifically for Highway 69." The budget? It wasn't there. That Premier suggested back in 2001 that he would start the active construction from Sudbury in 2002. It didn't happen. The reality is our Premier committed—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. He was just about to answer the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: It doesn't mean that when I sit down you start your noise. It means that I want order, and to allow the minister to complete his answer.

Hon Mr Bartolucci: The reality is that our Premier and our government will not commit to false promises. We will commit to action. We will ensure that it will be completed. We will inform the people that in fact the timeline will be a realistic timeline. We will not deceive the public.

LABOUR RELATIONS

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): My question is to the Minister of Labour. For too long now, the approach to labour relations in Ontario has been confrontational and unbalanced. The approach of the former government led to widespread and visible labour unrest. Our labour climate undermined business confidence and hurt working people and employers in Sault Ste Marie and across this province. It's time for a positive approach to labour relations. Minister, when are you going to move forward with a new approach to labour issues and can you outline our government's plan?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): I'd like to thank the honourable member from Sault Ste Marie for the question. It is a very important question. It is time for a different approach to labour relations in this province, and it has already started with the election of this government.

For the past 13 years, we've seen labour relations in this province swing from one philosophical extreme to the other, depending on the nature of the party in power. That is not good for the working people of this province, it's not good for businesses in this province and it's not good for the people of Ontario.

We are changing that approach. We are pursuing a fair and balanced approach to labour relations, and the policies we'll bring forward will be policies designed to implement a fair, balanced, positive approach to labour relations.

Mr Oraziotti: Minister, we do need a new approach to labour relations in the province. Strikes and disharmony have cost our economy far too much. How will we turn words into action? We must find ways to move ahead now. What have you done to bring in a new approach to labour relations?

Hon Mr Bentley: Once again, thank you very much.

You're right to demand immediate action, and we have already taken action on the labour relations front.

First of all, for those earning minimum wage in this province who had not received an increase for almost nine years, an increase is coming forward on February 1, 2004—the first time in nine years the minimum wage is being increased.

Second, we have already announced in the speech from the throne that we will be moving to end the 60-hour work week. We will be bringing forward legislation very soon to do just that.

Third, the approach to labour relations itself is entirely different because we're finally listening, not simply to just one side or just to the other; we're listening to both labour and employers and all the people of Ontario to design a made-in-Ontario approach to labour relations.

Finally, health and safety has finally assumed the priority it deserves in this province. It is our number one priority, and we'll be moving on that front very soon.

MUNICIPAL TRANSIT FUNDING

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is for the Premier. One of your key election promises was of not raising taxes. It seems very hollow indeed when people who ride the TTC in Toronto are going to have their rates go up by \$150 a year, starting in January. You promised two cents of the gas tax and that those two cents would start to flow to municipalities starting this year. Now the TTC chair says, "You have stolen Christmas from the TTC." My question, Mr Premier: Do these promises mean nothing to you, or are you content simply to play Grinch?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the question and the seasonal references, but I think the people of Ontario are entitled to the facts on this matter. Here are the facts: I know there's been a lot of speculation, and that's all it has been. We have always said that the gas tax transfer would be phased in. We've always said the municipalities would have to wait until the first budget before

any money would flow. That budget has yet to be written.

Mr Prue: To the Premier again: We now know you will do nothing, at least for the foreseeable future, on this two-cent gas tax. We know this will cost every village, every town, every city with a transit system money which they were promised and on which many of them are relying. We know this means \$150 per person to transit riders in Toronto, those same people who often cannot afford to drive a car and who are doing wonderful things for our environment by taking the TTC. We know it's going to cost them \$150, or some might put it at \$500 for a family with a wife and two children.

My question is: If you won't keep your promises to the city and to transit riders, will you at least offer the TTC a one-time bailout of \$50 million so that fares can be kept at their current levels?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be able to provide assistance to our municipalities, effective immediately. The fact of the matter is, to do so would be irresponsible, given our financial circumstances as we have found them to be.

I can tell you this: I took a great deal of pleasure in inviting the new mayor of Toronto, Mayor Miller, into my office. I don't think any Premier in the former government ever sat down with the mayor of Toronto. We are reaching out to that mayor and other mayors representing other communities from across the province. We are determined to work together. While we each have our own share of fiscal challenges, we are bringing something to the table that's been missing for a long time: a lot of goodwill. On top of that, the federal government is also expressing a genuine interest in putting our cities on a sustainable footing. So we look forward to moving together with our cities and the federal government to strike a new partnership and ensure all of our cities and communities are on a sustainable footing.

1520

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Premier and it concerns double-hatter firefighters. Double-hatter firefighters typically work as full-time professional firefighters in the city and serve as volunteer firefighters in their home communities, small towns nearby. In some cases, I'm told that these firefighters are being pressured by their union leadership to quit as volunteers or face charges by a union tribunal. If they are convicted of volunteering by their union, they are at risk of being expelled from the union and losing their full-time jobs.

A few days ago, I received a letter from Fire Chief Tim Bond of the Kemptville fire department, who says he lost a volunteer firefighter due to pressure from the union, and he fears the loss of more firefighters if nothing is done to protect them. Is the Premier aware of this problem in eastern Ontario and, if so, what will he do to

protect the rights of firefighters to volunteer where they live and on their own free time?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I thank the member for his question. I know he has a very sincere interest in this issue. As he knows, municipalities are responsible for the provision of fire protection services and are required to maintain adequate and effective fire departments. We believe that volunteer firefighters are vital to the provision of fire services in many Ontario communities.

I am aware, as the member was asking, that several two-hatter fighters are being asked by their associations to resign from their volunteer positions. The ministry is committed to working with all of the stakeholders to find a fair and acceptable solution to this issue. The ministry will seek a mediated settlement. If a mediated settlement is not possible, we may need to look at putting a regulation in place.

Mr Arnott: I thank the Premier for that answer. In 2002, the problem was raised with me, and I addressed it by introducing Bill 30, the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act. All of the major stakeholder groups, save and except the union leadership, supported my bill and the need to protect the employment rights of double-hatters. In spite of the fact that two thirds of the government caucus supported Bill 30 at third reading in a free vote one year ago, the Liberal caucus was officially opposed to the bill and it was defeated.

After the debate on Bill 30, the former government commissioned the Honourable George Adams, a highly respected and retired judge, to bring the stakeholders together for discussions and make recommendations. The Adams report recommended that the provincial government should take legal steps to protect double-hatters in certain communities and circumstances. Despite that report, the union president, Fred LeBlanc, recently told the Guelph Mercury that volunteer firefighters should be replaced by full-time professionals in communities across Ontario.

It appears that the effort to phase out volunteers is being ramped up under this government because the union believes the Liberals will turn a blind eye to this problem. Is the Premier prepared to take the legal steps outlined in the Adams report to protect these volunteer firefighters and, if not, how many more volunteer firefighters is the Premier prepared to lose on his watch because of union pressure tactics?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I say again to the member opposite that the ministry is genuinely committed to working with all the stakeholders involved to find a fair solution to this matter. We're going to seek a mediated settlement.

On top of that, it's also our understanding that the fire marshal has directed fire departments to do a couple of things: first of all, determine the number of career firefighters who are withdrawing their services as part-time or volunteer firefighters and, secondly, to assess the potential impact on fire protection services at the provincial or local level. I expect the fire marshal will

report back to the minister on the information he receives from the fire services. In the meantime, the fire marshal continues to monitor the situation and the ministry itself remains committed to ensuring we can find a mediated settlement.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): The question is for the Minister of Transportation. During the last election, we promised to the people of Ontario that the Highway 407 toll would be brought back to the rate stated by the Tories in 1999, that is 2% plus inflation since 1999 would be about 15%. Yet, we know that it is over 200% in some cases. Will you implement a policy so that the good people of Thornhill, Concord and Ontario will stop being ripped off by the toll rates?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member for Thornhill. I know he has a keen interest in this question. Let me start by saying that this is a bad contract. It's not in the interests of drivers and it's not in the interests of taxpayers. I want to assure the member and the people of Ontario that we are moving ahead by thoroughly reviewing this contract. We are going to look at all the options that will be presented to us and then move ahead in a fiscally responsible manner in the best interests of the public.

Mr Racco: In 1999, the Tories told the people of Thornhill that the province would have the ability to claw back toll revenues and impose financial penalties in some cases. In your opinion, can the financial penalties that the Tories promised be imposed, and what steps has your ministry taken to deal with the public transportation mess in the greater Toronto area that the Tories left us with?

Hon Mr Takhar: That's exactly what we are trying to find out. As I said earlier, our lawyers are looking at each and every clause of this contract. As soon as we can, we will move ahead in a fiscally responsible manner and will take all the appropriate actions to protect the public and the interests of the taxpayers.

AGRICULTURAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Last week in this House, you announced that you signed the implementation agreement for the agriculture policy framework. As you and I both know, and I expect most members of this House know, there was a great concern by our agriculture community of what was in that agreement. The only reason they were somewhat supportive of having it signed was because of the challenges that the federal government put forward and said, "If you don't sign, you will not get any of the transitional payments," which they were waiting for and were to have received already.

Some of the changes made were very important to them. Now they understand—I was at a meeting last

week—that they got a lot of warm hugs but absolutely no commitment to make any of those changes. In fact, what you signed was the original agreement with an understanding that both parties, one who has since resigned, were willing to discuss the changes that Ontarians want. Would tell us whether the negative option provision that the farmers wanted could be, or is presently, in the agreement, or is it going to be negotiated that we can get it in the agreement?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): We made substantial progress with this agreement. We advanced it much further than the previous government had. We worked very closely with agriculture commodity council. We were able to negotiate a one-year review with this agreement. We were able to negotiate into this agreement the area of negative margins. We were able to negotiate into this agreement a lower producer deposit. We were able to negotiate a commitment to continue on with the companion programs for another three years. During that three-year time period, we will have an opportunity for review. And that's what the former minister is getting at. He's looking for that commitment. We are committed to continuing on with the companion programs. We are committed to the transition funding that was proposed in this. This is a good deal for Ontario farmers.

Mr Hardeman: I appreciate the fact that there is opportunity for further negotiations but no further commitments for the farmers in the province. Particularly with the change on the other side of table, it's going to be very difficult to suggest that the farmers will receive the changes they need.

But I do want to thank the minister. He attended a meeting in Tillsonburg the other night with 1,700 tobacco growers to talk about the Liberal taxation policy on tobacco and what it would do to the industry. The minister defended the tax increases and promised transitional money for the tobacco farmers. Is the transitional program that you said the provincial Liberals were going to provide a part of the agriculture framework, and will that automatically include the 60-cent federal dollars in that program, or will it not be able to be added to the agriculture policy framework?

1530

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I'm not sure the question is fully in order, but I'm very pleased to answer it. We were very clear when we campaigned in the election, and I was pleased to stand before 1,700 tobacco farmers and give them the straight goods. It may not have been a message they wanted to hear, but this is a message we campaigned on. We were very clear when we campaigned: We talked about a \$10 increase on a carton of cigarettes.

Unlike the previous government, we were prepared to come to the table and be straight-up with tobacco farmers. We said, "We are prepared to create a \$50-million transition fund." That transition fund, which has been created, is something we can take to the table. Right now, there's the federal round table. Negotiations are

taking place between the federal and provincial governments. The \$50-million transition fund that we allocated, which is not part of the APF, is dollars that are coming from tobacco tax revenues. Those dollars are going to help us work with the farmers those five tobacco-growing regions to make sure there's a smooth transition not only for growers but for communities as well.

FOUR COUNTIES HOSPITAL

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Many of my constituents are concerned about the future of Four Counties hospital. It's a rural hospital in the village of Newbury, which is halfway between London and Chatham. In 1999, Four Counties entered into a partnership agreement with Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital to form the Middlesex Hospital Alliance. Since that time, the two hospitals have worked very hard to create the kind of partnership that is a model for the health care system.

Unfortunately, changes in governance and the types of services that are available at Four Counties have become a contentious issue. In August 2002, the local hospital board resigned and was replaced by a ministry-appointed supervisor. In addition to that, the hospital has experienced a deficit of over one half million dollars this year.

The Speaker: Question.

Mrs Van Bommel: As a result, people are concerned that the ultimate goal of the Ministry of Health is to close Four Counties hospital. Can you confirm that there are no plans to close Four Counties and that this hospital will continue to serve its community?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to thank the member for the question, and note her extraordinary knowledge on this file. I want to alleviate any concerns that exist in the local community in Newbury with respect to the Four Counties hospital. The government of Ontario and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care remain committed to the delivery of health services at that hospital, and further committed to working with the member and the local hospital to make sure the alliance, which is an important part of improved health care delivery in southwestern Ontario, remains and is strengthened.

Mrs Van Bommel: I want thank you very much for your assurances that the hospital will not close and that the ties with Strathroy Middlesex hospital will not be severed.

One of the goals of the rural and northern health care framework is to link small rural hospitals with larger academic hospitals, such as London Health Sciences Centre, so we can provide more comprehensive care to all our rural residents. With Four Counties Health Services in mind, I ask for your commitment to ensure a sustainable process, so we can keep rural and northern hospitals open.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Shortly after being appointed Minister of Health, I had the opportunity to spend quite some time in southwestern Ontario. I was enormously impressed with the networks—informal and formal alliances—that have emerged there. I think they are a model for moving forward, in terms of delivering care in a way that makes sense. We believe that care needs to be provided when people need it and as close to home as possible, recognizing at the same time that some more sophisticated procedures are better provided in large volumes in big academic teaching centres, like the extraordinarily good work that goes on at London Health Sciences.

I commit to the member to continue to work, as I have with the Ontario Hospital Association and partners, alliances and clusters of hospitals, to ensure that we are providing the best quality of care in local communities and make sure that where more intensive treatment is required, it's provided in a timely and high-quality way. I believe southwestern Ontario and a lot of the good work that has been done there is a model for other parts of the province.

SUDBURY REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Yes, you, Mr Bartolucci. Minister, prior to the provincial election, you said, "Ernie Eves was morally bankrupt for not paying 85% of the construction costs for the new Sudbury Regional Hospital." When can we expect your announcement to increase the provincial share to 85% of the construction costs?

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): One might suggest that one's past can come to haunt him, but I do not apologize for advocating for quality health care in my community. I have been committed to quality health care in my community since I first ran in 1978 for municipal council. I was committed in 1990 to that quality health care, and in 1995 and 1999 and 2003. The only difference over all that time span is that finally we have a Premier and a government who are committed to quality health care, not only in Sudbury, not only in northern Ontario, but across Ontario. I'm proud of that.

Mr Bisson: Wow, what an answer. Minister, it was clear prior to the election: You said 85%. At this point, from what I hear of your answer, you are saying never. So come clean. Is this yet another broken election promise by the Minister of Northern Development and Mines to the people of northern Ontario?

Hon Mr Bartolucci: The reality is, this Premier and this government will not cut hospital beds, as the NDP government did—8,000, I believe, during their mandate.

Our government is committed to a northern Ontario medical school that will increase enrolment so that there will be physicians across northern Ontario, not like the previous NDP government, which cut spaces to health care, to medical school.

I am proud of what will happen over the course of our mandate, because our government is committed to quality health care. We ran on it and we will live up to those commitments.

LAKERIDGE HEALTH CORP PROJECT

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): My question is to the Minister of Health, but before I get to that I'd like to say that Christmas and the holidays is a time of family and caring and I would ask all members to reflect on that and wish you all the best of the season.

Minister, there have been a lot of hard-working individuals, such as Chuck Powers and Don Blight, in the riding who have been working very hard on the Lakeridge redevelopment in the cancer centre in Oshawa. Can you give us an update as to the winterizing process for that site?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm pleased to assist with respect to Lakeridge Health Corp and the proposed redevelopment for Cancer Care Ontario. We ran into some challenges there with respect to funding shortfalls and the like. My ministry officials are working with officials at the hospital in a fashion that should see progress made on the site soon. We anticipate being able to fulfill the schedule as has previously been discussed, and would offer a strong assurance to the people of his community that we're going to make sure that we work to deal with the challenges we're confronting, the additional challenges related to cost escalation, and that the project will receive the support that it needs, because the services are desperately required in that area.

Mr Ouellette: I know the construction process, as mentioned, is taking a considerable amount of time and many of the people working on this project want to make sure that the project is done right and correctly on behalf of the constituents of not only Oshawa, but those as far away as Peterborough and elsewhere. Minister, can you tell us when the construction process is expected to get on line and begin again?

1540

Hon Mr Smitherman: The information that I have is that ministry officials are meeting with Lakeridge Health on December 22. It's our expectation that, stemming from that meeting, we're going to be in a position to agree on exactly what the timetable to move forward is, expecting completion, I believe, in 2006. So I'd be happy to continue to keep the member apprised of how those discussions are going, and I would seek any further input that he has related to this important project.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question's for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Over the past few weeks, we've seen some of the horrifying effects of domestic violence, some of these effects even resulting in death. Ensuring the protection of victims of

violence is very important. Many children and families are suffering because their former government was soft on these crimes. I want to ask the minister what she is doing to support abused women and their children.

Hon Sandra Papatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): To the member opposite, I'm pleased to have the question, especially in light of recent events over the last several weeks. I think it's very tragic, and all of us in the House I know feel for the families that are affected, it seems every week, by issues of domestic violence.

I want to tell you that I'm proud of the Premier of Ontario, who has already visited a shelter and did that in the London area—the first time likely a Premier has done that for many years. It's important to note that our government is doing a review, not just within my ministry, but across all ministries, about the programs that we all have that involve issues around domestic violence.

My ministry spends some \$89 million funding 100 different shelters. Do we spend the right amount of money? Do we know we need more shelters for women, more beds? Do we know that it's a function of second-stage housing? These are the serious questions that we're asking, and we expect that we will have a really super report available to us at the beginning of the year.

Mr Milloy: Supplementary?

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

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think I speak on behalf of all members when we express our thanks and gratitude to the Clerk at this table and all the staff around the precinct as we prepare to wrap up this year—the pages who have been here we thanked earlier—and to express the season's best to all of the staff, employees and particularly the Clerk at the table at this time of year, and wish them and all of our staff around here the very best of the season.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I personally should say that too, because the Clerk and many of the support staff around here make it a little bit easier for me too, and I too want to express my appreciation for the wonderful work they have done.

VISITOR

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's a pleasure for me to introduce a young constituent of mine, Kristopher Knowles. He's here, and he's an inspiration to us all. He is going to do a cross-country walking tour to raise awareness for organ and tissue transplants. Kristopher is waiting for a liver transplant, and he's here with his family.

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): On a point of personal privilege, Mr Speaker: I would just like

to clarify a few facts. I heard the Minister of Northern Development talk today about my attending in Sudbury in November 2001 as the Premier making a commitment. Well, that would have been tough to do, seeing as how I wasn't the Premier in November 2001. I did attend to make a commitment with respect to Highway 69 in November 2002, with, I might add, the support of the then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to pay for 50% of the four-laning of Highway 69, which I believe in. I know that the member would heartily endorse that, as he would the construction of the regional hospital in Sudbury and Thunder Bay and the medical school.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish every member of the House the best of the season. Now that question period is over, perhaps we can actually show some of that respect and fellowship that we talk about so often.

PETITIONS

OTTAWA RIVER PROJECT

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): “To the Legislature of Ontario:

“We, the residents of Fitzroy Harbour and the surrounding areas, strongly object to the proposal by the Ottawa River Project Inc to truck large power yachts through the quiet residential streets of Fitzroy Harbour;

“The Ottawa River Project projects that the maximum traffic flow will be one large power yacht trucked through the village every 20 minutes every day during the summer. We believe that such traffic will adversely affect our quality of life, the safety of our children and property values;

“Although we support the concept of the opening of the Ottawa River to navigation, we demand that the proponent find a route for the Shaw dam bypass that does not disrupt residential neighbours.”

I have signed my name to that.

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the previous government spent excessive amounts of taxpayers' money on partisan advertising for the supposed purpose of promoting their initiatives. This advertising took the form of direct mail flyers and pamphlets to individual homes and businesses, television commercials and radio advertisements costing the taxpayer close to half a billion dollars;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support legislation that will make this type of advertising illegal in the province of Ontario.”

I have affixed my signature to this.

I have two other petitions I wish to present. Do I do that now or do we do that one at a time?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I just want to give everybody a chance, so if you could do it another time.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario, and here to receive it for me is Janine Pryce, one of our excellent pages that we have this year.

“Whereas the superintendent of the Fiscal Services Commission of Ontario unilaterally and arbitrarily ruled to reduce physiotherapy fees for motor vehicle accident victims by 30% as of November 1, 2003; and

“Whereas the previous fees for these services were negotiated in good faith with the auto insurance industry in 1996 and with no increase over the last seven years; and

“Whereas the 30% fee reduction will make it impossible to provide the necessary quality of care to motor vehicle accident victims;

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

“To rescind the 30% reduction in physiotherapy fees for motor vehicle accident victims arbitrarily imposed by FISCO superintendent guideline number 0503 and collaborate with health care professionals to assess the objective evidence for the real reasons behind the increasing costs of auto insurance.”

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the previous Tory government in 1999 leased the 407 toll highway for 99 years to a multi-national conglomerate;

“Whereas the taxpayers of Thornhill, Concord and all of Ontario were misled into believing that the rate of usage would only increase by 2% a year plus inflation, when the costs have increased by over 200% in some rates;

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

“The residents of the Thornhill riding would like to ask the provincial government to take all necessary steps in order to reduce the rates at the lowest they were promised (2% a year, plus inflation) by the previous provincial government in 1999.”

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I have another petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas in 1997 to 2000, the previous Tory government reduced and ultimately eliminated funding

for public transportation, causing a public transportation crisis;

“Whereas last year, a study indicated a loss of \$2 billion incurred by the GTA because of traffic gridlock, as well as additional economic losses such as medical expenses and costs to the environment;

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

“The residents of Thornhill riding ask the provincial government to implement, as soon as possible, a new and viable GTA transportation system, whereby the residents of Thornhill, Concorde and the GTA can have better accessibility and accommodation.”

1550

AUTISM SERVICES

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

“Whereas our new Premier, Dalton McGuinty, and his Liberal government made a campaign commitment to expand funding for valued therapy for autistic children; and

“Whereas the families of autistic children continue to call upon the province to extend funding to children six years and older, who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) treatment; and

“Whereas the new Premier has admitted, ‘We simply don't have enough people right now with the skills to help those children under six, let alone those over the age of six’; and

“Whereas the Liberal Premier, Dalton McGuinty, described the current cut-off age as unfair and discriminatory;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to force the government to live up to its promise and extend funding to children six and older who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) treatment.”

I affix my signature because I support it.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin ... to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent, from practising the professions, trades and occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

“Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and

technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

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

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the other institutions and agencies of and within the government of Ontario, undertake specific and proactive measures to work with the bodies regulating access to Ontario's professions, trades and other occupations in order that newcomers to Canada gain fair, timely and cost-effective access to certification and other measures that facilitate the entry or re-entry of skilled workers and professionals trained outside Canada into the Canadian workforce."

I affix my signature on this petition.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I have a petition to deal with the deficit:

"Whereas former auditor Erik Peters, the Fraser Institute and the previous Ontario government have all projected a budgetary deficit by March 31, 2004, if no action is taken; and

"Whereas the Fraser Institute has recommended tax cuts and a reduction in unnecessary spending to deal with the projected deficit; and

"Whereas the federal Liberals have not come forward with their fair share of disaster relief for the SARS epidemic and the electrical blackout; and

"Whereas during the 2003 provincial election, Ontario Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty promised no deficit financing;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition provincial and federal Liberal governments to take the appropriate actions listed above to deal with the projected 2003-04 Ontario government deficit."

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I have a petition which reads as follows:

"Whereas the conservation authorities of Ontario play a vital role in maintaining the quality of life of Ontarians by ensuring the preservation of our natural environmental areas and protecting our water sources; and

"Whereas the funding of these conservation authorities has been cut severely in 1995 by the provincial government, impairing their ability to fulfill their mandate and increasing the pressure on them to sell their assets;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to re-establish the funding of the conservation authorities of Ontario to 1995 levels, plus 4% per year for each year thereafter."

AUTISM SERVICES

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

"Whereas our new Premier Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government made a campaign commitment to expand funding for valued therapy for autistic children; and

"Whereas the families of autistic children continue to call upon the province to extend funding to children six years and older who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) treatment; and

"Whereas the new Premier has admitted, 'We simply don't have enough people right now with the skills to help those children under six, let alone those over the age of six'; and

"Whereas the Liberal Premier, Dalton McGuinty, described the current cut-off age as unfair and discriminatory;

"I/we, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to force the government to live up to its promise and extend funding to children six and older who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention treatment."

I support the petition and affix my signature.

ATTENDANCE OF CABINET MINISTERS

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition here from my constituents. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I have affixed my signature to it, or I will shortly. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the previous government made a mockery of the historical parliamentary tradition of question period by setting new records for unacceptable absenteeism by cabinet ministers, thus making it difficult for the people of Ontario to hold them accountable for their performance as a government;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support legislation that will hold cabinet ministers accountable for missing most question periods without an acceptable reason."

I support this petition, and I affix my signature to it.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): This is titled, "We Reject Tobacco Tax Hikes.

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

"Whereas government measures threaten the existence of Ontario's tobacco growing industry; and

"Whereas the Dalton McGuinty government has now announced the first step in a series of tobacco tax increases;

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

"That the government of Ontario reject tobacco tax hikes, reject a smoke-free Ontario, reject the ban on tobacco displays, and provide compensation and support

for the continued existence of Ontario's tobacco growing communities.”

SOUND BARRIERS

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I have a petition from my riding, which I'll read.

“Whereas the route of the Conestoga Parkway is through the middle of the city of Kitchener, passing by many residential areas; and

“Whereas some do not have sound barriers erected in order to ensure that people living in those areas have reasonable enjoyment of property; and

“Whereas some do not have sound barriers erected, thus exposing residents to loud noise at all times of the day and night and preventing said residents from normal enjoyment of life and property;

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

“That a sound barrier be erected from the intersection of the Conestoga Parkway and Courtland Avenue to the intersection of the Conestoga Parkway and Trussler Road.”

I hope that the government will follow up on this as soon as possible.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed here by a great number of my constituents.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“Whereas history has proven that increases in tobacco taxes cause increases in the underground 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 transition of what remains a legal product;

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

“That the government of Ontario reject tobacco tax hikes, reject a smoke-free Ontario, reject the ban on tobacco displays, and protect the rights of consumers to purchase a legal, regulated product.”

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the people of Ontario understand the Liberal government pledged to repeal the equity in education tax credit; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario were not made aware that the above pledge made by the Liberal government was to become retroactive to January 2003;

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

“The people of Ontario are asking the government not to repeal the EETC retroactively, but instead to initiate the pledge as of July 2004. This will give the parents and/or guardians the proper amount of time and money to make the necessary arrangements for their children's education.”

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I have a petition here signed by a number of people—I'd say, about 50 people—from the community of Timmins. It reads as follows:

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

“Whereas as 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—“deducts 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;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the provincial government of Ontario stop the clawback of the national child tax benefit supplement and ensure this federal money reaches all low-income families.”

1600

WATERLOO-WELLINGTON TRANSPORTATION ACTION PLAN

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly and reads as follows:

“Whereas the residents of Waterloo-Wellington need and deserve excellent roads and highways for their safe travel; and

“Whereas good transportation links are vital to the strength of our local economy, supporting job creation through the efficient delivery of our products to the North American marketplace; and

“Whereas transit services are essential to managing the future growth of our urban communities and have a relatively minimal impact on our natural environment; and

“Whereas Waterloo-Wellington MPP Ted Arnott has asked all municipalities in Waterloo-Wellington to provide him with their top transportation priorities for the

next five years and beyond, all of them responded, and their recommendations form the Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan; and

“Whereas Transportation Minister Frank Klees responded quickly to MPP Ted Arnott’s request for a meeting with the councillors and staff of Waterloo-Wellington’s municipalities, and listened to their recommendations; and

“Whereas the Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan contains over 40 recommendations provided to MPP Ted Arnott by municipalities, and there is recurrent support for implementing the corridor study of Highway 7/8 between Kitchener and Stratford, a new four-lane Highway 7 from Kitchener to Guelph, assistance for Wellington county to rebuild Highway 24 from Guelph to Cambridge, a repaired and upgraded Highway 6 from Fergus to Mount Forest, Waterloo region’s light rail transit initiative, OSTAR funding for transportation-related projects, and other projects;

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

“That the provincial government support Ted Arnott’s Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan, and initiate the necessary studies and/or construction of the projects in it.”

It’s signed by a significant number of my constituents from the town of Minto.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE RATE STABILIZATION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA STABILISATION DES TAUX D’ASSURANCE-AUTOMOBILE

Mr Colle, on behalf of Mr Sorbara, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 5, An Act to temporarily freeze automobile insurance rates for private passenger vehicles and to provide for the review and regulation of risk classification systems and automobile insurance rates for private passenger vehicles / *Projet de loi 5, Loi visant à geler temporairement les taux d’assurance-automobile dans les cas des voitures de tourisme et à prévoir l’examen et la réglementation des systèmes de classement des risques et des taux d’assurance-automobile les concernant.*

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member for Eglinton-Lawrence has moved third reading of Bill 5. Mr Colle?

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): This is third reading of Bill 5, which had debate on second reading, in committee, and now we’re back. I think this complex topic of auto insurance requires as much explanation as possible. It is an immensely important issue because it affects over 8.3 million Ontarians. I’ve learned that more people pay for auto insurance than pay provincial income

tax in the province of Ontario, so it affects every pocketbook in every household in the province of Ontario. We’re not just talking about a small segment of the population; we’re talking about something that affects the economic well-being, the economy of this whole province. It is important that we take this issue seriously in a comprehensive way.

It’s an issue that is at the table of not only this Legislature, it’s also being dealt with in the Alberta Legislature, it’s being dealt with in New Brunswick, in Nova Scotia, almost in Quebec in fact. Quebec has a hybrid system of half public, half private. I’ve noticed just recently in the financial statement of the province of Quebec that they had \$300 million worth of losses for their insurance, which is, as I said, a hybrid of public and private. Some of the same pressures that are on auto insurance are seen in the United States of America, in the American states. So again, we have a multifaceted issue that cannot be corrected with one magic bullet solution.

This Bill 5 is an initial step to try to stabilize rates. It enables the superintendent of financial services under the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, a body very few people hear of. They deal with pension reform, insurance of all kinds, securities, so it’s a very important part the financial structure of this province, and it’s called FSCO. That is the critical part of Bill 5. If you look at sections 6 and 7, for the first time in the history of this province, we as the Ontario Legislature are trying to give the regulator of insurance more powers to, in essence, control the actions of the insurance companies. These powers have never been given to the regulator. Government has the role of regulating insurance. Even though insurance is essentially a private sector activity, which has literally tens of thousands of people working in it, we have the role as regulator. Through Bill 5, we’re trying to give more power to the regulator, the superintendent, in sections 6 or 7. That’s the heart of this bill.

In fact, the sections do say very explicitly that if anyone applying for approval through the Financial Services Commission of Ontario does not comply and is not forthcoming in the application, that individual or that company and its officers could be subject to a fine of up to \$200,000. It really puts teeth in the role and the powers of the regulator for the good of the eight-million-plus motorists in Ontario who have had many unprecedented increases in their premiums. I’m sure that in all our constituencies we’ve heard the examples of seniors who haven’t had an accident in 10 years, and all of a sudden their premium jumps from \$1,200 to \$3,000. We’ve heard of people who have to pay \$5,000 or \$6,000 for premiums who for years have been paying \$1,200.

This is the reality of what has happened, because auto insurance in this province is broken. It’s in a dysfunctional state. There’s no one person or group of people to blame in this. I think it’s really a combination of factors that have put auto insurance in a dysfunctional state, where the premiums are getting to be unaffordable and the public is getting to be very cynical and sceptical. They just can’t understand why premiums are going

through the roof. They can't understand what their policy is really giving them for their premium. They are, again, very anxious as they get their renewal notices.

What we've tried to do: On October 23, as part of Bill 5, again for the first time in the history of this province, Premier McGuinty issued a directive at the Ministry of Finance to institute a halt, a freeze, all new rate applications. In other words, the insurance companies have to file these rate applications in order to issue premium notices. On October 23, that was halted—no new filings as of October 23. This bill directs the superintendent to say that during this period he will not accept any filings but the filings have to be brought to him by January 23. We are expecting a reduction of 10%, on average, in those filings.

That is not easy to do, because the 10% has to come in co-operation with all the stakeholders in auto insurance, and it has to come from insurance companies primarily. There are over 100 insurance companies in Ontario, large and small. People always talk about the large companies, like Aviva or ING, but there are also the small farm mutual companies, which are not-for-profit. There are over 40 of them and there is even one company the NDP government of Saskatchewan owns: Coachman Insurance that operates out of St Catharines. So there's a vast spectrum of insurance companies. Overall, most of the insurance companies find themselves in a real financial tight spot, we'll call it, financial difficulties. They claim their costs are going up and their premiums aren't enough.

1610

One interesting thing in my research: As you know, I've been meeting with people all across Ontario, from all different walks of life, on insurance. I've also done some research in terms of seeing what they're doing in other jurisdictions. I was told to look at the California example. In California, there was Proposition 103, in which they essentially did some of the same things we're trying to do with Bill 5. Proposition 103 stabilized insurance rates in California to the point where there's been a 44% reduction in California's insurance rates. Once they were one of the highest in the States; today, as a result of intervention with Proposition 103, they have stabilized. There are some good things happening.

I want to refer to testimony—this is recent, October 22, 2003—by Douglas Heller, who is speaking on behalf of the Foundation for Taxpayer and Consumer Rights. He was appearing before the committee on commerce, science and transportation in Washington. What I noticed in his presentation, which was extremely detailed—he talked about how they made improvements in California, but I think the one interesting conclusion he made was that there seems to be a very obvious trend and cycle. The cycle is this: When the investment market for bonds changes and investment income on bonds in general decreases, there seem to be reciprocal crises in insurance. He's got tables and graphs that show that over the last 20 years whenever investment income from bonds—what insurance companies do when they get your premiums is

invest them in bonds primarily, about 80% are in bonds, but interest rates, returns, have been dramatically cut in the last four or five years. That is one of the underlying financial drivers in this insurance dysfunctionality. Insurance companies all over the world, especially in North America, have had a problem because their investment income has declined and their costs, on the other side, have increased.

That is not the only reason insurance costs have become dysfunctional or have gone out of whack for the ordinary person. The fact also is that health and rehabilitation costs—in other words, if you get hurt in an automobile accident, oddly enough you go into a private health care system that we have here in Ontario. You don't go to OHIP if you get hit in a car accident. You go into a private health care system and those costs have increased, as all health care costs have.

Also the tort costs, the legal costs of insurance claims have gone up. There are other factors too, which deal with what they call the tin and glass side; that is, when your car gets scratched or bumped, whatever may happen to your automobile, those costs have gone up because automobile repair costs are also getting to be very expensive. For instance, I know there is nobody here, but there are some people who drive around with very expensive luxury automobiles, and some of them have eight air bags. If your eight air bags deploy accidentally it probably costs about \$1,500 per air bag to repair. A scratch on a Jaguar is a lot more expensive than a scratch on an old 1965 Ford. There are all kinds of extra costs there, but automobile repair costs have actually been fairly reasonable.

Another factor I've learned about in my discussions in the committee hearings we've had is that there is an element of fraud, or what they call "opportunistic claimants." We had the chief legal counsel for the Toronto Transit Commission appear before the committee, and he gave a presentation where he pointed to an anecdotal example of what some people are doing, but this is not what's causing the dysfunctionality in auto insurance. I make that clear. There are many more complexities, but there is an element of opportunism there in auto insurance. These are people who try to take advantage of auto insurance for their own personal gain. They're in every aspect of life, but some of them seem to go into auto insurance. In fact, in Nova Scotia they call it the "auto lotto." Then it's referred to the superintendent of consumer advocacy in Nova Scotia.

Mr Brian Leck, the chief counsel, who deals with insurance scams at the TTC, mentioned that last year on a Sunday night there was the infamous insurance bus ride on Dawes Road in the city of Scarborough.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): City of East York.

Mr Colle: City of East York. Yes, right on the edge there.

On the Dawes Road bus on a Sunday night there were 95 people. There was an accident reported, where a rented U-Haul truck hit the rear bumper of a TTC bus,

and 45 of the 90 people on the bus claimed whiplash. The TTC got a tip from an anonymous source that said, "You'd better check into that. It was really a phony accident." They did some investigation and found out that, in essence, there was just a scratch on the rear bumper of the bus, and there were five ringleaders who paid 45 people 100 bucks each to jump on the bus and claim they had an accident. One of the ringleaders charged runs a rehabilitation clinic where you go for therapy and so forth. The others were in the business of recruiting people for accident claims. There have been seven people charged and they're still before the courts, but all the claims were denied. Again, this is not typical, but it's the type of thing that does happen in insurance, and ordinary people who pay good money for auto insurance are fed up with people who try and cheat the system.

There's always some tightening up to do on fraud, because insurance is like a pool. We all put our money into it, and when some people take out money that they really don't deserve, it hurts all of us. We're looking beyond Bill 5 to maybe do some consumer information about fraud, make policies more transparent and understandable. It's very evident that the only time we ever look at our little policies is when we have to make a claim. It sits there in some file at home. Nobody really looks at it when they sign it or when it gets renewed, but automobile policies are very complex. In fact most of us, I would dare say, don't even know the name of our insurance company. I'll ask the member from Thornhill if he knows the name of his insurance company. I'm sure he can't tell me, but he may. We know very little about the policy, how it works. So this government is committed to more consumer information. We're also committed to instituting an office of a consumer advocate for auto insurance. We think that has to be in place, because the consumer is sometimes victimized by the minority of people who are unscrupulous in insurance. The consumer deserves more protection and more information. There isn't enough of that. We think we can do more for that.

The other thing we hope to do is to give the consumer the ability to understand why he or she sees the dramatic increase in his policy. I was very intrigued by what Alberta is doing, and we're looking at that too, but not in this first step with Bill 5. Our second step could be what Alberta is doing. Alberta has a very simple system. They've just instituted it because Alberta has had the same problems we've had.

1620

In Alberta they have essentially a grid that gives you discounts if you have a good driving record or surcharges if you're convicted of an offence under their Highway Traffic Act. In other words, if you have a good driving record in Alberta—it doesn't matter if you're 25 years of age or 60 years of age—you get discounted on your premium, and it goes from zero down to a 65% discount on your premium. The opposite happens if you are a bad driver. Again, a bad driver is one who is convicted under

the Highway Traffic Act or commits some Criminal Code offence. They get a surcharge on their premium. So Alberta's system is a bit different.

Here in Ontario we hear people say, "I don't know on what they base the fact that I pay \$5,000. They say it's because I live in this postal code. I've never had an accident. Just because I'm 65 years old, why are they punishing me?" People just don't know what the rules are. We're hoping, as we get through more fundamental reforms in auto insurance, to start to make the policies more understandable and transparent. We also want to try to get more competition in the market, and that's critically important.

You can't do like we used to do in the 1960s and 1970s. We'd just phone up our local broker, and they would say, "Pay 500 bucks this year." We would sign the cheque, and that would be it. You can't do that any more, folks. You have to shop around. You have to get on the Internet. There are sites that give you comparative rates. I know the member from Beaches-East York will tell you that we had somebody from the consumers' association of Ontario tell us you can save up to 65% on your premium if you go to different insurance companies—65% savings if you shop around. You can't just go to one broker; you just can't go to the same old company. You have to look and ask and see if you can get a better deal.

It doesn't mean you're always going to get a dramatic saving, but insurance is now much different and we encourage everybody to go to different suppliers. There are even companies that sell directly to people, without agents and without brokers. There are savings there, if you want. As I said, the small farm mutual companies offer very good rates. So you must compare what's available for your own good.

The other thing we, as a government, hope to get into is the whole area of safe driving. There is a program now on national television, and also in some media, called Save Your Neck. What it's trying to tell people is that when you're driving your car, you have to have your headrest in the proper position; 85% of people do not have their headrests in the proper position. I mention that because one of the big cost drivers of higher premiums in this province is injuries to the neck. The headrest—and I'm sorry I'm going to do this, Mr Speaker—has to be level with the top of your head. If it isn't level with the top of your head, it's no good. You can't have the headrest down by your shoulders—Dr Qadri knows this. You have to have the headrest at the top of your head. The member from Willowdale and all these members probably don't know that. If we encourage people to use the headrest properly, we could save millions of dollars.

There's a lot of work to do. Bill 5 is the first step in trying to stabilize auto insurance for the good of the eight million motorists in this province who need to drive their cars. I hope you'll support this bill, and I'll share my time with other members here.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I move that we apportion the debate, to be completed by the government side by 4:45, by the

official opposition at 5:30 and by the third party at 5:50. I believe we have unanimous consent for that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Is there unanimous consent? OK.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): To my colleagues in the House, Speaker, and through you to the people of Ontario, I'd like first of all to commend the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, MPP for Eglinton-Lawrence Mr Mike Colle, for a very thorough and cogent presentation about an issue that is really of great importance and significance to all Ontarians. As Mr Colle quite rightly pointed out, it affects essentially every resident in Ontario, with 8.3 million confirmed registered drivers.

As the representative of the great riding of Etobicoke North, I was often confronted with horror stories by consumers, by my constituents, by the residents of that riding, Etobicoke North, having lived through increase after increase under the previous regime, the previous administration.

I'd like for a moment, Speaker, with your permission, to shed some light and make some comments on a number of the issues surrounding this particular bill, Bill 5, the Auto Insurance Rate Stabilization Act: first of all, some remarks on the speed with which our government acted upon this particular initiative, as well as some focus on the consumer protection that it will afford and some of the customization that we'll be able to bring to bear in this area, in this sector. To quote for a moment the Minister of Finance, "This is about acting responsibly to protect consumers. We're going to reduce out-of-control costs and make sure those savings are passed on to consumers in the form of lower rates."

As the member from Eglinton-Lawrence mentioned, there's something on the order of about 110 auto insurance companies covering the 8.3 million motorists of Ontario who have to suffer through, endure, something like 250,000 collisions. So it's timethat some rationality, some sense, was brought to this area.

I'd like to bring to the attention of this chamber, this House, this Parliament, that on the watch of the previous regime, the previous administration, the Tory party, auto insurance rates have risen by approximately 40% in the past four years. It's very clear that both the previous Premier, Ernie Eves, and his then-Minister of Finance basically hit the snooze button when it came to this particular file.

In particular, I'd like to bring to your attention that in 2002, the fourth quarter, there was a 9.2% increase; in 2003, the first quarter, a 7.3% increase; in 2003, the second quarter, an 8.5% increase; and in 2003, the third quarter, an 8.2% increase. As I mentioned, the Conservative regime, the Tory party, did absolutely nothing to help Ontario's motorists.

With this particular bill, the Auto Insurance Rate Stabilization Act—brought forth very expeditiously, I might mention, within 15 minutes of our government taking office—auto insurance rates are frozen for a full 90 days, and they require the approval of the super-

intendent of financial services for new rates to be implemented. So it brings to bear also the regulatory capacity of this government in an area which I think has been allowed to really smoulder and degenerate. That is, of course, what we're hearing on the ground as we travel in our respective ridings.

Our government, Speaker, campaigned on the promise of freezing automobile insurance rates immediately. I'd like to bring it to your attention and to this chamber and, through you, to the people of Ontario that we acted immediately on this particular file.

As well, I would like to mention that one of the things we engaged in quite actively was a very active and deep consultation process. The MPP for Eglinton-Lawrence, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, Mr Mike Colle, has been very active in soliciting opinions, meeting with a number of the stakeholders, insurance groups, those representing motorists and the various bureaus and agencies that are affected by this particular piece of legislation.

I would like to, for example, quote the Ontario Trial Lawyers' Association, which said, with reference to the previous Tory regime, "The Tory government failed to realize that the vast majority of auto accident victims are not frauds or malingerers, but people from all walks of life who have suffered legitimate injuries and who have a genuine desire to heal from their injuries and return to their productive lives. They have done nothing that requires them to be accountable, but simply had the misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time"—and, I may add, beyond the quotation, to be governed by a government that really did not have the interests of Ontario motorists at heart.

We will work with individuals like Mr Mark Yakabuski, not coincidentally the brother, I may add, of one of the Tory members here, but who is himself the Ontario vice-president of the Insurance Bureau of Canada. He says, "The auto insurance measures put in place by the previous government were nowhere near enough to support an average 10% reduction in premiums."

1630

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Mr Speaker, on point of order: I believe the member just indicated that Mark Yakabuski is not the brother of one John Yakabuski. I want to correct the record, if that's what he said. I heard him say that. He is the brother—

The Acting Speaker: Perhaps the member can address that.

Mr Qaadri: I speak with great pride of knowing Mr Mark Yakabuski, both in a personal capacity and, as I found to my delight, he is the brother of one of the Tory MPPs, and I may add one of my own debating coaches once upon a time. So I bring that to the attention of this House.

Since we're dwelling on the remarks of the non-elected Yakabuski, I would like to repeat for the honourable member that, as he says, "The auto insurance measures put in place by the previous government were nowhere near enough to support an average 10% reduc-

tion in premiums,” which is one of the lead initiatives we’re bringing forth.

I would like to submit once again to this chamber and to the people of Ontario that the previous regime failed Ontario’s motorists in this particular file, in this particular portfolio.

Another thing this initiative will bring forth to the motorists of Ontario, numbering some eight-million-plus strong, is that it will allow some customization, some flexibility to the auto insurance policies that the motorists of Ontario will actually sign and will affiliate themselves with. It will allow people to hold, for example, a higher property damage deductible on their policy, thus allowing them more freedom in the amount they choose to self-insure. This is another step we are very actively engaging the stakeholders in, to help lower premiums and make good on our various commitments, our staged step-wise commitments with regard to auto insurance premiums. For example, groups like seniors will not have to pay for coverage like income replacement, for which they may have little or no use.

Another thing that was brought to light by the MPP from Eglinton-Lawrence was the issue of fraud. Unfortunately, this seems to be a very rampant practice in insurance jurisdictions across North America, but in particular with regard to auto insurance. It’s estimated, for example, that insurance fraud is the second-leading source of criminal profits in North America, second only to illegal drug sales. For example, something in the order of about 10 cents to 15 cents of every dollar that policyholders actually pay in fact goes for fraudulent insurance claims. This is a real tragedy, but also this is part and parcel of the extra premium, the extra load that Ontario motorists have to endure.

Another very important aspect that this initiative brings forth is the removal of what are known as the DACs, or the designated assessment centres, basically because these centres actually duplicate efforts and are extremely expensive.

There are a number of issues I’ve dealt with, with regard to the speed with which this government has moved on this file, the consumer protection we’re bringing, the customization. To close, I will quote the Minister of Finance: “Our cost-saving reforms will result in lower rates—the relief drivers so desperately need.”

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): It’s with pleasure that I rise at this point to speak at third reading of Bill 5, the Automobile Insurance Rate Stabilization Act, a bill that I think demonstrates how quickly this government has moved to get a grip on some of the problem’s we’re facing.

Before I get into my comments on this, let me first state that this first sitting of this body has been a wonderful experience for me and I think all members of this chamber, particularly those of us who are here for the first time. I want to thank the Clerk and the legislative staff for making us feel at home here, for making us feel comfortable here. I also want to thank all my colleagues, especially those who have been here for a while, on all

sides of the House, and I mean all sides of the House. Everybody has been kind to us. Everybody has been generous to us. Everybody has provided us with guidance and advice. Even members of the opposite parties have done that. I want to tell you that, as somebody new to this institution, I really appreciate the help and assistance we’ve received.

As a former member of Toronto city council, I’m used to the cut and thrust of debate, much of which we’ve seen here, but one thing I’ve always admired about this place and the people in it is the fact that after the cut and thrust of the debate, and despite the disagreement on many of the issues, there really is a mutual respect, I think, that’s ingrained in all of us here for each other. It may not seem like that sometimes during question period, but as soon as that’s over, as soon as we walk out the door, I feel it in this place and I’m very proud to be part of the collegial atmosphere that I see and that we found here at Queen’s Park.

It’s in that spirit that I wish everybody on all sides of the House all the best for the Christmas season. That being said, let us get back to the cut and thrust of the debate.

In the short time that I have, I’m pleased to speak to this bill. It’s a very important part of the changes we are bringing to this government, a very important part of our efforts to change the direction of the government of Ontario.

The first thing it does is that it freezes future insurance rate increases as promised. The second thing it does is that following the 90-day freeze, there will be a 10% reduction in rates as promised. The third thing it does during this freeze is that measures will be taken to enable us to contain the skyrocketing health and rehabilitation costs for minor accidents, and begin the process to deal with the small minority of opportunistic claimants who are taking advantage of the system and making all of us pay for the fact they are taking advantage of this system. Fourth, after the 10% reduction, more reforms will follow that will allow for more protection from rising premiums, including the elimination of costly designated assessment centres, including as well customized policies that will help us get those rates down even further, as we promised.

I’m pleased to rise today and speak to this bill because it starts the process toward our reaching the commitments we made in this last election. Let’s face it, under the Tories the rates were skyrocketing. As well, they were not doing enough—in fact, they weren’t doing anything—to get those rates down. We’ve seen the increases. It’s been mentioned before. In the fourth quarter of 2002 they were up by 9.2%. In the first quarter of 2003 they went up by 7.3%. In the second quarter of 2003 they were up by 8.5%. In the third quarter of 2003 they were up by 8.2%. Those sound like annual increases. They were quarterly increases. It really was time for action. I’m pleased to be part of a government that has decided to take that action.

I’m looking at the clock, and I’ll ask my colleague—I’ve got another minute here to finish up.

This bill is going to affect the lives of a number of residents in Ontario. It's going to affect the lives of seniors who have perfect driving records, who may have gotten into one minor accident and found they can no longer afford to drive. This legislation will affect the lives of those young people who aspire to drive, who are looking forward to turning 16, 17, 18, getting into a car and being able to drive and knowing they may not be able to afford to do it. In fact, their car is probably going to be worth less than their insurance. This bill is going to be important to the soccer mom who gets into an accident going a little faster than she should, or has a traffic ticket going a little faster than she should on her way to soccer practice, watching her premiums skyrocket because of one small mistake. This bill is going to have a big impact on the lives of all the people of Ontario.

I'm pleased we've moved so quickly on this, as we have on so much that the Premier outlined earlier in the day.

I'm pleased to join you in this first sitting of the Legislature and once again wish everybody a Merry Christmas and all the best in the new year.

1640

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the senior member from York West.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I hope you don't mean that in age or years in service, but I'll take that as a compliment.

I want to add my voice for five minutes on this important piece of legislation.

If we think for a moment that the people out there are not watching the actions of the House and watching what we do with respect to this piece of legislation, we are very seriously mistaken. I have no idea if they expect a total reversal, if you will, of eight years of inaction, let's say, where the rates have skyrocketed. But I think it's fair to say that what we are doing today is what we initiated immediately after becoming a government: taking some action. I believe it's a good start.

As we talk here today, consultations are taking place with the various stakeholders. Our Minister of Finance and his parliamentary assistant, Mr Colle, have been and are continuously involved in continuing the negotiations and consultations with the various stakeholders: the individual agencies, brokers, individuals and insurance companies as well.

The important thing is that we don't fall into the same mistake again and go back and do another four years or eight years of hibernation. The people of Ontario, especially the single wage earner, the seniors, the single-income people and the small business people, expect some action from this government. I believe we have initiated a good beginning.

We have to look at the entire industry. There isn't one particular issue that is going to solve and bring relief to the problem. It's the entire industry. You may say, "Is it because of the many claims?" We would be very naive if we were to think that there isn't fraud out there. There's a lot of fraud, and the industry has to deal with it. Is it a

boon for lawyers, consultants, planners, whatever? Sure it is, but they are doing their job, they are doing what they are supposed to do. We have to do our share as well. We believe we have a responsibility to the people out there to bring some relief to an industry that over many years has done practically what it wanted at will. It's about time that we do something on behalf of the people of Ontario.

For myself, I have to say, my renewal was November 9 or something like that. I was shocked when I got a 58% increase, and I said, "My goodness, we had no accidents. The car is still the same car. I am still living in the same area." But because there are other areas that cause insurance rates to keep creeping up, we have to look at the entire industry. I don't believe for one second that if you live in one particular area of the city or of Ontario, you pay more or somebody pays less. That is not the case, should not be the case.

In the legislation as it is proposed, there are some safeguards, and I hope we can push the legislation ahead so we can get to the initial stages of bringing some relief.

I can see that my time is quickly running out. I would be remiss if I didn't take advantage of the fact that hopefully today we adjourn for the holidays and join our community members and families. I hope that the spirit of the holiday season, the spirit of Christmas, will be with every member, every family member and our community at large. I hope that when we come back in the new year, we can come back renewed, with new spirit, new hope for the people in Ontario. Let's hope that all members of the House can be responsible and bring some much-needed relief in all areas to the taxpayers of Ontario. Including yourself, Speaker, my best wishes to you as well.

Mr Klees: I'm pleased to join this debate. I look forward to the opportunity to set the record straight on some issues and also to provide some suggestions to this government, which is moving forward. They have a majority, so regardless of how long we talk about this and regardless of what we may point out, this government will do what it will do. I can't resist, of course, pointing out that regardless of how eloquently members of the government speak to the merits of this proposed bill and speak to the fact that they have somehow met a promise here that they made on the campaign trail, the reality is that they are, in fact, falling far short of meeting that commitment. If I recall well, on the campaign trail I heard something about a 20% reduction. That was a firm commitment to the people of this province relating to this insurance issue.

There's no doubt that everyone in this province knows that there is a problem in this industry, which is, as you know, the reason that our government came forward in July 2003. We introduced our plan for real insurance rate reduction, and when I say "real insurance rate reduction," it is precisely that. We introduced a program, after extensive consultation with the industry—my former colleague Rob Sampson spent considerable time meeting with stakeholders in the industry to discuss how we can, in fact, move to a point where we can see real rate

reductions for consumers in this province and do so in the context of an industry that is an integral part of our economic structure in this province, do so without negatively affecting that industry, allowing the industry to put in place the necessary measures to effect real rate reductions and put in place some structural changes within the industry that would ensure the sustainability of those reductions. So, in July 2003, we announced some very specific regulatory changes to complement the legislation that we had introduced. Those regulatory changes allowed the industry to move forward with a streamlining of the access to treatment—for example, for common injuries such as whiplash—by introducing a pre-approved framework for treatment. It also allowed the industry to move forward with improving benefits for children suffering serious injuries. A member previously put on the record his thoughts regarding the need to ensure that people who have real injuries and are affected long-term as a result of an automobile accident—that there is a way and a means to recoup expenses for those injuries. Our regulatory changes certainly provided for that.

Those regulatory changes also restricted the use of medical examinations by insurers in order to end duplication. Part of the problem that became very evident in the course of the consultations that we did as a government was not the intent of the legislation; it was how it was being implemented. It was many of the duplications, the red tape, the administrative procedures that were being used that had somehow found their way into the system that was adding significantly to the costs of the industry.

Those regulations also prohibited unfair business practices by health care providers and paralegals. It became very clear that there was a necessity to introduce a code of conduct for paralegals, who had become, and have become over time, an integral part of the industry. We introduced those regulations.

1650

I learned today that in spite of the fact that this government indicated that they had repealed those regulations—which, by the way, as a result of their implementation, provided for specific reductions of rates to the tune of up to 15%. It was agreed to by the industry that by taking these initiatives, by implementing these measures, they would be able to, by January 15 of this coming year, actually implement specific reductions to the proposed increases. We were told that those regulations had been withdrawn.

In discussions with the Financial Services Commission of Ontario, somehow, obviously, the government has failed to advise the Financial Services Commission of Ontario that those regulations had been withdrawn, because no one's told them. As of this afternoon, they're not aware of that. As a result of that, I would suggest that there's no reason why that 15% reduction can't be passed on to the consumers of this province. Clearly the regulations were still in place. The industry was working under the direction of those regulations.

I would urge this government to ensure that anyone who has been signalled that they were getting an increase

over the last couple of months would have the benefit of that reduction. I am anxious to hear back from the minister responsible as to whether or not he will take that step to ensure that consumers across this province will see that reduction on their proposed rate increases.

I want to point out one other thing here before I get into some more specifics. I referred earlier in question period today to the fact that this is a historical day in Ontario, historical in the sense that we had an editorial by the Toronto Star today that is headed, "Ontario Needs Action, Not Talk." I don't know if you saw this editorial, but I'm going to read into the record a reference that has specific meaning for our debate here. It says:

"While it is fair to give the Liberals until spring to table their first budget, it is also legitimate to point out that consultation is not leadership.

"Often, it can be an abrogation of responsibility that, for the Liberals, could leave them both unable and unwilling to meet their promises."

Why do I make reference to this? The fact of the matter is that this industry needs action now. The government has a responsibility to live up to its campaign promises, not just to freeze rates; their campaign promise was to reduce premiums by 20%. We're nowhere near that. Instead, what we're getting is the rhetoric that the parliamentary assistant will travel the province, will continue to consult, consult, consult. I suggest to you that this is just one more sidestep on the part of this government not to do what it said it was going to do.

The people of Ontario are starting to wake up to this rhetoric. They're starting to understand that this government has incredibly effective spin doctors, who have been able to give them a rationale for breaking every single promise that they made to the people of Ontario while they were on the campaign trail. I see members of the backbench wincing when I say that, and I would too. If I were in your shoes, I would be feeling very, very uncomfortable.

I know the member for Mississauga West, who takes his calling in this House very seriously, could be doing other things—very successful in the private sector—but he chose public service. I know for a fact that he was involved in helping to develop many of the campaign commitments and many of the campaign promises and policies, some of them very good. Unfortunately, what he was not aware of while he spent all that time working with his party colleagues and while he was campaigning was that his leader had no intention of ever keeping those promises. What he was not aware of, and what I'm sure most members of the backbench were not aware of, was the fact that the commitments that were being made could never be kept, because there is a limit to what government can spend. You can't spend more than you have.

For example, with regard to the commitment that was made to dedicate 10% of the gasoline tax to municipalities, we were asked to do that many times, and we said, "No, we as a government cannot afford that." The Liberals knew they couldn't afford it—they knew full

well—but they made the promise anyway, because it sounded good at the time, and they knew it would appeal particularly to municipal politicians across this province. They got the nod, they got the endorsement from many in the municipal sector, simply because of that one promise. What did we hear today? We heard the Premier admit, “We can’t do it. I’m sorry, but we can’t do it. And do you know what? I have no idea when we perhaps could do it, if ever.”

I believe my colleague wants to speak to this as well.

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): This one?

Mr Klees: Well, I just want to clarify whether you do. If you do, I’m happy to provide you with some opportunity. If he doesn’t, then I’m certainly prepared to continue.

I want to make a very quick reference to one recommendation, because I know this government is looking for some constructive advice. I have one piece of advice that goes far beyond simply the consultation that the parliamentary assistant is going to be undertaking, which is simply another delay for not meeting the promise. Here is something the Minister of Consumer and Business Services can implement immediately that will have a direct and immediate effect on automobile insurance rates in this province. It’s a private member’s bill that was passed unanimously in this House, Bill 186. Speaker, I believe you voted for it. In fact, there isn’t a member in this House who was part of the last Legislature who didn’t vote for this bill. It is now sitting, waiting for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services to simply move forward and implement it. It’s an act that directly affects car insurance in this province. I’m going to read you the purpose of this act:

“To further highway safety by promoting the proper and efficient repair of automobiles that have sustained structural or body damage.

“To protect consumers from dishonest, deceptive and fraudulent practices in the repair of such motor vehicles.

“To provide a fair marketplace for the collision repair industry and those who have an interest in it.

“To implement a regulatory framework for the collision repair industry which will provide for the certification of collision repair shops on industry standards, and decertify those collision repair shops that fail to meet those standards.

“To establish province-wide standards for quality collision repair, and a system of inspection and compliance.”

1700

I introduced this thought because there is no question that a large part of the cost of our automobile insurance relates to the specific issues that are involved in repair of automobiles that are damaged as a result of accidents. In this province, we have no standards currently for the collision repair industry. This bill, we are told by stakeholders—and we consulted on this, I say to the member opposite, over a period of some five years. We are assured that this implementation will immediately have a direct effect on lowering automobile insurance premiums

in this province. I leave that to the government to implement. We look forward to working with them to effect that implementation.

My time has run out. I know that the member from Whitby-Ajax is here and will be pleased to add his comments to this. I look forward to his advice that he can provide to this government to ensure, first of all, that their broken promise can be restored, namely, to reduce automobile insurance premiums by 20%, that they get on with doing the work rather than just, under the guise of consultation, defer and continue to break their promise. I know that he’ll have some specific advice as well regarding this legislation, and he will no doubt refer to the very specific measures that our government brought in that would result in real action in this marketplace. I look forward to his inspiring remarks.

Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this debate.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I thank the member for Oak Ridges for the introduction. I don’t often get introduced, so it’s nice to hear in the Legislature.

Bill 5 is the bill being debated. I’m going to get to some of the specifics in the bill, but as a general concern, the government has taken the approach in the last four weeks here—and this is the last day we’re sitting until—I think the government’s coming back in March. The government has taken the approach of inaction, and that includes on this automobile insurance issue, which is an important issue for my constituents, certainly, in Whitby-Ajax and for working families all across the province of Ontario.

The big promise the Liberals made when they were seeking office was that they would hold the line on your taxes. This is from their Web site. Their leader wrote, “Ontario workers and their families already pay enough. We will hold the line on your taxes.” They then brought in Bill 2 here to increase taxes, the largest single-day tax hike in the history of the province. They said about auto insurance specifically, which is the bill we’re talking about, that they would reduce automobile insurance premiums in Ontario.

Bill 5 actually takes away the opportunity of many people in Ontario to have immediately lower automobile insurance premiums. The Eves government, the previous government, had instructed the insurers to refile in Ontario, which they did before the election date. This bill, Bill 5, prohibits the superintendent of insurance from permitting any of those insurers to proceed with rate reductions, because he will not be permitted to consider those filings that were made before the date of the election.

A number of the insurers have talked about a more expeditious system in Ontario of getting to rate reductions, premium reductions, for the people of Ontario, and that is the file-and-use system. That is, we have a system now where the insurers file with the superintendent, and then he or she proceeds to review the filings and decides what would be appropriate for that particular company.

That was done—that is, the filing was done—before the election on October 2. But none of those filings has

been approved, and the insurers are not permitted to file and use—that is, for example, file for a rate reduction and then go ahead and apply that rate reduction immediately for the benefit of their insured persons. That would be an area which I commend to the government for their consideration. They're very keen on consultation and not on action. Automobile insurance requires action in this province. As they consult over the course of the next few months, I guess, and come to some sort of recommendation stage with respect to automobile insurance, I encourage them to look, among other things, at this file-and-use concept for automobile insurers in Ontario.

There are many other problems with the bill, one of which is that it applies only to private passenger vehicles and not to commercial vehicles. There's a big problem in Ontario with motor vehicle insurance rates for commercial vehicles. It applies not only to school buses but to commercial vehicles involved in the cross-border trade with the United States. I'm sure members here have heard from their constituents—I certainly have over the course of many months now in 2003—about this cross-border trade issue that we have with companies in Ontario, many of them smaller and medium-sized companies which are the backbone of the economy in Ontario, having difficulty obtaining commercial motor vehicle insurance at a reasonable rate in Ontario so that they can conduct their business, which is an export business, which is great for the people of this province for employment and for growth here. That's another big area that is not covered by Bill 5.

There are, of course, no rate reductions in Bill 5. It merely imposes a freeze and, as I say, it prohibits the superintendent from letting any possible rate reduction happen arising out of the previous filings, based on those filings.

There is a delay, as I say, in available rate reductions and overall, when I look at the bill, which is going to come to a vote—it is a vote that will make no difference for the people of Ontario in terms of their automobile insurance rates until the government begins to address the substantive issues.

If I may, then, Speaker, speak about these substantive issues for a while, I'll try to be as succinct as I can. Automobile insurance is relatively sophisticated in Ontario. We have had some type of no-fault insurance since I believe 1969 in this province. We were early in that in terms of North American automobile insurance coverage. As everyone knows in Ontario, it is a mandatory product in the sense that no one is permitted to operate a motor vehicle in Ontario that is uninsured.

Mr Chudleigh: They're not supposed to.

Mr Flaherty: They're not supposed to; that's right.

It seems to me that that alone is sufficient reason for it to be incumbent on government to ensure that there is a range of rates available that meet the needs and that are affordable to the consumers of Ontario. At the same time, there's an accessibility issue. The government has to ensure that there is a sufficient supply so that there is

adequate accessibility for businesses and individuals, families across the province. When they look at automobile insurance, they need to have a look at the no-fault side of it, which compensates people, regardless of fault, who are injured in motor vehicle accidents, the idea there being that there should be a certain basic level of benefit available to someone injured in a motor vehicle accident regardless of fault, which was a controversial issue at one time. Over time there has been reform in that area, which is section B in the policy. There has been substantial reform increasing the benefits available on the no-fault side.

I'm going to pause there for a moment, because it is in that area that there's a great deal of controversy and difficult issues relating to charges made by persons who deliver services to people injured in motor vehicle accidents on a no-fault basis. There are many people who deliver those services. They have been permitted to charge in excess of the rates charged by them when, for example, they do workers' compensation work—victims of accidents on the job in Ontario. This is controversial and has been raised at committee hearings and I'm sure will be an important point that will be addressed by the government, that needs to be addressed by the government, as they review the costs in the system, the point being that the benefits from all of our premiums are supposed to flow in the no-fault sector to those persons who have sustained injury and who need the opportunity to have the services they need to rehabilitate themselves and recover and become gainfully employed again in Ontario.

1710

Lots of that money is not getting to the victims; it's being eaten up by transactional costs and caregivers. A lot of the money is also being eaten up by these designated assessment centres, which are referred to by the acronym DAC, and the plural, DACs. These were created as a place where persons would go to be assessed with respect to the personal injuries they sustained and treatment plans to be developed. They have become an industry unto themselves, arguably. They are a substantial cost associated with the development of treatment plans and, perhaps as important, a substantial delay. Delay costs money in the insurance business, particularly in the adjustment of claims.

Interjection.

Mr Flaherty: That's right. As my colleague from Halton points out, it does nothing for victims. In fact, it may be a negative in terms of recovering and rehabilitating and getting on with their lives if there is substantial delay in treatment being available because somebody's assessment is the subject of delay. So those are transactional costs, assessment costs that need to be substantially reduced on the no-fault side of automobile insurance.

I talk about this because this of course affects the bottom line. When you look at all the sections of the coverage, you get to the end where you can say, "OK, we've reduced costs A, B, C and D. Therefore, the average premium to drivers in Ontario can be reduced."

That's vitally important for our lives together in the province.

On the tort side, which is section A of the standard auto policy—this is the part that compensates victims of automobile accidents who are not at fault. They're entitled to the no-fault benefits, of course, but in addition, they're entitled to the right to sue. Most of those cases, as some of the members of this Legislative Assembly would know, do not proceed to court, but actions are commenced or claims are made and they are resolved over time. They tend to be relatively serious cases. They tend to sometimes involve cognitive injury, serious physical harm.

As a civilized people, I think it is incumbent on us—and I urge this on the government—to ensure that we respect the dignity of individuals in this province when they are innocent victims of motor vehicle accidents, and their right to be fully compensated on an individual basis, having a look at their individual needs and circumstances and their futures. This is true for everyone but particularly true for children, who can have their futures altered dramatically by injuries sustained in a motor vehicle accident. This is the humane, individualistic dignity of the individual aspect of motor vehicle compensation in Ontario.

The member for Oak Ridges has spoken about collision coverage, and that is an important area of the policy as well. This is the area—and it drives up costs—where we're talking about automobile repairs. The cost of repairing automobiles has gone up significantly over the course of the past number of years, particularly given the way vehicles are put together these days, with large plastic parts and so on.

There are abuses involving various participants in that sector. Steps have been taken from time to time to try to control those costs, and it's important that all of the participants in that aspect are subject, as they are, to the regulations that are in force. I urge the members opposite, when they engage in this review of automobile insurance on a serious, substantive basis over the course of the next couple of months, to have a solid look at that area. Again, in comprehensive coverage—theft and so on—that is an area involving crime and fraud that needs to be looked at very carefully by the members of the government.

I say to them that Ontario needs action, not talk. I'm sure they're not surprised to hear that from an opposition member. I was surprised to read it as the lead editorial in today's Toronto Star. The Toronto Star says, "Ontario Needs Action, Not Talk." I can't agree more with the editorial writers at the Toronto Star, especially the one who did the headline. I thought that was very well done: "Ontario Needs Action, Not Talk." They were talking about the big picture, about the broken promises and about this obsession with process on the other side.

There's no vision of Ontario. What they talk about is process, consultation, meetings, get-togethers. It's a wonderful thing to do; it's a grand thing to do. We all like gatherings, especially at this holiday time of the year. It's great for people to get together, but you have to have

some idea of where you're going; otherwise it's easy to get lost along the way. You need to have a direction.

Particularly on Bill 5 and automobile insurance, there is no direction. There is no picture there. There is no, "Here's where we want to get to and here's how we're going to do it." What there is is, "We're going to freeze some auto rates but not others and we're going to talk to some people about it."

There has been lots of consultation on this issue. I've raised some of the important points today that have been consulted about many times. I don't blame the government for saying, "Let's go back and talk." Go back and talk one more time. You shouldn't have made the promise that you'd lower premiums. You shouldn't make promises that you can't keep. I think the government is getting that now, that they've really got to cut back on this promise-making thing, because it's making them look very bad in the eyes of people across Ontario, particularly young people who want to look up to the member for Willowdale or the member for St Paul's. They want to think well of them, after all, especially at this happy time of the year.

Interjection.

Mr Flaherty: The member for Halton is encouraging me to move on to a gathering, I believe.

I do wish to encourage the members opposite to do well in their consultation. I look forward to having an opportunity to debate a substantive bill in the new year, when I'm sure the members opposite will make an effort to come back with a sophisticated bill.

I say, in summary: This is a system of automobile reparations in Ontario that is complex, sophisticated and balanced. They must be careful on the other side to keep the balance so that the system functions properly, at the same time with reasonable controls on automobile insurance, which of course is a mandatory product.

I want to wish everyone in the House a Merry Christmas, of course, particularly the well-informed and very kind people of Whitby-Ajax who saw fit to re-elect me this year. All the best—

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Oh, well, nobody's perfect.

Mr Flaherty: The member for St Paul's is not being nice to the people of Whitby-Ajax. He's doubting the wisdom of their decision. I'm sure he doesn't mean that, because this is the holiday season and he wants to be cheery about it, so I'll let that pass.

All the best to the members of the House and to you, Speaker. Have a wonderful holiday.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's indeed a distinct pleasure to follow the member from Whitby-Ajax, who as Minister of Finance had a lot of consultations on auto insurance reform. In fact, for the record, I should make it clear to the viewers tonight that after Bill 194, I believe it was, of the NDP, the increases had been in the range of 5% to 10% annually in auto insurance. Over our terms, with Bill 59, I believe, and the subsequent Bill 198, there

was rate relief, but the rate relief got pent up and, clearly, we have Bill 5.

I'm going to talk for the very brief time I have here on Bill 5. As the opposition's point person on the hearings on Bill 5—and, by the way, those listening tonight should realize that those hearings were part of a major time allocation which restricted debate on a very substantive topic, as the member from Whitby-Ajax has outlined.

For those listening, I'm going to read just a few comments and focus on a couple of points in the very little time I have. This bill is quite small. In fact, it does not nearly address the substantive issues behind auto insurance, the least of which are the victims. I'm going to read the explanatory notes for the viewers tonight:

“The bill temporarily freezes automobile insurance rates for private passenger vehicles at the rates in effect on October 23, 2003”—that was the rate our government set—“and suspends the approval of applications under the Insurance Act for rate changes while the bill is in force.”

What has really happened here is that the government has just stopped the rates. The government promise during the election was a 15% to 20% decrease in rates. What have they done? Nothing.

This bill—I will go through it. There is another important clause which I'm going to debate in the very limited time I have, but for those interested who really want a detailed accounting of what happened during the public hearings—which were, with all respect, a sham. They were a sham to the extent that on the day of hearings, December 15 of this week, the members of the government failed to show up and the hearings were suspended by the Chair of the committee. The finance and economic affairs committee suspended the hearings. All those deputations, from the insurance bureau, the victims, were not put on the record. As the government Liberal members—I'm not sure; I would not like to impute motive, but I believe they did not show up, and that's suspicious in my accounting of this event. But it's important to pay attention to details and not get lost in the shouting here.

1720

In this section I'm going to refer members to, “An insurer”—that's the company, the big giant corporation—“may apply to the superintendent of financial services for a rate increase if the insurer believes that it is just and reasonable in the circumstances having regard to the insurer's financial circumstances.”

The companies, like ING, are broke, right? It's often referred to and has been referred to by many members on all sides of the House as the Mack truck clause. That's section 6 I'm referring to, and I'm going to read section 6 of the bill. It's important to put it on the record. Here's what it says:

“Application to charge higher rates”—you've got to read the bill. Subsection 6(1) says, “An insurer may apply to the superintendent for approval to charge rates that exceed the authorized rates if the insurer believes it

is just and reasonable in the circumstances having regard to the insurer's financial circumstances....”

All they seem to be saying here is that their biggest concern is to the insurer, the underwriter. What this does is it forces, in a very short window, the industry—these are the underwriters this risk pooling addresses—to rewrite the classifications of risk and providers of risk insurance.

Mr Flaherty, whom I have the greatest respect for, knows this industry well. He made substantive changes but he always protected the victims. When I heard him speak—

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: These are minutes, and I can tell you he had the greatest respect for victims, specifically children, specifically people involved in catastrophic incidents. He made very brief mention of the DACs, the designated assessment centres.

My perspective on this is that I am dealing with a constituent at the moment. This person was hit a year and a half ago by an impaired driver and, to this date, they've been put through the treadmill, the maze of insurance, the DAC companies. They are at risk of losing their home; I put this on the record, it's a public record: Jacqueline Hurren. Her legal representative is trying to make sure that her needs are being addressed by having expeditious access to a timely assessment through the DACs and through a timely resolution of these issues without having to go through another accident, another battle, which is the court system itself.

I believe the members here should know that today this is third reading. They have had the mother of all time allocation bills—of all time. They had three bills all rolled into one time allocation, limiting the amount of presentations from stakeholders, from citizens of this province. They limited it, and then denied them access by not showing up at the committee. They dealt with auto insurance, they dealt with the hydro issue and they dealt with the largest tax increase in history of \$4.1 billion.

There have been a lot of shell games going on in this early term of this government. We, as opposition, are here to hold them accountable, and I am saying that this bill does not nearly come close to committing to the promises to the people, my constituents in the riding of Durham, of lowering auto insurance. For the most vulnerable in our society, it's my understanding that their intention is to eliminate access to proper assessments. They promised to cancel the DACs, these assessments, in their policy paper prior to the election, but like every other promise prior to the election, they did one thing and after the election they're doing another thing. In fact, Bill 5 is a travesty of access to justice, of access to proper and adequate insurance coverage by the Liberal government that's now sitting.

I want to conclude by saying that in all respects I really believe—I still think of Mrs Hurren. She's losing her job, potentially losing her home. I would not cite her name if I wasn't given permission. She's desperate to be properly assessed, to have her claim recognized—it was a

convicted impaired driver; that's been resolved in the courts—and she's unable to get proper resolution of her concerns. This government has done nothing for her, and I'm convinced, going forward—the victims still out there in auto insurance, both those paying premiums and those looking to have resolution to their concerns, are being denied.

They've used every excuse in the book. Today was a litany of excuses; that is what it was. To say there's a deficit or something—the Toronto Star said it today. They have to get on with governing. Governing is about making difficult decisions.

Out of respect for other members in our caucus who have much to say, and I look to the former Minister of Health, who has much to say on this issue, I'm willing to yield the floor. But the point has been made. This bill is nothing but a shallow promise on a very complex issue. Always keep the victims in mind. I know that was always the intent of our Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, and I know, going forward this government will always stand on the side of victims.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Before I begin my remarks, I want to take this opportunity, on this last day of the 2003 session, to extend my warmest wishes and season's greetings to all the members in the House. As I was driving up here this morning along University Avenue from my home in Kitchener-Waterloo, I reflected upon the fact that it was such an honour to be one of the 103 people elected in this province and to have the responsibility and the honour to represent the people in this wonderful province of Ontario. I think sometimes we forget how very fortunate we are. I know that each one of the 103 members tries their best every day to do the best job they can. It's certainly a privilege for me to work with all of you. I wish you a great holiday with your families and your friends.

I will speak briefly. I have less than two minutes to speak about Bill 5. I think we're all concerned about this piece of legislation. Regrettably, it's not going to reduce auto insurance rates in this province at all. I've certainly heard from many constituents who are at a point where they're having to reconsider whether or not they can afford to drive their car. I have one individual who has given up his car. He just could no longer afford the cost of insurance.

This bill doesn't help in that respect because there is no rate reduction. There are no provisions in this bill to reduce the costs of the industry or the rates for motorists, and it doesn't provide any sort of consumer protection. Regrettably, it also delays the available premium reductions to people in Ontario. As you know, our government had put this province in a position where insurers had filed rate reductions pursuant to the reforms we had introduced. This would have provided for a 10% rate reduction for the motorists across Ontario. However, the freeze in this bill that is being implemented by the government will actually deny people in this province the immediate 10% rate reduction we were prepared to provide for them.

Also, I would indicate that the bill doesn't cover the commercial users and the small businesses. This bill will be a hardship to businesses in Ontario. We need to remember it's the businesses that create the jobs. It's the jobs that create the revenue. We were able to see the creation of over a million jobs when we were in government. So this bill, regrettably, is going to have a detrimental impact on both individuals and businesses in the province of Ontario.

1730

Mr Prue: I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Niagara Centre. We have approximately 20 minutes. This bill is about auto insurance. It is about freezing the rates of excessively high automobile insurance while this government grapples with how to reduce the amount that consumers are forced to pay.

Before dealing with the bill itself, I'd just like to read out into the record what people see in their rate increases that are coming through the mail today—rate increases, I might say, that were authorized before the last election. I have here a certain bill to a Mr Michael Prue. I went to the amount of money and saw a 15% increase and immediately saw a little red. What made me even angrier was, when I looked in, not only did I get a 15% increase, this is in fact why I got a 15% increase and maybe not a 20% or 25% increase: "Automobile Insurance Has Changed.

"Step one, effective October 1, 2003, deals with fairness and immediate cost pressures."

You might remember that day. That was the day before the election. This is what the Conservatives did as they were going out—

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): They slashed benefits.

Mr Prue: They slashed benefits, and here's what I no longer have in my coverage for an extra 15% increase. They say they will be prohibiting "unfair business practices by health care providers and paralegals effective November 1, 2003." What that means, is the people who look after injuries—the chiropractors, the massage therapists and others in the province—can no longer do unfair business practices, whatever those were.

The second thing is that they are changing my policy so that if my car is stolen and not found, the insurance company will now subtract the deductible. So if somebody steals my car, I have to pay the deductible, and I'm an innocent victim. I obviously wouldn't have even been in the car. It would have been parked and in my driveway or something at the time that it happened. I now have to pay the deductible.

What the insurance company is going to do is introduce rules about the kinds of injuries that are entitled to compensation for pain and suffering, and how to get that compensation. These rules apply to accidents after October 1. It is now much more difficult for an innocent victim involved in a traffic accident to sue for pain and suffering. They're going to change the deductibles that apply to that pain and suffering from \$15,000 to \$30,000, and these are affective after October 1.

Last but not least, they are going to change the basic weekly income replacement benefit from \$400 to \$300 a week.

For the privilege of getting a 15% increase, I as a consumer have lost all of these benefits. That happened on October 1. What happened on October 23? Twenty-two days later, my exorbitant rate of insurance increase, with all the stuff, was frozen.

I looked with great anticipation to Bill 5 coming forward from the government. I have to tell you, what this bill did was freeze an excessively high rate with very few and limited benefits where it was. It was most instructive, given the arguments in this last couple of days about retroactivity and how the Liberal government thought it was necessary to be retroactive to all of those people who sent their children to religious-based schools and how it was perfectly justified to go back 10 months, that there is not one provision in here that is retroactive upon the insurance companies. Surely, if you wanted to be retroactive to anyone, you should have been retroactive to companies that gouge and continue to gouge the poor driving public, but there's nothing in there about that.

What there also is not in this bill is, it does not cover businesses. It does not cover cab drivers, personal deliveries and messenger services, and it does not cover transportation and trucks. So these people who have seen their rates go up exponentially in the last couple of years—we heard a horror story of one trucking company in the north, with the same fleet of trucks and with no accidents, that went from \$40,000 in 1998 to now paying over \$400,000 for the same service. It doesn't cover any of those.

When we look inside the bill, there is a Mack truck section, section 6. It does not freeze the rate but provides the criteria "to charge higher rates," and this is vested with the superintendent. So all a company has to say is, "We're not making enough money, we're in a little bit of sad financial situation, our investments haven't been good," and the superintendent can agree with them and give them whatever he thinks is fair. This is the Mack truck provision.

Now, it's absolutely clear from the deputants who appeared before us where this government intends to save the 10% after the 90-day period—it is abundantly and totally clear. Number one, they are going to further cut the services to victims. They are going to make it more difficult for victims who are involved in automobile accidents to get the service they need to recuperate. Especially in the fields of chiropody, chiropractics and massage therapy, and where psychological problems develop, they are going to make sure it is increasingly difficult.

Just as the past government did, this new government is going to embark down the same road. They are going to cut the amount of funding that is available to accident victims. They are going to further rein in the health professionals, who have seen the rates they are able to charge to give necessary medical services to accident

victims, particularly those who have soft tissue injuries, decrease by some 30%.

We are also seeing what is expected in here. We had some excellent presenters who gave us some good cost estimates of how much is going to be saved: \$275 million for medical rehabilitation, chiropractors, physiotherapists and massage therapists, and \$250 million by increasing the pain and suffering threshold. They're going to save a pittance and a few dollars on the customization of plans. But instrumentally, and what is most telling here, is that they are making no cuts whatsoever to the companies or to the brokers.

Those companies and brokers are not expected to save 10 cents. The brokers will continue to be able to charge 12.5%—that is not going to change. The companies are going to continue to be able to make whatever profit the market will bear and to choose not to insure those who, by law, need to have driving insurance, and we will see the rate of the facility policy increase. Approximately 15% to 20% of the drivers on the road today have no insurance at all, and we are only going to see an increase in that.

Now, this is all versus what would happen if this government would bite the bullet and look at public auto, look at the experience of British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and, in a marginal way, of Quebec as well. We would see exactly where money could be saved. You have a choice: You can cut the money that is paid to accident victims, you can cut the money that is available to health care professionals, you can ensure that the private insurance companies continue to reap profits of 10% to 12% and have huge and bloated bureaucracies, or you can go public.

In public insurance, you're going to save money in a different way: not on the backs of consumers, not on the backs of the injured, not on the backs of those who have been involved in automobile accidents, but simply by doing away with something I think the Conservatives on the other side of rump might find disrespectful and disgraceful, but that I put to you would be of great benefit to overall consumers, and that is getting rid of the 12% to 15% profit margin that insurance companies historically make.

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We could also save hundreds of millions of dollars annually on administrative efficiencies by having one bureaucracy within the insurance system, by having one actuary within the insurance system, by having one set of guidelines, by having one set of solvency costs.

Last but not least, we would save an enormous amount, as the Liberals keep telling us, by doing away with all the unnecessary advertising. This is an opportunity, for the government would be the sole provider. They wouldn't have to advertise. They would be the only game in town, rather than every insurance company sending me letters telling me how good they are, and the ads on television telling me how much money they can save me, when in reality, they do not.

That is why I think this bill is terribly flawed. It does nothing. For 90 days, it freezes high rates. The proof will

be in the pudding of the end of the 90 days. But I will state that the reality is, at the end of the 90 days, the consumers will still be screwed.

With that, I will turn the floor over to my colleague from Niagara Centre.

Mr Kormos: Speaker, you appreciate that these could be—as a matter of fact, they will be—the final comments of the year 2003. I'm pleased to have had the final word for the year '03. I will be here on January 2, if the government wants to recall this Parliament to participate in the first comments of the year '04, because I quite frankly find that three-month vacation a little bit of an embarrassment. Yikes. How these guys could be here—my gosh. They weren't here but two days, remember? Then they voted themselves a three-month vacation. Zonkers.

Look, you know what folks are saying out there on the street? You do? There's not a cabbie—the doorman over at the Sheraton Centre the other day was shaking his head, everybody is shaking their head saying, “Can you believe those guys?” Broken promises after broken promises—I was counting off the broken promises Howard Hampton was listing in the response today. I got up to 10 on my fingers. I was trying to do graphics right behind Howard. I realized, uh-oh, he's going beyond 10. I could be in big trouble here. Really, out of 231, we're talking about how many so far? We're talking about at least 20. The ratio—

Mr Sergio: Who's keeping count?

Mr Kormos: We're keeping count, brother. We're keeping count real good. Look, feel free to break your commitment to private auto insurance. At this point, you've broken enough promises. Nobody's going to chastise you for breaking your promise to the private, for-profit auto insurance industry, the one that you're sitting in the lap of. It's like that old Victrola, the old RCA-Victor logo, “His Master's Voice,” right?

Mr Hampton: You could break this one and people won't even notice.

Mr Kormos: That's right. There's the Liberal government of Ontario and his master's voice. You're sure to see Mark Yakabuski calling the shots once again. You heard what happened. The Tories reduced benefits secretly by regulation. They slashed benefits. Mr Prue told you about those. The industry says, “But you've got to do more. You've got to give us more. You've got to slash benefits even more, make the innocent victim pay.” That's why deductibles increased from, what, \$15,000 to \$30,000, Mr Prue? Am I right, \$15,000 to \$30,000?

Mr Prue: Yes.

Mr Kormos: That's called punishing the innocent victim. Don't you guys get it? The industry wants more and you're going to give it more. What you should be doing is giving them the door. Say, “So long.” You guys have had how many kicks at the can, and you still foul it up?

Mr Colle: This could be the last kick.

Mr Kormos: Mr Colle says, “Oh, this is the last time.” Oh, Lord, Mr Colle. Yes, stand up, get up on your

feet. It's easy for you to say, because you know you're not going to be able to get up on your feet and put that on the record.

Listen, I've seen Liberal governments, NDP governments, Tory governments, try to regulate this industry. Now I'm seeing Liberal governments with another a kick at the can. David Peterson couldn't regulate them, couldn't contain them. New Democrats, albeit with their bent for regulation, were unable to do it in the early 1990s. The Tories were unable to do it in 1995-96, and subsequently again in the second term. Trust me, Mr Colle, they're having you for dinner. They're having you with HP Sauce on the side. You've been had. You've been consumed. You're in the process of being digested, and as you travel down that alimentary canal, bid so long to your former friends; that's all I can say to you. Because you know where you're going to end up? Well, at this point, the plan ends up in the toilet with all the others.

Here I am, au naturel, as I told several newspaper, radio and television interviewers; I promised them I'd be up here au naturel. Now, some of them thought that was a reference to Doukhobor background, but I promised them, no, it simply meant sans cravate.

Here I am. It's Thursday afternoon, post-resolution time, and I'm proud to be standing here as the member for Niagara Centre, as a proud New Democrat whose former leader, Ed Broadbent, is in a very exciting way taking up the challenge again, going to kick some Mahoney butt up in Ottawa. We've got Dennis Mills scurrying to his hole in the ground here in Toronto; Layton's obviously geared to win over in the Danforth area, so you've got Mills scurrying, pleading, grovelling for an appointment, and you've got Richard Mahoney going, “Oh, nuts.” One journalist said to me today, “Don't you think Ed Broadbent is too old?” I said, “Are you kidding? Compared to Martin, he's a kid.” By all means, Ed Broadbent is tough, strong, well-grounded, sound, and he's got himself a new riding to win up in Ottawa. I am looking forward to that federal election.

Now, I understand why the Liberals here at Queen's Park don't want to be sitting in that period preceding that federal election, because you've already done Martin and his gang a whole lot of damage. You understand that, don't you? The broken promises and the patina, or the anti-patina, that has begun to stick to you—you have not done any favours to your federal cousins. Mind you, obviously Stephen Harper and Peter MacKay did, but you've more than offset the favour that MacKay and Harper have done for the Liberals by damaging Liberal fortunes here in this province.

This had better be a good point of order, Speaker, because he's using my time.

Mr Baird: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I feel compelled to rise and defend Stephen Harper in this House. It's shameful of you, to criticize Her Majesty's—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. Boy oh boy, I touched a nerve in that rabid little right-winger. That's rabid spelled R-A-B-I-D, not with two Bs and a T.

I just want to tell these pages, and tell your colleagues tomorrow, that we in the NDP think you're one of the best bunches of pages we've ever had here. You guys are just super, all the young women and men who have served this Legislature who are headed home to your ridings. All of you have been outstanding. For us who have had a chance to meet your folks or your grand-folks who have dropped by, it's been a real pleasure. Shelley Martel was a page and now she's a major pain in the side to this Liberal government. She's as good an illustration of how well pages can do as anybody. I encourage you to come back here in 15 years' time and have one of these seats for yourself.

Interjection: Your seat.

Mr Kormos: In 15 years' time, pal, it could be. They'd be more than welcome to it in 15 years' time. In 15 years' time I'll be almost as old as you are, and I'll be ready to retire.

I'm looking forward to see the public auto insurance unfold. I'm looking forward to the egg on the face. This government capitulated to the NDP on our status in the Legislature and I'm looking forward to them capitulating to the NDP on public auto insurance. I'll be more than eager to help them make it happen. Howard Hampton would be more than eager to work for this government. Public auto insurance, like in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, is the only system that is fair to drivers and fair and just to victims. Public auto insurance: no more lapdogs to the private, for-profit auto insurance industry.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Pursuant to the order of the House dated December 4, 2003, I am now required to put the question.

Mr Colle has moved third reading of Bill 5. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1750 to 1800.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

Ayes

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

The Speaker: All those against, please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Flaherty, Jim	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Baird, John R.	Hampton, Howard	Prue, Michael
Bisson, Gilles	Hardeman, Ernie	Tascona, Joseph N.
Chudleigh, Ted	Hudak, Tim	Witmer, Elizabeth
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Yakabuski, John
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	
Eves, Ernie	O'Toole, John	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 62; the nays are 19.

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

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, His Honour awaits.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): While we're waiting for His Honour, I wonder if I could take three or four seconds to wish all members of the Legislature a happy and safe holiday.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario entered the chamber of the Legislative Assembly and took his seat upon the throne.

ROYAL ASSENT SANCTION ROYALE

Hon James K. Bartleman (Lieutenant Governor): Pray be seated.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly of the province has, at its present sittings thereof, passed certain bills to which, in the name of and on behalf of the said Legislative Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

Deputy Clerk (Ms Deborah Deller): The following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed:

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

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;*

Bill 5, An Act to temporarily freeze automobile insurance rates for private passenger vehicles and to provide for the review and regulation of risk classification systems and automobile insurance rates for private passenger vehicles / *Projet de loi 5, Loi visant à geler temporairement les taux d'assurance-automobile dans les cas des voitures de tourisme et à prévoir l'examen et la réglementation des systèmes de classement des risques et des taux d'assurance-automobile les concernant.*

Le Greffier de la Chambre (M. Claude L. DesRosiers): Au nom de Sa Majesté, Son Honneur le lieutenant-gouverneur sanctionne ces projets de loi.

In Her Majesty's name, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

The Speaker: May it please Your Honour, we, Her Majesty's most dutiful and faithful subjects of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario in session assembled, approach Your Honour with sentiments of unfeigned devotion and loyalty to Her Majesty's person and government, and humbly beg to present for Your Honour's acceptance a bill entitled An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2004.

Clerk of the House: His Honour the Lieutenant Governor doth thank Her Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, accept their benevolence and assent to this bill in Her Majesty's name.

Son Honneur le lieutenant-gouverneur remercie les bons et loyaux sujets de Sa Majesté, accepte leur bienveillance et sanctionne ce projet de loi au nom de Sa Majesté.

The Speaker: Before we adjourn, I would like to just say to all of you Merry Christmas and thank you for your co-operation during this time. I know it's a very important role that you have all played and you have helped me carry out my duty as best I can. I look forward to seeing you all in March. I want to wish you and your families Merry Christmas and a very prosperous and happy new year.

It being after 6 of the clock, we stand adjourned until March 22, 2004, at 1:30 pm.

The House adjourned at 1813.

ERRATUM

No.	Page	Column	Line(s)	Should read:
17A	850	2	22-52	<p>ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION</p> <p>Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to pay tribute to a young constituent of mine from Sarnia-Lambton who's truly an inspiration to us all. Kristopher is a 13-year-old Sarnia native who is presently waiting for a liver transplant, and he has a wish: to accomplish a 200-city-and-town walking tour across Canada to help save nearly 4,000 people who need organ and tissue transplants.</p> <p>The walking tour begins next month in Sarnia, but before that, I'm proud to tell the House that Kristopher will be here at Queen's Park tomorrow, along with many supporters, for a pre-kickoff announcement. I want to take this opportunity to invite all the members to join us at this event tomorrow afternoon, and I want to remind all members and all Ontarians to show their support for this vital health care issue and consider filling out an organ donor card. I had the opportunity to distribute these cards to other members earlier this week, and am happy to sign one myself.</p> <p>I'm proud of the amazing leadership that Kristopher is displaying on this issue, and I urge all members to show support for Kristopher's Wish. I'm happy to wear the special Gift of Life pin, which my office has left in both the east and west lobbies today.</p> <p>At this time, I'd like to ask for unanimous consent for all members to wear this special pin in support of Kristopher's Wish.</p> <p>The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent to wear the Kristopher pin? There seems to be unanimous consent.</p>

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon / L'hon James K. Bartleman
Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Alvin Curling
Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks at the Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Agostino, Dominic (L)	Hamilton East / -Est	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Environnement
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Waterloo-Wellington	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Parliamentary assistant to the Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / adjoint parlementaire au président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Baird, John R. (PC)	Nepean-Carleton	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	
Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L)	Sudbury	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Bentley, Hon / L'hon Christopher (L)	London West / -Ouest	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (ND)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	
Bountrogianni, Hon / L'hon Marie (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Minister of Children's Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Services à l'enfance, ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Bradley, Hon / L'hon James J. (L)	St Catharines	Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs
Brotten, Laurel C.(L)	Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Parliamentary assistant to the Premier / adjoite parlementaire au premier ministre
Brown, Michael A. (L)	Algoma-Manitoulin	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Richesses naturelles
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont-Dundas- Charlottenburgh	
Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L)	St Paul's	Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Cansfield, Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy / adjoite parlementaire au ministre de l'Énergie
Caplan, Hon / L'hon David (L)	Don Valley East / -Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy House Leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint
Chambers, Hon / L'hon Mary Anne V. (L)	Scarborough East / -Est	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Churley, Marilyn (ND)	Toronto-Danforth	
Colle, Mike (L)	Eglinton-Lawrence	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Finances
Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph (L)	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L)	Scarborough-Rouge River	Speaker / Président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga West / -Ouest	
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West-Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga	
Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Sarnia-Lambton	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for democratic renewal / adjointe parlementaire au ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Dombrowsky, Hon / L'hon Leona (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Duguid, Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs (Urban) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales (Secteur urbain)
Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight (L)	Windsor-St Clair	Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / -Nord	
Eves, Ernie (PC)	Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey	Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition
Flaherty, Jim (PC)	Whitby-Ajax	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	
Fonseca, Peter (L)	Mississauga East / -Est	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Gerretsen, Hon / L'hon John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Minister of Municipal Affairs, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires municipales, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Gravelle, Michael (L)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / -Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Travail
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora-Rainy River	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham-Kent Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Erie-Lincoln	
Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Burlington	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton Centre / -Centre	
Kennedy, Hon / L'hon Gerard (L)	Parkdale-High Park	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Klees, Frank (PC)	Oak Ridges	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Niagara Centre / -Centre	
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte (L)	York Centre / -Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	Chief government whip / whip en chef du gouvernement
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity-Spadina	
Marsales, Judy (L)	Hamilton West / -Ouest	
Martel, Shelley (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London Centre-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / -Sud	Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
McMeekin, Ted (L)	Ancaster-Dundas- Flamborough-Aldershot	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for seniors / adjoint parlementaire au ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
McNeely, Phil (L)	Ottawa-Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon / L'hon Madeleine (L)	Ottawa-Vanier	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound-Muskoka	
Milloy, John (L)	Kitchener Centre / -Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron-Bruce	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture and Food / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation
Mossop, Jennifer F.(L)	Stoney Creek	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Culture
Munro, Julia (PC)	York North / -Nord	
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (L)	Sault Ste Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Parsons, Ernie (L)	Prince Edward-Hastings	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Transports
Patten, Richard (L)	Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Education / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de l'Éducation
Peters, Hon / L'hon Steve (L)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation
Peterson, Tim (L)	Mississauga South / -Sud	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Tourism and Recreation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs
Phillips, Hon / L'hon Gerry (L)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches-East York / Beaches-York-Est	
Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra (L)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / -Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children's Services / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Services à l'enfance
Racco, Mario G. (L)	Thornhill	
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London-Fanshawe	
Ramsay, Hon / L'hon David (L)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds-Grenville	
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph-Wellington	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / -Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Consumer and Business Services / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises
Smith, Monique (L)	Nipissing	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Smitherman, Hon / L'hon George (L)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Sorbara, Hon / L'hon Greg (L) Sterling, Norman W. (PC)	Vaughan-King-Aurora Lanark-Carleton	Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances
Takhar, Hon / L'hon Harinder S. (L)	Mississauga Centre / -Centre	Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Tascona, Joseph N. (PC)	Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Van Bommel, Maria (L)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs (Rural) / adjointe parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales (Secteur rural)
Watson, Hon / L'hon Jim (L)	Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises
Wilkinson, John (L)	Perth-Middlesex	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener-Waterloo	
Wong, Tony C. (L)	Markham	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	Don Valley West / -Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Zimmer, David (L)	Willowdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Attorney General / adjoint parlementaire au procureur général

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Dominic Agostino, Lorenzo Berardinetti,
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Ernie Parsons, Shafiq Qadri, Laurie Scott,
Monique Smith, Joseph N. Tascona
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