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Wednesday 4 February 2004

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(Hansard)**

Mercredi 4 février 2004

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

Pre-budget consultations

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Consultations prébudgétaires

Chair: Pat Hoy
Clerk: Katch Koch

Président : Pat Hoy
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Wednesday 4 February 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES

Mercredi 4 février 2004

The committee met at 0900 in Days Inn and Conference Centre, Timmins.

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

The Chair (Mr Pat Hoy): The standing committee on finance and economic affairs will come to order. The committee is pleased to be in Timmins today.

I would call forward our first presenters, the Northeastern Catholic District School Board.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Chair—come on forward, Colleen; don't be shy. Just as you're walking up, I'm killing time—I would welcome the committee to the city of Timmins. It's always good to see that committees are prepared to travel, and we're looking forward to the deliberations. For those people watching, in case you don't know, this is a standing committee of the assembly, which means this committee has some weight. On the right of the Chair, Mr Hoy, are the Liberal members of the committee. The Tories are over here. They are not here yet, but I'm sure they will be here. New Democrats are over here.

You've got your time to present. We just want to welcome you, and welcome the committee to the city.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr Bisson. It's not a point of order, but it was a point of great interest.

NORTHEASTERN CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: You have 20 minutes for your presentation. You may use time within that 20 minutes for questions if you so desire. I would ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording, Hansard.

Ms Colleen Landers: Thank you. I'm Colleen Landers. I'm the chair of the Northeastern Catholic District School Board. To my right are Larry Yaguchi, our director of education, and Gina Malciw, who is our director of finance. I thank you for the opportunity to present today on behalf of the students of the Northeastern Catholic District School Board.

We span approximately 25,000 kilometres, with schools from Kapuskasing to Cobalt, including 12 elementary schools and one secondary school, which is in Timmins. Our schools are spread over the district as follows: We have one school in Kap, JK to 8; one school

in Cochrane, JK to 8; one school in Iroquois Falls, which is dual-tracked, French immersion and English, JK to 8. In Timmins we have one school which is JK to 8, French immersion only; one school JK to 6, English only; O'Gorman Intermediate, our intermediate school, JK to 8, dual-tracked, English and French immersion; and O'Gorman High School, 9 to 12. St Joseph, which is JK to 6, is in South Porcupine, which is about a 10- to 15-minute drive from here. Kirkland Lake has two schools. One school is JK to 3, dual-tracked. It's our new small school. We've just started that and our parents are very excited about sending their children to a small school. We have Sacred Heart, which is 4 to 8, dual-tracked. Englehart has one school, JK to 8; New Liskeard has one school, JK to 8; and Cobalt has one school, JK to 8. As you see, we have a lot of single-school towns, with the exception of Timmins and Kirkland Lake. Our elementary schools have an enrolment of about 2,537 students, and we have about 374 at our secondary school.

Since the inception of the funding model, we have had difficulties in some areas that we feel need to be addressed. Some of these areas are transportation funding, compensation, school operation, technology, full-time JK and K, and I'm going to throw in the grants for English as a second language for the native students.

New incentives introduced by the government come with no monies, so what you do is you have to take your coppers and pay for them. New incentives should come with the money to implement them. We should not have to go into our coppers to implement things that are mandated by government, such things as criminal reference checks. The cost for that is enormous. Teacher performance appraisals and PSAB accounting requirements: Again, the cost is enormous. If this government is going to mandate incentives, then the dollars need to come with them.

The Northeastern Catholic District School Board does acknowledge the improvements made in recent years for funding to education, such as the rural and remote funding and, most recently, the announcement of the \$112 million to improve student literacy. Both of those really have helped us, and we thank you for that.

Compensation: The board will be negotiating with their teachers over the next few months. As you know, all contracts in the province of Ontario are opened as of this year. This is something the previous government did, and they are telling us that we have to do three-year contracts.

Although there were increases provided for 3%, increases moved forward and they did not address the gaps that have existed for years between provincial allocations and boards' actual costs. Compensation also includes benefits, which have gone up considerably, especially health benefits. That is a cost to the boards.

Benchmarks need to be increased for salary purposes to align with actual salaries. Without changes to these benchmarks, we fall further behind or have to make up the difference from other areas. Our board does take money out of administration and put it back in the classroom. I know we're one of the few, but we do, and we're very proud of that. Therefore, we recommend that employee compensation benchmarks for teaching and non-teaching staff be amended to reflect more realistically school boards' costs. That to us is very important, particularly with us going into negotiations at this time.

Average per-pupil credit load: The secondary curriculum provides for a graduate course expectancy of approximately 30 credits. This is an average of 7.5 credits per year. Students may take additional credits. We're not funded for those additional credits. The foundation grant currently provides funding for the number of secondary school teachers required when students take an average of 7.2 credits, which was the government average in 1997 and has not been changed.

Through the teacher qualification and experience grant, additional funding is provided to a board where its average secondary school credit load exceeds 7.2 credits, up to a board average of 7.5 credits. Our board average is 7.5, and there are some boards that have 7.6. So we pay for the difference.

Students sometimes want to take some extra credits. Particularly with the four-year stream now, you have students taking extra credits. Therefore, we recommend that the credit load factor within the teacher qualification and experience be adjusted to recognize the actual average per-pupil credit load per board.

Full-time JK and K: In northeastern Ontario, we have offered full-time JK and K even though we're not funded for it totally. We feel that with the new government's view that investments in our preschool children are smart investments—we thought that before, and we have spent that money on our children.

With the curriculum being squashed the way it is into four years, children at the lower levels need to learn more and be prepared to enter high school. Therefore, we think that the JK and K years are good preparation for social aspects, for the fact that children learn the basics, because many children come at different levels to the school, and grade 1 is where they fall behind. So the JK and K are important years. They pay off with better learners, healthier children, more secure families and a more productive economy.

Early childhood education is critical to the future learning success of children in elementary and secondary schools. As suggested by the Royal Commission on Learning, savings from the elimination of the fifth year of secondary school could be utilized to pay for the

additional costs of the expansion of the kindergarten programs. The overall provincial decline in enrolment would provide savings in staff costs, as well as additional pupil places, which could be utilized to accommodate full-time junior and senior kindergarten programs for those boards that choose to offer them.

These programs could be offered on a graduated basis, allowing their introduction to coincide with the availability of suitable accommodation and qualified teachers. Therefore, we would recommend that the Ministry of Education look at providing funding for full-time junior and senior kindergarten programs if boards wish to offer these programs. I think it's a great investment in the future and I think the children do better in school once they are in the programs at JK and K. We have proof to show that.

Technology: You're in northern Ontario and, as you see, the vast spaces between communities, if you drove the highways, are trees. With our one-room schools, in between, it's trees.

Funding in the area needs to be improved so that the boards can replace obsolete computer hardware and/or expand their inventory to meet the growing needs and expectations related to the current curriculum and to life in an information society.

The high cost of infrastructure and line charges for access to the Internet have put a strain on resources in northern Ontario. In our board, we have put money into a WAN—we have our own WAN—so we can video conference between our schools.

Our superintendent of education—we have one; we're very lean at the top—is on the highway all the time. Our principals, in order to meet, are on the highway. We need our principals in our schools—that's where they belong. So we do a lot of our meetings by video conference now in order to save dollars, not only for the dollar fact but for the fact of having our principals in our schools where they belong, having our teachers in our schools. So if we want to offer some kind of education, we use video conferencing, but that's a big cost in northern Ontario.

0910

You have multiple boards having their own WAN, whereas maybe not only for education but for others, they could be joined together so that there would be a WAN line of some kind funded by the government in northern Ontario, so that all these dollars are structured into maybe something else.

We recommend that the funding for technology be increased to allow the school board to maintain, update and introduce new hardware and software. We're in the technology age. Our children in JK, K and grade 1 are on computers, and they're happy to be on computers. You have children who are three and four who can input into a computer. So if we're going to do that, then we have to keep up with the technology at the school level in order to be able to provide them with that resource.

We recommend that funding be provided for professional development for teaching and non-teaching staff in the introduction of new equipment and hardware.

You have programs that you purchase, but then there is also the training that has to go along, and that costs dollars. So I think the government needs to look at the funding on technology.

School operations: This is an area that the board struggles with each year, and it's not just our board. The benchmarks need to be adjusted to reflect the real cost. The hydro in northern Ontario, the gas and renovation costs exceed those of the southern Ontario boards. Costs have been increasing over the last few years, but the funding has not changed. It costs more to heat our schools. We have 40 and 50 below zero here. Our heating costs are far higher.

For effective learning, students need to be in a clean, warm and safe environment. It's fine to say that you need to educate your children, but you have to have a building around them to educate them in. That building has to be sound. There is no funding for us to be able to keep our schools in that kind of situation.

Transportation: You rode in a nice, luxurious bus last night. That's not what our kids ride in. They ride in yellow school buses that have difficulty heating. Busing is cancelled because at 37 below, as we spoke about with some of you last night, the buses can't run. We have very big costs in transportation in northeastern Ontario. We have been awaiting a new funding model since amalgamation in 1998. Whatever we get from you, our bus drivers get. We don't keep any of the coppers. Our bus drivers are having difficulty even operating on those coppers. The ministry has given boards additional funds to cover some of the costs, but does not address the issue adequately. A new funding formula is required sooner rather than later to put back some stability into the system.

We are one of the first boards in Ontario where all four boards have the same bus going down the same street at the same stops. We have a joint transportation committee that has been working together for the last 15 years because it's the only way we can spend our money wisely. We do it ourselves. We have our own policy that is now going to be passed by all four boards. We've just implemented bus stop systems to save and be more effective. So we're not wasting our transportation money. We are probably very efficient. We meet the requirements, I think, of what the consortium is supposed to be without even going to an outside agency to do it. We've done it ourselves. It's not often you see four boards who agree on the same policy, the same bus stops. We're doing it because of our children and because we want to use our money wisely.

I really feel that you need to look at what the actual costs of transportation are and fund those costs so that we can have bus companies that are willing to provide that busing, because if they can't pay their bills, they're not going to provide the busing. We don't want money for ourselves; we want money that will cover the cost of good transportation.

I want to add to it—it's not on the form—English-as-a-second-language grants. In northeastern Ontario we

have a lot of native children. They do not live on reserves; they live in the communities. They come to our schools speaking Cree, not English. They end up not qualifying for English as a second language. The native children then end up coming to school, not understanding, not being able to learn, being behavioural problems, or being identified and IPRC'd. How do you think a child feels in classroom when they do not understand the teacher, do not understand what is being taught? What ends up happening is they sometimes become behavioural problems.

Why can our native children not qualify for ESL grants when they do not speak English? You have to be an immigrant or you have to live on a reserve. It's wrong. They are the people who founded our country and have been here for years. I think we're not being fair to our native children by not allowing them to qualify for grants as ESL students. You only need to provide it for the first two or three years. Then they understand; then you probably will save with them not being IPRC'd or not being behavioural children. I think that's something the government needs to look at. I think that because you are an immigrant or because you live on a reserve—there should be another aspect that if you're a native child and English isn't your first language, you should be able to access that grant. I feel very strongly on that.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you for taking time to discuss some of these issues with us. On the whole we are pleased that the funding formula has allowed us to put more monies into our schools for our students. Perhaps some minor reshuffling of funds in combination with more flexibility will enhance funding for our students and staff to ensure equality and fairness.

We, at our board, make decisions for our children. We are five boards amalgamated into one. Whatever we do is for the betterment of children in our whole board, not just one community. I bring this to you, representing the trustees of our board. If you have any questions, feel free; we'll answer them.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation. We have two minutes per party and we'll begin with the official opposition.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Thank you very much for your presentation. It's a real pleasure to be here in Timmins and to meet, as we did last evening.

There are a couple of things. I want to commend you on the transportation coordination. That's the goal. You would think all boards would ultimately get over the politics of it all, and I commend you for doing that.

I also am a great believer in the computer thing. That's sort of my own personal background. I just want to make an observation here. I think, and I have said this quite loudly, that language and books are really the medium of learning. It's very important. I actually believe there should be no computers in the primary grades. You have to learn the mechanics of writing and interpreting sounds etc. After you've mastered those skills, then you need the technology. Part of that is that it's a social environment, it's interactive, and that is very important in the primary grades.

I may be alone on this and I'm not an educator but I have been a trustee for a couple of terms. We're dumping a lot of money into schools in the primary grades that I don't think is actually correctly used. The one thing you know about computers is that they're obsolete the day you buy them. So once you go down that route, and it's coming out of a book budget, you're really cheating them, for the very essence of learning is books. Computers are just a tool, like a calculator or a pencil, but the mind and the interpreting symbols, whether it's a six or a nine, are very important, and the small motor skills are absolutely critical. I don't know if it's that valuable. For someone who has a learning difficulty, I'm sure that lab learning with a computer is probably a helpful resource. You might want to respond to that.

I have a question on the ESL that may not be very popular as well. I've felt for a long time, having been a trustee, where we had a mixed board—we do have French-language schools and immersion schools, and there is a difference; I understand that. But we are dealing with multicultural issues—

The Chair: Please put your question, Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: My question is coming up.

The Chair: Your time has expired, so please put your question.

Mr O'Toole: This is the question: If you're looking at scarce resources—and in some of your schools you're offering, I see, dual-stream schools, that is, English, where you offer immersion programs, and also a French-language school or a parallel immersion school—

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): Is there a question now?

Mr O'Toole: Yes, the question is this—it's a very important question—why do we not have a system where, if you want to learn French, you go to a French-language school, and you provide the supports in the primary grades for children who have English as their first language, as you are suggesting for First Nations? What do you think of that idea?

The Chair: You may answer if you choose.

Mr Larry Yaguchi: I'm Larry Yaguchi. I would just say, first off and for the most part, there is a very important distinction between FSL, French immersion and a French-language program. They are and should be very different. I'm not going into it at length, but I would just say that they aren't the same.

0920

The Chair: We move to the NDP.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): Your presentation was excellent. I only have two minutes so I want to zero in on the children who speak Cree. Could you tell me how many there are? How widespread is this? Are there 20 children, 50 children, 100 children?

Ms Landers: In St Paul school here in Timmins, we have probably 15% of our 325 children who come into our school speaking Cree or one of the other dialects of the native children. So it's a large percentage. The reason they're mostly in St Paul is because of the fact that our other elementary school in Timmins is a French immer-

sion school, and for them to be able to handle three languages—they come into our English-speaking school first. It's not only our system; it's also the public system. At Timmins High and Vocational, which is the secondary school, I would imagine you have 150 to 200 children at that school who are native, who have sometimes come into the system late etc and do have a language difficulty.

Mr Prue: And no government in the past has ever given you money for ESL for those children?

Ms Landers: No, never. They do not qualify for that.

Mr Prue: That has to change.

Mr Yaguchi: If you go further to the northwest—I'm not too sure where your travels are going—you'll find that the population is even higher. You can have schools that may even be up to 50%.

The Chair: We'll move to the government.

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): Thank you, Ms Landers, for your presentation. It was certainly excellent. I know first hand the situation you're grappling with here in northern Ontario, having taught for the Algoma District School Board for 10 years. It's about a 10-hour drive across the board, so I certainly know first hand.

Let me make one comment first of all with respect to our government on education and the turmoil that has taken place over the last number of years. We want to build our relationship again and improve our relationship with our education stakeholders in this province. That's our commitment from our government, to do that.

You mentioned—and I certainly commend you—many of the initiatives that you're leading here in this province, trying to do the best for the young people in your communities. I certainly commend you on that.

You mentioned the amalgamation of the transit system among the boards. Are there any other areas that would allow you to share services among the boards in this area, that would give greater efficiency to what you do and allow money to be spent in other areas or other priorities that you may have?

Ms Landers: We have an education day where we share with the other boards, when we bring in PD for a large section. We've always done that. We share the cost then, and all the teachers are together. We have a group that we're working on right now. We were the lead board on this. We are working with the city, the hospital and everyone else on maybe buying our fuel together, some of our resources together. We've already taken that initiative. We are very forward in the fact that as many dollars as we can will go back in the classroom. We want to be inventive, so we have taken the lead on that. We've had four meetings with the city, some of the mines etc. Our director has been meeting with them to see if we can get better dollars if we buy more in bulk. So we are looking at those things. We've always been a very frugal and forward board.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Mr Chair, can I ask research to find out why native children who don't have English as their first language, as in the case

brought forward here, are not eligible for funding under the ESL model? Thank you.

Mr Prue: I wonder, on the same point, if I could also ask if you would research the number of children who exist. I think they're primarily in northern Ontario, but this is just one board. I think it would be instructive to know how many children are being denied this in Ontario.

The Chair: Research will do that for you.

TISDALE SCHOOL BUS LINES

The Chair: I call forward Tisdale School Bus Lines, please. Good morning. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. Within that 20 minutes, you may allow time for questions if you so desire. Please state your name for the purposes of Hansard.

Mr Ron Malette: My name is Ron Malette and I operate Tisdale School Bus Lines in South Porcupine, a company providing home-to-school transportation in the Timmins area for over 35 years. For myself and the other 30 operators in our district, seeing the smile of a young child, eagerly waiting to board the familiar yellow bus, emphasizes the passion we have for the industry. The enthusiasm expressed by their facial gestures, the warm hugs, the little stories they must tell, can only enhance our reason for being a service provider.

It was exactly 12 months ago today when I appeared before this committee as you prepared a report for the 2003 provincial budget. I want to begin my remarks, as I did in Sudbury, speaking as a school bus owner and operator.

This morning, 800,000 children in communities across this province, from remote towns and villages in the far northwest and northeast to suburban centres around the GTA, boarded the familiar yellow and black school bus for the ride to school; a trip they will repeat this afternoon; a trip that more than 1.5 million parents in Ontario expect will be safe, secure and on time.

Simply put, the educational day for many Ontario students starts with us and ends with us. We are a very small but very important partner in education. We transport 43% of all children enrolled in public education.

Since the early 1990s, parents, school boards and the members of our industry, many of whom operate small businesses, as I do, and employ over 15,000 Ontarians, have told successive governments that the provincially funded student transportation system needs their immediate attention and leadership.

For the past six years, the government has been studying student transportation. Elected legislators and bureaucrats repeatedly admit the current temporary model, in place since 1995, is unfair and inequitable.

Last June, the Ministry of Education released details of a new student transportation funding model which they propose to implement in September 2004, a mere seven months away. Since then, school boards and bus contractors have heard nothing as the ministry collects and studies data. Boards and contractors need an an-

nouncement from this government now. Boards must plan effectively for changes in policy, and contractors must determine impacts on our operations and take appropriate action.

As well, members will be aware of the report of the Education Equality Task Force in December 2002. That report recommended that the government commit \$691 million to school busing. Today, only \$651 million is provided in grants to school boards.

Demand for student transportation services increases steadily with enrolment growth and enrolment decline as well as curriculum or program requirements. You may have fewer students on the bus, but you still need the bus to go to the end of the route to get the most remote child. As an example, we have 17 secondary school students, who rely on our service who live in Gogama, 125 kilometres from school.

Financial pressures on the school bus industry caused by manufacturing cost increases, rising insurance premiums and fuel price volatility persist. As well, due to provincial underfunding, many contractors have not received rate increases for a number of years and cannot afford to pay skilled and dedicated drivers what they should be paid. I have, for consideration purposes, outlined some of the most significant cost data that reflect the actual costs. I won't go through those for you, but you can see them in front of you.

I would like to add that cost pressures in northern Ontario are much more significant, and not only in our operations. Schools also face the same harsh realities of life in the north. In the last month, we have seen temperatures in the minus 40-degree range—add to that wind chill values that reflect a minus 50-degree or minus 55-degree environment. As the costs increase for heating schools, so do our facility costs. Can you imagine starting up a bus at 4:30 in the morning and having it run until 9:15 am after the morning route? Energy costs to provide current to the engine block heater becomes a 24-hour expense. The monthly expenditure can be as high as \$1,500 for our fleet of 21 buses.

I urge this committee to recommend that the proposed new student transportation funding model be implemented as planned this September and funded as recommended by Dr. Rozanski; that is, \$691 million plus benchmark increases from August 2002. Implementing a new funding model without the \$40 million will continue inequities across the province.

Excellence for All: The Ontario Liberal Plan for Education contains the following statement:

“School boards in rural and northern regions need funding that reflects the transportation and other costs of far-flung regions.

“We understand that schools in urban, rural, suburban and northern areas have different needs. The funding they receive should reflect the needs of those communities.”

As a small bus operator, I submit this is an affordable promise to keep to ensure that the 800,000 children continue to receive safe, secure and on-time transportation.

0930

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation. We have about four minutes per party. We'll begin with the NDP.

Mr Prue: In the last couple of years, we've all seen the cost of gas—they're probably gas buses, not diesel.

Mr Malette: They're diesel.

Mr Prue: Oh, they're diesel. That seems to be a little bit more stable. Costs of that kind have gone up quite significantly. Has there been any adjustment from either the past government or from this one for increased fuel costs?

Mr Malette: There has been some adjustment, which was provided two years ago. It was quite minimal, actually, but I think the Ministry of Education is aware of the costing model that's out there. They need to address those issues.

Mr Prue: How about the bus drivers? Have their wages gone up in the last number of years?

Mr Malette: They have not kept up with the rate of inflation.

Mr Prue: When was the last time bus drivers in your company got a raise?

Mr Malette: About two years ago, and prior to that was probably eight years before that.

Mr Prue: Can you be blunt and tell us how much a bus driver who carries very precious cargo gets?

Mr Malette: Today they're getting around \$42 per day.

Mr Prue: Per day?

Mr Malette: Per day.

Mr Prue: How many hours does that involve?

Mr Malette: Drivers work between three hours and four hours a day.

Mr Prue: That's not much if that's their whole job.

Mr Malette: That's right. What's happening in our industry is that a lot of drivers have to go out and look for secondary income. Being dual-income families today, a lot of drivers are not interested in working for three or four hours a day; they need full-time employment. It's becoming more of a challenge for us to hire good, competent employees to run our buses and ensure the safety of the children.

Mr Prue: You've mentioned the figure \$691 million versus \$651 million. That's \$40 million. That's a lot of money, I guess, but it's not that high a percentage. Have you received any indication from the present government that they want to move on Dr Rozanski's recommendation?

Mr Malette: We haven't had anything confirmed, no.

Mr Prue: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll move to the government.

Mr Colle: We certainly heard from the chair of the board, Ms Landers, how northeastern Ontario is maybe a model for the rest of Ontario in terms of co-operation. You essentially pick up children from all four different boards?

Mr Malette: Yes, we do. I must tell you that this board is very diligent in ensuring there is good co-

operation between the four boards and the bus operators to ensure there is no wasteful spending on the buses.

Mr Colle: Do you deal with four different people, one at each board, in terms of your company, or do you deal with one person assigned from the four boards? How does that work?

Mr Malette: The four boards have one manager of transportation who oversees day-to-day operations, and we report to that individual.

Mr Colle: So there is one individual whom they have assigned?

Mr Malette: That's correct.

Mr Colle: You think that works very efficiently?

Mr Malette: Extremely well.

Mr Colle: OK. The other thing in terms of cost pressures: I've been talking to some of the bus drivers and some of the school bus companies in southern Ontario, and the real cost pressure they're having is insurance. What's happening with insurance costs in north-eastern Ontario?

Mr Malette: They're very reflective of what's happening in the south. If I may add, for your information—you talked about driver compensation—crossing guards in the GTA get paid more than school bus drivers do, and I think that's a real issue that needs to be addressed. I believe the drivers have a lot more responsibility out there with the care and control of those children.

Mr Colle: And about insurance costs?

Mr Malette: Oh, I'm sorry. Insurance costs are very reflective of the situation in southern Ontario. Insurance rates are going up 200% or 300%, and it's becoming unmanageable for us. As an example, back in 1996, I would have been paying probably around \$16,000 or \$18,000 as a premium and today it's over \$70,000 for that same premium.

Mr Colle: How many providers of insurance are there up here?

Mr Malette: There are only two providers who are willing to do school buses in North America. One is Lumbard and the other is St Paul's, which is a US firm.

Mr Colle: So there are two left. OK. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr Wilkinson, did you have a question?

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): That was my question, actually, on insurance.

The Chair: We'll move to the official opposition.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation. The busing issue and getting some standards and uniformity has been an issue for a long time. It seems that this part of Ontario has certainly done the job.

I guess the simple request here is that you're basically asking them to come forward with the final \$40 million. What we did over the last two or three years, as you know, is the \$30 million, but it was never core funding, it was kind of one-time funding. So the operators were operating in a kind of wishful frame of reference, having no ability to make longer-term commitments and decisions. It must be very difficult. I gather that's what you really want.

I'm going to ask the research staff—we've heard the ESL issue, the transportation issue, the technology issue, the resources, the costs of fuel and heating and all that. The costs here are higher per student; there's no question about it. In fact, if you look at per capita spending, the education demands are absolutely astronomical, and I can't disagree with many of them either. I would like the research staff to tell us what is the cost per student in a large board like Toronto and the cost per student here in northern Ontario, whether it's French-language or English-language systems. It would be interesting to have a comparison. Then, if you could, break that out: how much per student on transportation costs, because everybody's bused here—I mean, you can't walk 125 miles to your school. In fact, how do you get there by bus? Do you have anything to respond to that? Because it is equity and there are disadvantages here technically by distance and the rest.

Mr Malette: A decade ago, the Ministry of Education used to fund boards in northern Ontario at a premium, 15% over boards in southern Ontario. The government removed that 15%, and that was—

Mr Bisson: Was that on transportation alone?

Mr Malette: I believe it was across the board, and that was a very difficult position for us to be in. It put a lot of operators out of business. You have to remember that if you want to keep the children safe, secure and on time, you have to make sure there's a safety net to ensure the operators are compensated fairly. I don't see that happening right now. Mind you, I must tell you that we're a very dedicated group who provide service to the school boards in northern Ontario; probably more dedicated than you'll see anywhere else in the province. Maybe it's a northern thing.

Mr O'Toole: Does any capital money flow at any time, or do you finance the equipment yourself? Is that it?

Mr Malette: Yes, we actually have to beg, borrow and steal from our banker. Bankers are not very interested in looking at us right now, because it's not a very profitable venture. If they don't see any margin in there, they're not going to want to lend you money.

Mr O'Toole: Were there ever any capital grants?

Mr Malette: No, there haven't been.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning.

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS'
FEDERATION OF ONTARIO,
ONTARIO NORTH EAST LOCAL

The Chair: I call on the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario North East.

Good morning. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. You may allow time for questions within that 20 minutes, if you so desire. I ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of Hansard. You may begin.

Mr David Livingston: Good morning, Chair and members of the standing committee. My name is David

Livingston. I'm the current vice-president of the Ontario North East local of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. I am certainly pleased to be here this morning and to have the opportunity to forward our thoughts regarding fair and equitable funding on behalf of the students enrolled in the publicly funded schools of north-eastern Ontario.

We, as teachers and union members, acknowledge the incredible cost of adequately funding education in Ontario. We acknowledge that every board of education—and District School Board Ontario North East is no exception—is, in fact, a multi-million-dollar enterprise. It is critical that we ensure that funding allocation delivers the best bang for the buck. We welcome this consultative process provided by the Liberal government of Ontario. Please give due consideration to the suggestions put forth on behalf of the elementary students and teachers of the District School Board Ontario North East.

As mentioned previously, we acknowledge that our board of education manages a multi-million-dollar organization. It must also be acknowledged that the well-qualified teachers who staff the schools from Temagami to Hearst represent the resource base of this organization. Without them, the system would not function.

0940

As a union, we negotiate fair salaries for teachers and attempt to ensure that teachers' working conditions are of high quality. We also maintain that good working conditions for teachers and positive learning environments for students are synonymous.

However, it is not possible for us to negotiate other terms regarding the allocation of funding to elementary education at the local level. Therefore, today we advocate for students and teachers by directing the provincial government to address and eliminate the unfair gap in funding that continues to exist between elementary and secondary student grants. Those of us who work with young students strongly object to funding that considers secondary students to be more worthy than their younger brothers and sisters. The gap between elementary and secondary school funding is an offensive \$796 million. This inequity must be eliminated, and not to the detriment of secondary school funding.

Additionally, the disparity in class size between elementary and secondary classrooms sits at 2.5 students per average class size. A government that pledged smaller class sizes for primary students cannot allow this disadvantage for the elementary system to continue. We cannot stress too clearly, however, that the reduction in class size must not be funded at the expense of the salaries, benefits and working conditions of classroom teachers.

Teachers in our system spend countless dollars personally enriching programs in our schools. My colleague Ms Rowlandson will be speaking to that after I'm done here. They spend countless hours orchestrating fundraising to support computer programs, library collections and school excursions. This is a symptom of a system that is currently under-funded.

Let's speak for a moment about specialist teachers. In this school board, they have gone the way of the dinosaur. I, for one, was at one time a librarian at my school. I'm now a special ed teacher. We have very few music teachers in our system, librarians are virtually non-existent, computer teachers are an endangered species, and guidance teachers are extinct.

The loss of these special teachers is tragic to the system. Their special gifts often bring learning to life for some young people. In addition, without these special teachers, it is difficult for school boards to provide classroom teachers with the kind of preparation time that results in high-quality classroom experiences for children. Adequate preparation time is also critical to the effective implementation of the myriad of new programs, such as early math and reading which are now being mandated by the Ministry of Education.

In a different venue, we ask that this government consider the \$50 million spent every year on the EQAO standardized testing program. As elementary teachers, we know that we are best qualified through ongoing and reflective evaluation and anecdotal observation to assess student learning. We assert that the devotion to standardized testing, initiated by the predecessor government, has been destructive to the system. Schools are now driven by improvement plans that coalesce all teaching toward improving test scores. The whole child is often lost in the shuffle.

We also question how EQAO standards are set when such international standards as those used on the OECD program for international student achievement position Ontario's 15-year-olds third only to those in Finland and Alberta, while our own provincial tests have large numbers of the same student population failing to achieve provincial standards.

Standardized testing and quality education are not synonymous, and we ask this government to question whether \$50 million, plus the huge amount of money spent in in-service for and the delivery of the testing itself, is money well spent.

I would also like to refer the Chair and the committee to President Emily Noble's nine-page submission entitled *Rebuilding Ontario's Education System*. It's available on the ETFO Web site at www.etfo.on.ca.

At this time, I'd like to turn it over to my colleague Paulette Rowlandson.

Ms Paulette Rowlandson: Good morning, Chair and members of the committee.

Teachers have been subsidizing their classrooms for the government for years. The average spent in an elementary classroom in a year is well more than \$500. Items purchased range from bulletin board displays to class sets of glue sticks. Other items are markers for overheads and chart paper, class sets of scissors, staplers, colouring pencils, pencils and pens. Some of these items we need to provide for our classrooms because the boards are buying from the least expensive suppliers to save money, while other items are just not available in the school supply room.

When substandard materials are purchased by the boards of education to economize, many of these consumables are useless. The pencils break every time you sharpen them, and the leads fall out. The sharpeners we have eat up the pencils or the sharpeners' handles break off. Substandard erasers are hard and leave black smudges instead of erasing properly. Most of our pens are not functioning. We are left with boxes full of unusable pens, pencils and erasers that sit on shelves or are discarded because of poor quality.

Supplies available in the schools are unreliable. Therefore, your dedicated teachers go out and purchase pencils and sharpeners that will do the job, and erasers and pens that that will write to alleviate all the frustrations in the classroom.

Also, numerous items that are needed for the curricula are purchased on a regular basis by your teachers. For instance, in the new math curriculum, concrete materials such as counters, fact flash cards, pulleys, metric scales, measuring tapes, graphing activities, to name a few, are not provided.

The schools do not have adequate funds to purchase these materials that are needed to support the program. Therefore, the teachers go out and purchase these resources with their own money.

Also, in the social studies curriculum, we have a section about the peoples of the world and of life in their communities. However, textbooks showing the peoples, their clothing, their homes or their foods are not provided. The teachers must then purchase the necessary items if they are to be able to successfully teach these lessons.

The arts awaken and develop the creativity of our students and our children. Thus, a large variety of supplies such as paints, sponge or foam pieces, among others, are needed to expose our children, our students to textured art lessons.

Another area that teachers put a lot of personal money into because of a lack of government funding is the technical department. Our schools are becoming more and more technically-oriented. Teachers are now required to access the Internet for updated new resources. Does the board provide financial compensation to the teachers who subscribe to the Internet? Do they compensate the teachers for subscribing to an educational site that will provide numerous handouts and exercises that will cut down on the amount of hours spent devising these activities for the classroom?

Also, teachers are required to do report cards on computers. Does the board provide teachers with functioning computers? No. The teachers are expected to have computers and to use them for school purposes, but boards do not have sufficient funding to pay for computer software, let alone for printer ink cartridges that are used up when you photocopy a whole class set of report cards at an average cost of \$40.

Numerous teachers have had problems with their personal home computers after installing the program containing the start-up information for report cards. Does the

school or school board pay for the technicians needed to repair these computers? No. A home visit by a technician is not cheap and can run you into hundreds of dollars. On an average it's an hour for a visit from a technician.

Are all teachers on staff provided with functional computers at work? No. In this technological age, more funding is needed for our schools.

Teachers are a conscientious body of people who take their work to heart and want to ensure that they have all the necessary tools to provide their students with the best available learning environment and education. That is why teachers have been subsidizing the education system by paying for many of the supplies required for their work.

In today's age, we are also dealing with a student population that needs to be motivated, either for learning purposes or for behavioural purposes. Children more than ever require concrete resources and motivational items to learn. These concrete resources and motivational items comprising a variety of manipulatives, stickers, prizes, treats, all add to the program and enhance the learning of the students. They are a must in today's classroom. Are these provided to teachers? No.

Today, I have tried to make you aware of a few problems that exist in our education system. That is why government funding needs to be increased to cover and include all the necessary supplies that teachers require for their classrooms so that our children can be well equipped to survive and function in today's society.

A point to note: In the section of the employee expenses in the income tax guide, there is a paragraph to the fact that teachers are allowed to claim consumable expenses. Why doesn't the government make it obligatory for school boards to sign the form, the employee expenses form T-2200, so that teachers are able at least to claim their expenses?

Thank you.

The Chair: Does that conclude your presentation?

Mr Livingston: Yes, it does.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per party. We begin this rotation with the government.

0950

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): Good morning. Thank you for making this presentation. I've thoroughly enjoyed listening to all the presenters this morning. I have a particular interest in music, and while you addressed a lot of the supplies, could you tell me what state your instruments are in, or do you have a music program? Is that a part of the daily activity for the children? Music has been proven to stimulate the mind and the spirit. Could you just expand on that, please?

Ms Rowlandson: In the school that I'm in we have a music teacher. Materials are not readily available. A lot of the equipment has come from year to year and is becoming older. This music teacher will be retiring this year. We have no idea whether she will be replaced. The word is that there are no funds available to replace the music teacher, so the program that we have—20 minutes

with music twice a week for each classroom—will probably disappear next year.

Mr Livingston: The school that I'm in is a 7-8 school. It's the only 7-8 school in the board. We've had a music program since 1970 when I first arrived on the scene. The instruments were purchased probably back in 1975-76 when the instrumental program started and very few of them have been replaced. You can imagine what kind of shape some of them are in. But they still offer the instrumental program, along with choral music as well.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll move to the official opposition.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I'd like to thank the elementary teachers for testifying this morning. Much of your presentation focused on subsidizing equipment for the students. Two questions on that one: Are the parents ever asked to buy a pencil or a pen for their child or to supply that? Secondly, the average subsidy teachers are throwing in is \$500 on those items, plus you listed expenses for teachers—Internet costs, use of home computer, sometimes having a technician coming into the home. What would be the total? Are you asking for the finance committee to provide that money directly to teachers? I know you mentioned the tax write-off option as well.

Ms Rowlandson: To answer your first question, we do ask parents to provide pencils and other supplies for their children. We have families who do not have the means to purchase these for their child, therefore we still have to provide some for the classroom. In a way we're asking that more funding be given to the schools so that the school boards may provide maybe a little budget per classroom teacher so that they can have access to that amount of money and use it in their classroom for the year as they see fit to provide these supplies.

Also, it would be a very good idea to have the government allow the teachers to claim these on their income tax. It would cover some of it, not the whole portion. I gave you a rough idea of \$500. I'm a core French teacher and when I started teaching there was nothing provided supply-wise in my classroom. I've had to go out and buy it. You can't teach a lesson on food or any of these things without concrete materials, because a picture just doesn't say it. Some of the kids, especially our Cree children, don't even have an idea of what a watermelon is, apples or oranges. I'm not kidding when I say this.

These sets of manipulatives cost \$200 or \$300, so if we are here to train some of these—I spent over \$1,000, \$2,000 when I began my teaching. These consumables are used by the kids. Eventually, they wear out, they disappear, they are broken, so therefore you are continually replacing them. If the government would tell school boards, "Sign these expense sheets," that would be one way, plus increasing the funding in the schools so that the boards are able to provide functioning computers to the teachers at the school. I've already replaced my hard drive. It cost me over \$500. I've had a technician twice come in to repair my home computer. I worked at school for two years with my home computer there before I got one provided to me by the board.

The Chair: We'll move to the NDP.

Mr Bisson: Thank you very much. Just for members of the committee, most of our reserves here are fly-in communities, so the cost of transporting food and essentials is out of this world. They're not kidding when they say that you'll get kids who'll come down this way by choice in order to attend secondary and a lot of them haven't seen a lot of the foods that we're used to because of the cost. Even if they're in the store, in many cases, if you are in Peawanuck it's probably kind of old and you wouldn't want to eat it. So most of the kids wouldn't know. Quite frankly, my good friend Mike has seen that.

First of all, I notice you have broccoli.

Ms Rowlandson: No, it's asparagus.

Mr Bisson: Asparagus, I should say. I have to go back to school.

Ms Rowlandson: See, you have to come back to my class here.

Mr Bisson: If I had gone to your class, maybe I would have liked asparagus much earlier in life. I'm a convert and I commend you for showing the kids—

Ms Rowlandson: I grabbed this one because it fit in my container.

Mr Bisson: The T-2200: You were saying that you are allowed to deduct on your federal income tax. Explain to me what you were getting at.

Ms Rowlandson: It says in the bulletin, in the guide, that teachers are allowed to claim consumables.

Mr Bisson: As a federal deduction?

Ms Rowlandson: As an income tax deduction, yes.

Mr Bisson: But federal, not provincial.

Ms Rowlandson: Yes.

Mr Prue: Close to.

Mr Bisson: Close to. But the problem is the boards won't sign it?

Ms Rowlandson: The boards do not want to sign them. We've asked principals to sign them. They send it off to the boards, and the boards' directors, the board persons in charge of finances do not want to sign these.

Mr Bisson: So you can't file it as an expense under a T-2200 without the signature?

Ms Rowlandson: That's right.

Mr Bisson: OK.

The Chair: Mr Prue, very brief.

Mr Prue: Yes, very brief. I just want to get back to the EQAO. That's \$50 million. I think all of the teachers' groups are unanimous: If you're going to save some money, that's the place to save it. My question to you is, if this continues and the boards don't have any money, what is the purpose of the EQAO? If they're to recommend improvements and then there is no money to make the improvements, what is the purpose of that board? I don't understand. Maybe you don't either, but I'd like to hear that.

Mr Livingston: Not being an expert on the EQAO, I would say that their primary function, as I see it as a union person, is in the testing area. If they don't have that mandate anymore, I'm at a loss as to what they would—I don't know.

Mr Prue: OK.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning.

CITY OF TIMMINS

The Chair: I would call on the city of Timmins to come forward, please. Good morning.

Mr Victor Power: Thank you, Mr Chair. My name is Victor Power, mayor of the city of Timmins. "Power" is spelled like in hydroelectric. With me is Mr Jack Watson, who is our city clerk and acting city administrator.

First of all, I'd like to thank you for holding this hearing right here in Timmins, which, as you all know, is really the capital of northern Ontario and the largest city of Canada in terms of geography. That gives you an idea as to why we have some of the needs that we're going to be talking about.

The city of Timmins has four major points that we would like to discuss this morning: a new deal for Ontario cities; the financial impact of transferred provincial highways to the city of Timmins; the continuation of the northern Ontario heritage fund—capital assistance to enhance northern communities program; and also the need for long-term-care beds.

First of all, the city of Timmins supports the request of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for a new deal for cities. Ontario's municipalities must have adequate, predictable and stable revenue that reflects the true cost of funding local municipal priorities. All municipalities, regardless of their size or location, face fiscal challenges. New funding plans must be implemented through co-operation with the federal and provincial governments to provide political autonomy and revenue-raising flexibility. Municipalities are left far too reliant on property tax, a poor alternative, since it tends to lag population growth and has only an indirect connection to economic activity.

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Municipal revenues are not keeping up with the cost of living, let alone the service responsibilities. The city of Timmins understands the province's fiscal challenges, but Timmins has been facing similar pressures for years. Sustainable solutions must be found to address the growing fiscal imbalance. The limited municipal revenues are proving inadequate for municipalities to meet the burgeoning local responsibilities for such areas as public transportation, waste management, water purification, public safety, and roads.

We urge the provincial government to work with the federal government to ensure that Ontario's municipalities have the authority, autonomy and revenue necessary to fix its infrastructure. The city of Timmins supports AMO's position, which is to pursue a tripartite agreement with the provincial and federal government that would improve cooperation, enshrine consultation processes into legislation and provide a basis for sourcing more stable and predictable sustainable revenue.

In addition, the city of Timmins would not want to see any federal funding provided to municipalities off-set by reduced provincial transfers. These new federal initiatives should not proceed without provincial agreements that there will be no clawbacks on provincial funds that help municipalities.

Municipalities have been downloaded the responsibility to maintain former provincial highways. The cost of maintaining local roadways and the former provincial highways and bridges are now funded through property taxes.

The city of Timmins supports AMO's position that a share of existing gasoline taxes should be given to municipalities to help fix their infrastructure. This is based on the premise that provincial and federal gas taxes are collected to fund roadway construction and maintenance. The city of Timmins believes that there is a need to study the ability of municipalities to fund and manage responsibilities that have been downloaded on to them, such as provincial highways.

The city of Timmins is struggling with a pressing need for investment and new infrastructure. Property taxes alone cannot possibly finance the needed investment in roads, public transit, water and waste water treatment. Significant investment is needed from both the provincial and federal governments.

The following is a summary of the provincial highways transferred to the city of Timmins. I won't itemize each one, but you came in from the airport last night, and one of the roads listed here is the airport road. That's in terrible condition. All the other roads listed here are in just as bad a shape.

You'll see at the bottom of page 6 a table. In 1997 and 1998, the province downloaded highways to some cities—not to all, but to some. Timmins received, as you can see, 86.8 kilometres of highway. Sudbury received 14 kilometres of highway. Thunder Bay received nine kilometres of highway. North Bay and Sault Ste Marie did not receive any kilometres of highway. I'm not here to suggest that they should; I'm only pointing out that we did receive more than our share.

The city of Timmins is currently maintaining these highways but cannot afford to assume the annual estimated \$4 million for capital construction upgrading and maintenance costs without major increases in municipal taxes.

The situation is compounded by the fact that for the past six years no capital construction improvements have been completed on the 87 kilometres of transferred provincial highways other than those on the connecting link highways. The condition of some of the transferred highways is reaching a level of critical concern to the city. We are particularly concerned about the safety of our residents, as well as visitors to the city, travelling on these transferred provincial highways.

The city of Timmins does not have the financial resources required to reconstruct the transferred provincial highways to a level that would ensure the continued safety of the public. MTO provided \$1 million in

1997 for the maintenance of transferred highways for a period of three years. By the end of 1998, these funds were expended. Since then, all maintenance has been completed and paid for by the city of Timmins.

The city of Timmins is proposing as part of the new deal for northern Ontario the continuation of the northern Ontario heritage fund capital assistance to enhance northern communities program as one way to provide northern communities with the resources to build, renew and enhance their basic infrastructure. This would maintain the quality of life that is necessary to generate jobs and investment in local economies.

The flexible eligibility criteria and funding based on population size allow this program to meet some of the long-term needs with respect to municipal infrastructure. A guarantee by the provincial government that this program will continue for years to come will allow municipalities to make long-term plans to upgrade the existing infrastructure within their cities. The commitment by the provincial government for the continuance of this program will be a huge step toward cities in northern Ontario achieving sustainability.

Before I leave this topic, what I'm talking about here is, this year we received \$2.5 million for infrastructure from the fund that I'm talking about under the northern Ontario heritage board. If we were to receive that every year, we could really do some work. We're leveraging that money and we're going to spend about \$3.7 million on that program this year. We're calling that the big dig, but we'd like to have a big dig every year, because we have so much work that needs to be done.

Long-term care: The city of Timmins is also requesting the honourable minister to petition the provincial government for additional long-term care beds for the city of Timmins.

Over the last number of years, the district health council has indicated that the district of Cochrane is over-bedded with respect to long-term-care beds. The city of Timmins respectfully suggests that when analyzing the need for long-term-care beds in the district of Cochrane, the district may be over-bedded as a whole, but in our respectful submission, we believe the city of Timmins itself is under-bedded. I'll explain what I mean.

Right now, they say the district of Cochrane is over-bedded. That may be true, but don't tell that to someone whose parents have to be moved from Timmins to Hearst or New Liskeard or Iroquois Falls because we can't find them a long-term-care bed here in Timmins. It's probably true to say the district of Cochrane is over-bedded, but the city of Timmins is very much under-bedded. As I say, this is a really serious problem. We have all kinds of seniors who are shuttled off to other municipalities. What a way to spend your golden years; your family can't even come to see you, other than maybe once a week. This is just not right. So we're bringing this to your attention. Statistics don't always tell the true story, and this is the true story.

In 1993, the provincial government changed the status of homes for the aged to long-term-care facilities. Due to

the change, a number of issues began to arise. Currently, anyone 18 years old or older who requires long-term care is eligible for admission to Golden Manor. This change in policy has led to a crisis where younger people with long-term-care needs are being admitted to Golden Manor and seniors are placed on long waiting lists. The city of Timmins believes that this change in policy displaces seniors who are currently on our waiting list. In other words, more people have become eligible for long-term-care admission, and the impact of this change in provincial policy was not considered. Although the target group for eligibility to Golden Manor has increased, the number of long-term-care beds has remained the same. Presently, Golden Manor Home for the Aged has a waiting list of 90 people, and this has been the average over the last number of years.

In addition, many of our seniors do not have family doctors. There is no mechanism in place when someone enters the emergency ward and is discharged into the community. Follow-up with respect to the frail elderly is virtually non-existent.

In addition to the above, the emergency wards and hallways in our local district hospital are filled with seniors on stretchers. There is no doubt that the lack of human and physical resources for long-term care has created a crisis in Timmins. The need for rehab beds at our district hospital is essential, and it is inappropriate to have an acute care facility providing long-term-care crisis beds.

The city of Timmins has been actively pursuing the provincial government to increase the number of long-term-care beds within the city. In 1998, the city of Timmins and members of the board of directors of the Dome Porcupine Transitional Living Centre proposed to the Ministry of Health to increase the number of long-term-care beds in the city of Timmins. I'm going to stop here to tell you what I'm talking about.

1010

The Dome Porcupine Transitional Living Centre is now known as Spruce Hill Lodge. This was formerly a hospital. When the hospitals were merged into Timmins District Hospital, a number of residents of the South Porcupine area of the city of Timmins, the east end of the city, got together and said, "We're not going to see this building empty." So they went about on their own as volunteers and created a home for seniors. They now have, I believe, about 40 people living there. It's a beautiful place, but it's not funded by the government and it's not funded by the city of Timmins; it's run by a board of volunteers. Most of the work has been done by volunteer labour and by labour that has been provided by local industry, different contractors and so on. It's unfortunate that you don't have two days here, because if you were to visit that place, you would see what private initiative can accomplish.

Regardless, what we would like to see—first of all, we'd like to see an addition to Golden Manor. But if that's not possible, we don't know why those beds over there cannot come under the wing of Golden Manor and

why renovations couldn't be done to part of that building—we wouldn't really need a physical addition—so that additional beds could be provided for our seniors.

Mr Bisson: That's a brand new building.

Mr Power: It's a brand new building, in that it's not more than 20 years old. What I'm talking about here is something that makes sense. It might not meet all the criteria of crossing the t's and dotting the i's, but it makes sense. I just thought I'd stop and mention that.

The proposal was refused, and the city of Timmins is still facing the same problems it had six years ago. Our city is still in crisis, and it's time to take a long look at the needs of our aging and vulnerable citizens in the city of Timmins. We must address funding shortfalls, not only in the provision of additional long-term-care beds, but also community resources to allow seniors to remain in their own homes for as long a period as possible, thereby reducing the current pressures on our local hospital and community services.

Attached to this brief is a presentation prepared by Dr. Edson Smith, medical director for Golden Manor Home for the Aged, which was presented to the Honourable George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, a week ago Saturday.

Once again, we would like to thank the standing committee on finance and economic affairs for providing the opportunity to us to speak to you regarding these issues that are of the utmost importance to the city of Timmins.

If there are questions, I'd be pleased to try to answer them.

The Chair: We have about two minutes per party. We'll begin with the official opposition.

Mr Barrett: Mayor Power and Mr Watson, I appreciate your being here. I commend the committee as well for including Timmins on this swing. I represent the rural south. We have many similar problems in the rural south, but I find a lot of this really quite valuable.

I was not aware of any threat to the northern Ontario heritage fund. Has there been any indication that this may be changed?

Mr Power: I wouldn't say there's a threat. What we're saying is that the \$2.5 million we received this year in special assistance through that special fund is a one-shot deal. That should be an annual grant, so we could really get some work done on our infrastructure.

As you know, with the climate we have—I'm sure the member from Sault Ste Marie, Mr Oraziotti, is familiar with the same type of climate—by breakup at the end of March, our roads are in terrible condition. You hear all this talk about pothole patrols on the radio, and all that sort of stuff. That happens every spring, and it's going to happen for the next thousand years. We can't say we're going to spend a minimum on infrastructure. What we're saying is, let's have a big program every year.

Mr Barrett: Very quickly, again we have in common that you mentioned seniors do not have family doctors. Do you have shortages of nurses or pharmacists?

Mr Power: We have shortages of just about everything in the medical field. Some of the doctors have been

born and raised in Timmins, but most of them, of course, come from other areas.

Mr Barrett: I find in the north other occupational groups who are paid by the taxpayers, the people of Ontario. We don't have a problem, it seems, getting OPP or MNR or other people who are paid by the government to serve the people. Do you see a different way of ensuring that we have these—we're paying these people to serve the people. We don't have a problem with OPP and other groups in rural areas. Why do we have a problem with doctors?

Mr Power: As you know, there's a shortage of physicians everywhere, and here in particular there's a shortage of specialists. I don't have the answer; I can only present the problem. I do know we had a meeting with Timmins and District Hospital the other night, and they are spending \$600,000 a year on retention and recruitment. We provide part of that. So it's not that people aren't doing anything about it. We're working on it all the time.

The Chair: We'll move to the NDP, and Mr Bisson.

Mr Bisson: Just a couple of things for the committee, and then I'm going to go to a question you didn't raise in your brief, because I'm curious to see if you've got the same problem.

On the question of Spruce Hill Lodge, the interesting thing about that is that it was a hospital and there was an extension done to it in the 1990s. You've got a brand new building that is a facility designed by the Ministry of Health and that meets the requirements of the Ministry of Health. So when we talk about trying to find a way to convert that to long-term-care beds, it wouldn't be all that expensive to do, quite frankly. That's what the mayor is alluding to.

The other thing members should know is that we've called together all the players in the long-term-care field: Mayor Victor Power, the CCAC, the heads of the institutions—the hospital, the long-term-care facilities—the medical community, and we've been working as a group to try to come up with some solutions to some very long-term problems we've had, and there's actually some good indication from the Ministry of Health that they're going to move on that. But part of what we're saying is that at the end, it's probably going to take an infusion of new beds, and the policy that the former government had—to do it in the private sector—ain't going to cut it up here, quite frankly. We need the government to reverse that policy so that if there is any addition of long-term-care beds, we look at public institutions like Golden Manor.

The heritage fund: Just quickly put, Mayor, I would rather see the \$60 million go to economic development. I still believe we're better off to fund municipalities with core capital through ministries, not through the fund itself. I know the government is looking at that, and I certainly hope you go that way. As a northerner, you know that \$60 million in heritage fund monies would go a long way toward economic development if we can give it access to the private sector and let the ministries properly fund the needs of the mayor. We may have a bit

of a different view on that, but I think we're going to the same place.

Mr Power: Mr Bisson, I don't care where the money comes from within Queen's Park as long as somebody writes a cheque. I'm saying we'd need at least \$2.5 million a year.

Mr Bisson: My question is on the impact—

The Chair: Your time has expired, Mr Bisson. We'll move to the government, and Mr Oraziotti.

Mr Oraziotti: Thank you for your presentation. If I took the cover page off, you could probably put Sault Ste Marie in this package. There are many similarities.

I want to ask you a question about an issue with respect to the northern Ontario tax incentive zone. We know the implementation date was scheduled for January 1, 2004. We know that the tax incentive zone proposal and the pilot projects that were originally proposed have been under review, as opposed to full implementation. I think we know there have been some problems with the regulatory framework. I want to ask you how you feel about that, as the mayor of a northern community.

I'm just going to preface that by saying that in talking to some of the other northern caucus members, the differences in terms of tax incentives—for example, the northern Ontario heritage fund would take into account the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka and offer tax incentives for areas that are two to three hours away from Toronto at the same level as communities that are 15 hours away. What types of businesses do you think you'd be able to attract, based on that one-size-fits-all tax incentive program?

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Mr Power: I'll start with the second part of your question. I don't know how Parry Sound-Muskoka ended up in northern Ontario, to be honest. It doesn't really matter how they ended up there, but the point is well taken. For example, we consider Huntsville more or less a bedroom community for Toronto; it's not really part of northern Ontario. If an incentive grant is going to be given to Muskoka, it's not really the same as giving an incentive grant to an area like Timmins or Cochrane or Kapuskasing. That just doesn't make any sense.

As far as tax incentive zone is concerned, my understanding is that it was so fraught with regulations and there were so many t's to be crossed and i's to be dotted and so much fine print that it really wouldn't have helped us very much, plus the fact that we would have had to put up a substantial amount of money. Apparently it—I don't know if the word is “scrapped,” but it's more or less out now. It's under review, whatever that means, and it's going to be replaced by northern development councils. Probably that's a good thing. The heading “tax incentive zone” sounds good, but apparently what was underneath that heading really didn't amount to much substantial help for us.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning.

Mr Power: Thank you, Mr Hoy, and I want to thank again all the members of the committee for coming to

Timmins. I noticed that people from Sudbury and Thunder Bay are coming here. It's great that you were able to come to Timmins.

ONTARIO FEDERATION
OF AGRICULTURE,
COCHRANE DISTRICT

The Chair: I call on the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Cochrane district. Good morning. Please state your name for the purposes of Hansard.

Ms Gladys Helin: I am Gladys Helin. I am the president of the Federation of Agriculture in Cochrane district and a retired dairy farmer. I will be presenting this on behalf of the farmers of the Cochrane district and all of Ontario.

Thank you, Mr Hoy. It's a pleasure to see you here in Timmins.

I'm referring to the problem that has hit Canada and many countries right now, and that is BSE. The crisis that has hit Ontario farmers in the year has been devastating. I realize that much has been said about the problems and losses that have affected western beef producers, but consider what has happened to Ontario farmers. The bottom has dropped out of the market; farmers are suffering. Cows that sold for 55 cents to 60 cents a pound last year are now bringing in 3 cents to 10 cents a pound. That is where the problem is.

The processors are taking advantage of this situation. After purchasing this beef, they're making a gross profit at the expense of farmers. In normal times, a processor would make a profit of about \$125 per pound for an animal. Today, the profit margin for these processors is \$400. Have you ever seen bargains at McDonald's or Wendy's? That's our hamburger. That's coming from our cattle.

The answer to the dilemma that farmers find themselves in today must be resolved. Most important, research has to be done in this regard. We feel that research dollars have to be put into this program. There are dollars that are being wasted in research that should be put into this BSE program, because it is crippling the beef industry.

Testing is the most important thing today if we are to recover from this problem that we are facing. Scientists in the States—and I have given you a paper on that—have discovered a blood test for BSE. The papers are available. This testing should be done on all cattle. Testing has been done in tuberculosis and contagious abortion, which is known as brucellosis, on a country-wide program and eradicated. Why not do this while we still have a few farmers trying to succeed?

We also need an extension of slaughterhouses that can handle these animals, similar to the one that is being planned by Gencor in southern Ontario. Giving farmers a subsidy—and I dislike the word subsidy—on cows that have to be slaughtered for the beef industry, which I understand is about \$125 over what has been received for a butchered cow, is not worth the paperwork that has to

be done—that's if you can find out how to get the paperwork. Why not put some of this into the testing program that I have mentioned?

Latest statistics show that the average age of a farmer in Ontario is 58. The question is, where are our young people? They are being educated and, with the knowledge gained from the farm, are getting top jobs in industry. So what is going to happen to our agricultural industry in years to come if our young people do not have a family farm to take over? The costs today to get into farming are prohibitive. With all these problems that are facing young people, can we force them to stay? Northern Ontario is crying about the loss of our young people to the south. It has been happening in agriculture for many years.

I'd like to speak now on the heritage fund. The heritage fund, as I heard our mayor speak on a few minutes ago, has helped farmers increase production in the last few years with funding. My latest information that I want to share with you is that support to farmers in this has decreased, from 50% in the beginning to 40%, and now in the latest paper I received yesterday, 20%. This will devastate some farmers who have already planned and ordered materials for barns and other projects. By the way—and it's just a question I was asking—is this reduction going to be across the board in all projects or is it only agriculture?

We realize that funding in agriculture has been steadily decreasing, but we are asking you not to decrease any more. Our priority is research, and also technology transfer. We need to know what the researchers are doing. If these are programs that are coming out, farmers need to know—some way of informing farmers of what is going on.

I didn't want to ask for a lot. On consulting with our farmers in the area, they said, "Don't ask for too much and we might get what we're looking for." Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation. We have about three minutes per party, and we begin with the NDP.

Mr Prue: Just on the heritage fund decreasing for farmers, this is quite troubling. Who made that decision to decrease it? Was this the previous government?

Ms Helin: I have given you the paper that was sent to us. It's in the package.

Mr Prue: I don't have time to read it. I only have three minutes, so can you tell me?

Ms Helin: It was an Ontario package.

Mr Prue: But it was the previous government or this government?

Ms Helin: From what I understand, the paper just came out now, so I presume it was this, and I can't understand how it's been done before the budget.

Mr Prue: That's what I was trying to ascertain here. What you're telling this government, then, is not to go down that road; to allow the farmers of Ontario, and particularly the northern farmers access, to the heritage

fund so that you can build barns and do what's necessary to maintain the family farm.

Ms Helin: To improve their production, yes.

Mr Prue: On the test for BSE, they've developed that in the United States. Do you have any indication of how much it would cost per cow to do the test?

Ms Helin: I presume about \$40 a cow.

Mr Prue: And you are asking that the government of Ontario help the farmers in testing at \$40 a cow.

Ms Helin: I believe that's the only answer we can get. It's the only way we can go. If we want to keep our beef industry alive, we have to. Going and having discussions with the United States is not going to help. We have to prove it to ourselves.

Mr Bisson: Just a very quick question. I look at the price of the beef I buy on the counter. I know you're not getting a heck of a lot. Who is making all the money?

Ms Helin: The middleman, as they always blame.

Mr Bisson: What are you getting now per pound? It's down to almost—

Ms Helin: If it's a cull cow that's going for hamburger, the most we're getting is 10 cents to 11 cents a pound.

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Mr Bisson: How much was it, let's say, two years ago, before all this?

Ms Helin: It was 55 cents to 60 cents a pound.

Mr Bisson: It just amazes me that that's not a scandalous situation. We're still paying the same price at the counter. Somebody is making money. We should give it to the farmers.

The Chair: We'll move to the government.

Mr Wilkinson: I just have a couple of questions. My riding is probably the most rural riding in southern Ontario, so the problems you have are also in southern Ontario. I know a lot of people in the cattle industry are happy about the Gencor initiative, but here in northern Ontario there is really no slaughter capability at all, right? So what happens if the border is closed?

Ms Helin: We do have a small slaughterhouse in Ramore, but actually we need something else. We have to have something, because there is just no way—Gencor is coming up with that slaughterhouse, but actually I believe most of the cull cows that are purchased at New Liskeard are going to Quebec.

Mr Wilkinson: So they're going over that way, because the US border has been closed the other way.

Ms Helin: That's right.

Mr Wilkinson: I know it's probably the number one issue facing agriculture today. It's more of a federal thing that we're trying to support, what we need to do to get that border opened. It's a huge issue where I'm from and I'm sure it's a problem here as well.

In regard to the testing, this is relatively new. I hadn't actually seen the article about the UK blood test, which seems to be amazing, if we can actually get that over here. Are there any impediments to getting that test available in Ontario other than the fact that we just have to buy it?

Ms Helin: I presume it would have to be purchased, but it's something we have to look to because our industry is suffering, and suffering very badly. In dairy farming alone, their cull cows were their—should I say?—profit line, and they've lost it.

Mr Wilkinson: So you don't have much of a cattle industry here; most of it is dairy in the north.

Ms Helin: No, we have quite a bit of others. We have hog farmers, poultry farmers, quite a few grain farmers. We have a little bit of everything here in the north.

Mr Wilkinson: This is affecting your other ruminants as well, I would assume.

Ms Helin: That's right.

The Chair: We'll move to the official opposition.

Mr Barrett: Thank you, Ms Helin. We really appreciate this information on the blood test because, regrettably, the way it is now, you have to kill the animal before you can find out whether it has got a problem.

Ms Helin: That's right.

Mr Barrett: This has been going on since last May. The level of testing in Canada or the States did not go up, although very recently the federal government did put \$90 million into this. If we had a blood test, it just indicates the value of research and technology. You indicated that brucellosis is no longer a problem.

Ms Helin: That's right.

Mr Barrett: My family had to kill every one of our herd because of brucellosis and actually my father caught it as well. It was very serious. Now it's not a problem.

The federation of agriculture did present a couple of days ago to this committee, and the report was very well received by all parties. It made mention of support for the Gencor proposal, financial support for additional cooler space, financial support and funding for marketing, emergency feed and deadstock removal, and financial support for the national tag program, the ID program, which—

Ms Helin: Is a wonderful thing.

Mr Barrett: It's a success story in Canada. It leaves a lot to be desired in the United States. They're not up to speed compared to Canada. It's the same with the testing. So many areas in the States don't test. That's not an excuse for us not to—through government to continue to ensure that we have the same kind of standards as Japan and France, for example, where every animal is tested. So your provincial body has presented a lot of this. You've indicated some new information. We didn't really get much information on the cull cow other than help needed for the cull cow. Is there anything specific we should do for dairy and the cull cow?

Ms Helin: In the dairy industry, I could explain to you that from a herd of say 60 to 80 milking cows, a farmer has to cull at least 20% if he wants to keep his production aligned properly. For a producer, they cull any animal that is not up to par. I'd say 20% of the herd is culled yearly. In a beef herd, I'd say about 10%. It's quite a number.

Mr Barrett: When they're eliminating these animals and they're not replacing them, there is income tax—

Ms Helin: You are eliminating animals, but on a farm that is operating, you are raising replacement cattle constantly. A farmer who has 50 milking cows has 100 cows, because he has replacement cattle coming along every year.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning.

ASSOCIATION DES ENSEIGNANTES
ET DES ENSEIGNANTS
FRANCO-ONTARIENS,
UNITÉ NORD-EST CATHOLIQUE

The Chair: I'll call on the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, unité nord-est catholique.

The Vice-Chair (Mr John Wilkinson): Bienvenue. Thank you for coming this morning. For the members of the committee, there is simultaneous translation. The English is on channel 1 and the français is on channel 2.

You have 20 minutes for your presentation and questions from the committee. We'd ask that you begin by identifying yourself for Hansard.

M. Paul Taillefer: Monsieur le Président, membres du comité, je vous remercie de m'avoir accordé le temps d'être ici aujourd'hui. Je suis Paul Taillefer, le président de l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, l'unité nord-est catholique. Je représente environ 640 enseignantes et enseignants réguliers et 150 enseignantes et enseignants suppléants qui travaillent dans la région du conseil des Grandes Rivières.

L'automne dernier, nous avons entamé une période de renouveau, teintée d'espoir. Après avoir subi, pendant huit ans, les compressions budgétaires et les réductions de services, les Ontariennes et les Ontariens ont choisi le changement. Les promesses électorales des libéraux nous ont permis de rêver à un avenir prometteur. Nous demandons maintenant au gouvernement libéral de respecter ses promesses, d'investir dans le renouvellement des services publics et de mettre en place ce changement.

Tout le monde comprend que le déficit, identifié à 5,6 milliards de dollars—l'héritage du dernier gouvernement—place le gouvernement libéral dans une position difficile. Toutefois, vous devez comprendre que ce n'est pas un programme de coupures et de réductions que nous recherchons. Les libéraux se doivent d'entreprendre les changements nécessaires afin d'actualiser la vision du renouveau présentée l'automne dernier.

Nous avons vu à travers les dernières années que les politiques du dernier gouvernement ont créé un déficit social important en réduisant les services publics et en s'attaquant aux plus vulnérables de notre société. C'est à vous de corriger cette situation qui, à long terme, aura des effets néfastes sur notre société.

J'aimerais vous parler aujourd'hui du déficit social en éducation.

Après huit ans de compressions budgétaires et de réformes précipitées, nous ne sommes pas seuls à voir l'impact de ce déficit social. En décembre 2002, le

rapport Rozanski concluait que, pour répondre aux besoins des nos élèves, il devait y avoir un investissement de près de deux milliards de dollars dans le système scolaire ontarien.

Monsieur Rozanski a aussi confirmé que la formule de financement mise en place il y a six ans ne répond pas aux besoins particuliers des écoles de langue française et ne fait rien pour pallier les coûts additionnels reliés à l'éducation en langue française. En cela, il ne faisait que reconnaître ce que nous revendiquons depuis toujours : les besoins particuliers rattachés à l'éducation de langue française doivent être financés de façon différente et de façon adéquate.

Dans son mémoire, présenté hier à Ottawa, la présidente de l'AEFO provinciale a fait état de certaines conséquences d'un financement inadéquat. Permettez-moi d'élaborer sur certaines conséquences particulières au nord de l'Ontario.

Je parlerais premièrement de la survie du nord de l'Ontario.

Trop souvent, le nord de l'Ontario n'est reconnu que pour ses mines et ses forêts. Il est urgent de reconnaître notre plus grande richesse : nos enfants. Sans eux, il n'y a pas d'avenir pour le nord.

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D'une part, il faut améliorer les programmes pour les élèves à risque pour réduire le taux de décrochage aux paliers élémentaire et secondaire. Il faut aussi mettre fin à l'exode de la jeunesse vers le sud de l'Ontario car c'est toute l'économie du nord de la province qui souffrira bientôt d'une pénurie de main-d'œuvre. Selon l'AEFO, l'investissement dans l'éducation postsecondaire francophone pour le nord doit être une stratégie importante de tout plan qui vise à maintenir la population du nord.

L'Université de Hearst, qui a trois campus dans le nord, est la seule université francophone de la province. Nous devons à cette institution que beaucoup de jeunes ont pu faire leurs études chez eux et sont restés par la suite dans le nord. Or, l'institution ne reçoit pas l'appui nécessaire. C'est le corps professoral et le personnel de l'université qui s'évertue à faire des collectes de fonds pour subventionner un programme de bourses destinées aux élèves poursuivant des études postsecondaires. Si on veut garder nos élèves dans les communautés du nord, il faudrait offrir la scolarité gratuite, ou au moins réduire substantiellement les frais de scolarité des étudiantes et étudiants du nord qui choisissent d'étudier dans le nord.

D'autres initiatives doivent être mises en place pour garder nos jeunes dans le nord, et cela avec l'appui du gouvernement. La survie du nord en dépend.

L'accessibilité à la formation en région est importante pour nous aussi. Comme enseignantes et enseignants, on doit constamment s'adapter au changement afin de bien desservir les élèves. Dans le nord c'est devenu une tâche quasi impossible à cause des nombreux bouleversements apportés par le gouvernement conservateur.

En premier lieu, la formation en cours d'emploi n'a pas été favorisée par la réduction du nombre de journées pédagogiques de neuf à quatre. De plus, la création de

conseils scolaires de langue française avec des superficies énormes a réduit l'accessibilité à la formation. Les extrémités de notre conseil se situent à environ trois heures de route du siège social à Timmins. Dans notre conseil, pour recevoir une formation de cinq heures et ensuite retourner à domicile, certains membres du personnel enseignant doivent voyager près de six heures en voiture, sur des routes mal entretenues—comme l'a partagé maire Power—souvent en mauvais temps, de nuit et exposés aux dangers d'accidents routiers.

Nous avons aussi beaucoup de petites écoles isolées, et cela occasionne beaucoup de déplacements qui ajoutent aux coûts de la formation. L'an dernier, le ministère de l'Éducation a donné une formation de trois jours à Timmins pour un projet de lecture. Le personnel affecté à ce programme a dû se déplacer, se faire héberger et payer des frais de gardiennage. Timmins, malgré ce que le maire a dit, n'est pas le centre du nord de l'Ontario. Toutes les autres communautés sont bien loin, mais elles font partie aussi de notre district.

Il est temps de restaurer les neuf journées pédagogiques afin de favoriser la formation en cours d'emploi là où se trouvent les enseignantes et les enseignants. Il doit y avoir un financement qui permet au personnel des écoles du nord d'avoir accès aux mêmes formations que dans les grands centres, et nous devons réduire les déplacements en amenant la formation à nos milieux éloignés. Le ministère de l'Éducation doit tenir compte des réalités du nord lorsqu'il planifie de la formation ou des ateliers. Nos enfants méritent que leurs enseignantes et leurs enseignants aient accès aux mêmes sessions de formation que le personnel dans les centres urbains.

En fonction du matériel pédagogique, vous êtes sans doute conscients que les écoles de langue française souffrent d'une insuffisance de matériel pédagogique. Les problèmes relèvent de la disponibilité et du financement.

En premier lieu, il est à noter que le matériel qui répond aux exigences du programme-cadre de l'Ontario et qui est produit à l'intention d'une clientèle franco-ontarienne est plutôt rare. Nous devons souvent nous contenter du matériel qui vient du Québec. Les ressources produites en Ontario pour les Franco-Ontariennes et les Franco-Ontariens arrivent souvent deux ou trois ans après la mise en place des programmes-cadres. Ce décalage est évident lorsqu'on voit des manuels de science qui se font évaluer un chapitre à la fois car ils sont incomplets. Les maisons d'édition consacrent de nombreuses ressources aux manuels en anglais car c'est rentable. Le marché restreint de manuels en français entraîne des coûts additionnels pour nos conseils. Par conséquent, nos élèves sont privés de ressources. Cette injustice se fait voir dans nos écoles où nos élèves travaillent avec des dictionnaires désuets ou des cartes géographiques qui ne reflètent pas les changements géopolitiques dans le monde.

Au niveau de nos installations scolaires, nous avons deux nouvelles écoles en voie de construction; cependant, nos bâtiments sont vieux et demandent un entretien

constant. À cause de leur âge, ces édifices accaparent une grande partie du budget pour les frais d'entretien. Certaines écoles ont des problèmes de ventilation qui affectent la santé des élèves et du personnel. Il est difficile de trouver de l'argent pour une simple couche de peinture. De plus, la formule de financement ne tient pas compte de l'usure additionnelle qu'entraînent nos hivers rigoureux sur les installations scolaires du nord. Vous auriez aimé passer le mois de janvier ici, je vous le dis.

La promotion de la langue et de la culture :

Lorsque le gouvernement conservateur nous a accordé la gestion des conseils de langue française, il a assumé la responsabilité d'en assurer le bon fonctionnement. Dans son récent rapport, M. Alan King a fait état d'une situation particulière ayant trait à l'identité culturelle de nos écoles. M. King a noté que 60 % des élèves dans les écoles de langue française croient que leur identification à la culture d'expression française est importante ou assez importante. Or, ces élèves vivent dans un monde dominé par une culture anglo-américaine et font partie d'une communauté qui se voit obligée de défendre sa culture et sa langue.

Le système d'éducation, en partenariat avec la communauté francophone, doit aider à réduire le taux d'assimilation culturelle et linguistique des jeunes Franco-Ontariennes et Franco-Ontariens. Le gouvernement libéral se doit d'investir davantage pour que nos écoles puissent jouer pleinement leur rôle culturel afin d'aider les élèves à s'approprier leur culture et à développer leur estime de soi.

Notre dossier d'invalidité de longue durée est un dossier très alarmant. Les conditions de travail des enseignantes et des enseignants, dont la pénurie de ressources et les conditions des installations scolaires dans les écoles de langue française, ont un impact direct sur la santé de notre personnel. Nos membres enseignent le programme d'études de l'Ontario comme dans les écoles de langue anglaise, mais ils ont une surcharge additionnelle puisqu'ils font aussi la promotion de la langue et de la culture. Afin de garder les élèves dans les écoles de langue française, ils assument la responsabilité d'un vaste éventail de clubs et d'activités. Puis il va sans dire qu'à cause de la taille de nos écoles, ils doivent assumer plus d'une tâche. Nos membres souffrent d'un taux d'épuisement professionnel alarmant.

Les chiffres sont éloquentes. En 1997, on comptait 23,71 réclamations par 1 000 membres auprès de notre assureur en matière d'invalidité de longue durée. En 2001, ce chiffre est passé à 26,85, et en 2003, à 36,75 par 1 000 membres. Chez nos collègues anglophones, le taux de réclamations était de 20 par 1 000 en 2003, alors qu'il est de huit réclamations par 1 000 chez l'ensemble des travailleurs et des travailleuses en Ontario.

Notre programme d'aide aux employés connaît aussi une hausse d'utilisation. En 2000-2001, 9 % des appels portaient sur les difficultés reliées au travail. En 2001-2002, ce chiffre est passé à 28 %. Ce qui est plus alarmant, c'est que de ces appels-là, 51 % viennent des membres qui ont moins de 10 années d'expérience.

La surcharge fait des ravages au sein du personnel dans les écoles de langue française. L'insuffisance des ressources humaines et financières crée beaucoup de stress. Le rapport Rozanski a soulevé les problèmes du financement inadéquat pour les écoles de langue française. Voici un des effets néfastes que vous pourriez pallier avec un financement juste et équitable.

Pour toutes ces raisons, l'AEFO estime que ce n'est pas le temps de maintenir un régime de compressions, mais de passer au rattrapage. Vous devez corriger les erreurs du passé et, au minimum, mettre en oeuvre les recommandations du rapport Rozanski en tenant compte des besoins particuliers des écoles franco-ontariennes.

L'automne dernier, la victoire du Parti libéral nous a conduits à l'aube d'un nouvel Ontario, un Ontario où le gouvernement serait à l'écoute, protégerait les plus vulnérables de notre société et ferait de l'éducation une valeur fondamentale. Dalton McGuinty et son gouvernement ont des choix difficiles à faire. Les promesses électorales doivent maintenant être actualisées.

Il n'y a pas de réponses faciles, mais il y a des principes importants à considérer. Le gouvernement conservateur a hypothéqué l'avenir de toute une génération de nos enfants. Le gouvernement libéral a le pouvoir de redresser la situation.

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Allons-nous faire passer une signature sur un document de la Canadian Taxpayers Coalition avant l'avenir de nos enfants? N'oubliez pas qu'un enfant qui avait quatre ans en 1995, quand Mike Harris a pris le pouvoir, a fait toute son école élémentaire sous le signe de la coupure et des compressions et des réformes précipitées. Si votre gouvernement prend la même orientation, cet enfant va terminer son secondaire sans avoir accès à l'éducation de qualité qui est son droit.

L'AEFO croit fermement que les élèves ontariens méritent mieux. Lors de son discours au Empire Club jeudi dernier, le ministre de l'Éducation, Gerard Kennedy, a affirmé que le gouvernement n'est pas le seul intervenant à avoir la responsabilité pour la livraison d'une éducation de qualité. Il a répété que l'ensemble de la société doit être prêt à certains sacrifices pour atteindre cet objectif.

Nous sommes d'accord, mais nous pensons aussi que le gouvernement doit assumer le leadership sur cette question. C'est pourquoi le gouvernement McGuinty doit agir de façon rapide pour rétablir les services publics de qualité et prendre les décisions nécessaires pour faire avancer le dossier prioritaire de l'éducation.

Merci beaucoup.

Le Vice-Président: Maintenant, les questions. Chaque parti aura deux minutes. Pour le gouvernement, M. Peterson.

M. Peterson: C'est un grand plaisir de vous entendre aujourd'hui. Il y a une organisation qui s'appelle e-Learning au sud de l'Ontario qui se spécialise en éducation électronique, avec des ordinateurs. Connaissez-vous cette organisation? Est-ce qu'il y a un moyen de vous aider ici, au nord?

M. Taillefer: Je n'ai pas des connaissances particulières de l'organisation. Au nord, nous nous servons de certains moyens de la nouvelle technologie; par exemple, la vidéoconférence. Nous avons un système de vidéoconférence où nous pouvons offrir des cours dans nos petites écoles à distance, car dans les petites écoles, il y a peut-être un manque d'inscriptions pour offrir certains cours. Mais cela ne rejoint pas toute notre clientèle afin d'être capable d'offrir les cours dont les élèves ont besoin pour poursuivre leur postsecondaire. Il arrive souvent que les enseignants dans nos petites écoles secondaires ont assumé une gamme de préparations différentes qui pour eux devient une surcharge.

M. Peterson: Il y a un autre groupe qui s'est adressé à nous ce matin qui a dit qu'il « shared » avec les autres conseils les coûts et les frais pour baisser les frais pour tous. Est-ce que c'est une possibilité pour votre organisation?

M. Taillefer: Nous partageons le transport avec les trois autres conseils limitrophes dans la région, mais pour ce qui est de toute la programmation scolaire et de tout ça, ça revient à la gestion du conseil scolaire de langue française. Il y a très peu de ressources qui peuvent être partagées avec les anglophones, parce que les curriculums sont essentiellement différents.

Le Président: Pour le Parti conservateur, M. O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation. I want to acknowledge that the French-language boards, both public and separate, were initiated through our government after the Sweeney commission, so that seems to be working out. Prior to that, they were sort of parallel boards. I would ask if you think you've come any way to achieving the recognition for the French-language system and/or indeed the danger or threat of the erosion of your culture.

M. Taillefer: Je crois que la création des conseils de langue française est une initiative qui était grandement appréciée, puis il était temps. Cependant, comme le dit le rapport Rozanski, il y a des particularités qui s'attachent à l'éducation en langue française qui doivent être adressées pour le service qui est offert à nos élèves dans nos petites écoles rurales dans le nord en particulier. On a besoin que l'attention et le financement particuliers pour ces besoins-là soient adressés, puis le temps presse.

La communauté de Fauquier, et je sais que M. Bisson va vous fournir une carte sous peu là, s'est ralliée autour de leur école élémentaire pour la sauver de fermeture il y a quelques années avec des investissements d'argent, puis aussi avec un programme qui incitait les gens à déménager à Fauquier avec une offre d'un terrain puis de l'argent, etc. Alors, l'école au coeur de la communauté est très importante dans le nord, mais il va venir un temps où les communautés ne pourront pas se permettre d'attirer les gens puis de subventionner les écoles. Je crois que c'est le rôle du gouvernement d'assurer la survie de ces écoles.

Le Président: Pour le NPD, M. Bisson.

M. Bisson: Merci beaucoup, Paul. Tu as fait un commentaire faisant affaire avec la formation qui a dit que la

formation que vous avez comme enseignants dans le nord est différente—et moindre?—de celle offerte dans le sud. Peux-tu me dire la différence—

M. Taillefer: C'est une question d'accès. Une fois que les membres auront la carte géographique, ils pourront comprendre que le prof qui doit suivre une formation à Timmins, venant de Haileybury—si tu le fais dans un jour, ça veut dire que tu es parti très tôt le matin, puis tu arrives chez vous très tard le soir, prêt pour reprendre ta journée d'enseignement avec tes élèves le lendemain, tandis que les profs qui sont choyés, qui sont à Timmins, eux-autres, ils suivent une formation de cinq heures. Pour nos autres profs, ça devient une formation de 11 heures. C'est ça le problème. Nous autres, on est un peu différent. C'est qu'on a des grosses poches de population comme à Hearst, à New Liskeard, à Cochrane, à Kapuskasing. Si le conseil aurait de l'argent destiné à la formation, on pourrait aller dans ces régions-là puis former les membres. Comme c'est là, oui, on a accès à la formation, mais c'est les déplacements. Je dois dire que moi, comme président, je me déplace sur toutes ces régions-là, puis ce n'est pas un énorme plaisir de voyager nos routes d'hiver avec des transports, des orignaux, la noirceur puis les rafales de neige. C'est difficile.

M. Bisson: Tout est l'argent. Rozanski a fait son rapport; il a fait des suggestions. Là, c'est au tour du gouvernement. Quel avis leur donnes-tu faisant affaire avec les recommandations de Rozanski, et, s'ils ne les acceptent pas, qu'est-ce qui arrive ?

M. Taillefer: Il y a un groupe de travail qui était mis sur pied l'an dernier, puis juste cette semaine l'AEFO a été invitée à la table. Je pense que c'est un bon signe, parce que nous sommes les travaillants en première place. Nous connaissons les problèmes qui existent dans les écoles.

Je pense qu'on devrait agir, on doit agir vite. On doit mettre en place ces recommandations parce que, au niveau des écoles françaises, on a fait de la gymnastique, on a démontré de la flexibilité pour faire fonctionner nos écoles. Cependant, il y a des gros manques, puis, comme toute autre entreprise, on risque de chuter s'il n'y a pas une injection immédiate d'argent pour répondre aux grands besoins qu'on a, qui sont particuliers au nord, aux communautés isolées, puis à l'éducation de langue française.

Le Vice-Président: Merci beaucoup.

M. Taillefer: Je vous remercie.

Mr Peterson: Mr Chairman, I was wondering if we could get a breakdown from research of the school boards, broken down into English and French, Catholic and public, with the number of boards, number of teachers and the funding, just to see—

Interjections.

The Vice-Chair: OK. Thank you, Mr Peterson.

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NORTH BAY GENERAL HOSPITAL

The Vice-Chair: I would call the North Bay General Hospital, please. Welcome to the committee.

Mr Mark Hurst: Good morning. My name is Mark Hurst. I'm the president and CEO of the North Bay General Hospital. We appreciate the opportunity of being here today to present to the standing committee. In the interests of time, I may not follow the text word by word, but it will generally follow the themes that I'm presenting.

The hospital that I am responsible for is a 207-bed, level C district referral hospital in northeastern Ontario serving a catchment area of 129,000 people. This organization, on April 1, 1995, evolved from a voluntary consolidation of the North Bay Civic Hospital and St Joseph's General Hospital of North Bay Inc following a long history of co-operation, collaboration and rationalization of programs and services.

From the outset of our existence, our single unified board has been focused on the ultimate goal of a new facility on a greenfield site. This strategic direction was confirmed by the Health Services Restructuring Commission, giving us approval to construct a larger, expanded general hospital facility co-located with a regional mental health centre operating under the auspices of the Northeast Mental Health Centre.

On behalf of our board of directors, staff, physicians, volunteers and all of the citizens receiving care in our facility, I wish to speak to you briefly about a number of factors affecting the provision of health care in our community and throughout northern Ontario which I hope you will consider in your deliberations.

I've provided you with some information on some of the global challenges in the health care system in Ontario. I'm sure you will have heard this already, or will hear it, from the Ontario Hospital Association, so I won't repeat it for you. I think it's evidenced in information that you've had provided to you before, so in the interests of time I'll just leave those few paragraphs. I reference those global operating challenges simply to emphasize the magnitude of the issue and the importance of moving beyond current funding, which seems to be allocated in the absence of an overall vision or preferred direction for the entire health care system. Since these arguments also apply to many other parts of the province, I wish to take a few minutes to briefly outline the unique challenges in northern Ontario which directly contribute to the current funding dilemma.

While there has been a lot of published work in this regard, I wish to refer to the northern health strategy steering committee, under the auspices of the Networking in the North group, which has recently produced the Northern Health Strategy: Northern Solutions for Northern Issues. I've brought along a copy of the document, if anybody wishes to see it. This research work has concluded that in northern Ontario a number of prevailing statistics have a direct and adverse impact on the provision of health care. They point out an 18% higher mortality rate than in the rest of the province, higher rates of cardiovascular disease, lung and colorectal cancer, injuries and poisonings, overall lower life expectancy, and higher incidents of smoking as a serious health risk

behaviour. Personal income is lower, while unemployment is higher in the north; in addition, our aboriginal population has numerous health care challenges and needs.

This strategy has outlined the following priorities requiring our attention: A more equitable funding formula is required, including a philosophical shift to promotion, prevention and education. Education needs to commence in the early school years, with emphasis on healthy behaviours and suicide and injury prevention.

Overall, health promotion and education requires a much larger emphasis and funding support than is currently provided; improved access to care and services in the north along the principles of equity, timeliness and quality; enhanced resources in northern Ontario to support recruitment and retention of health human resources, enhanced technology, and support for addressing the socio-economic factors outlined above; ongoing support for capital infrastructure upgrades; healthy public policy recognized as a priority, with legislative incentives to support societal change—for example, non-smoking bylaws.

A focus on collaboration, enhanced coordination and partnerships is required across the north, given the challenges of its geography and distance between major centres. Ongoing research and evaluation with appropriate accountability measures and information requirements is also a high priority. Finally, ongoing northern advocacy is required to ensure that these priorities are well understood by government.

We are hopeful that the new Northern Ontario Medical School will be of significant assistance in addressing many of these challenges. I have only touched on the work briefly, to demonstrate the prevailing conditions facing health care providers throughout the north. Recognizing that short-term, quick solutions are unlikely, advances are possible on many fronts. In our hospital a number of key issues require timely and decisive action on the part of government. Considerable work has been done to develop a framework for mental health reform, including de-institutionalization, community reinvestment, enhanced housing and integration with other treatment modalities to minimize and remove the long-standing stigma of mental illness.

While the divestment has occurred in many other communities in the province, it has not yet occurred in North Bay, and that is adversely impacting the overall reform plans.

The North Bay Regional Health Centre, a co-location of the North Bay General Hospital and the Northeast Mental Health Centre, will go to tender this spring, with construction to commence in late summer or early fall for completion 30 to 36 months thereafter. We have an opportunity to provide a world-class model of care, equivalent to best practices in other jurisdictions. However, the overall vision embodied in the final report of the northeast mental health implementation task force requires government support and commitment to bring this advancement in care to fruition.

We are also planning a children's treatment centre to enhance the overall continuum of care for children's rehab services, as it is recognized that there are times when the needs of the most vulnerable—disabled children—can be compromised in the battle for continuing scarce resources. With protected funding in a children's treatment centre and a strengthened community approach across our region, an innovative model can be put in place.

In many hospitals across northern Ontario, including our own, there is a serious problem of alternative level of care patients who do not require the hospital environment but cannot readily access the appropriate level of care in our community as it is not available. In our hospital, this can be as high as fifty patients on a given day, and largely arises due to the aging demographics of our district.

We are working effectively in concert with our community care access centre and many other agencies to seek a solution. However, short term relief for this uncontrollable utilization issue appears unlikely without intervention at the government policy level.

Much has been written about the problems of physician, nursing and specialized staff recruitment and retention. I have often been told that this is a systemic problem across the entire province, and I certainly believe that. It needs to be stressed, however, that the playing field is still uneven for the north given our distance, geography, and critical mass challenges. The current marketplace is extremely competitive and often requires us to use scarce patient-care resources to cover gaps in coverage and enhance on-call funding to maintain our role as a district referral facility.

It is hoped that in your budgetary process, and in the current negotiations with the Ontario Medical Association, steps will be taken to address the ongoing unique challenges of recruitment and retention in the north.

Public expectations for health care overall remain exceedingly high, and our patients tell us repeatedly that there is little or no tolerance for reductions in the core patient care programs that we provide. In order to sustain a high quality system that adequately addresses growing demand, it may be necessary to consider previously unpopular policies around the level of services to be funded beyond those that are considered to be of highest priority to the public.

In the hospital system we know full well the incremental funding needs required from year to year. In order to effectively allocate scarce resources in the future, some level of relative stability must be found in the short term.

For northern Ontario, new innovative approaches will be of significant assistance, including district and regional picture archiving communications systems—a model originated right here in Timmins; the development of the electronic medical record through integrated information systems; and an increased commitment to work in partnership across currently independent hospital groupings. You may be aware that there is a voluntary

system of hospital networks in the province at the time, but there has been little or no incentive to consolidate or move forward. Recently there was a small amount of money allocated for that purpose.

I can assure you that our board recognizes in this environment the increasing requirement for hospital accountability and the challenge to ensure the maximization of administrative and clinical efficiencies. As we speak to the Ministry of Health on an ongoing basis we recognize that if reductions in core services take place, there's a danger of losing the critical mass in northern Ontario, and that could jeopardize the programs for the future.

Just briefly, I would like to speak to you about capital project development and related challenges in northern Ontario. We are currently actively involved in the development of a new health care facility on a greenfield site. The current funding formula for the general hospital portion of our project requires the community to come up with 30% of the required funds, which in our case, is a total of \$40 million on an overall project cost, including the mental health portion of \$212 million. Just a quick aside: If you do the math, you'll notice that's better than 70-30. It's because the mental health dollars are 100% funded.

While the local community fundraising drive, which had established a goal of \$16 million, recently announced current cash and pledges of \$18.2 million, the required municipal contribution from North Bay and surrounding areas of \$24.4 million is extremely challenging and requires some innovative financing approaches over a 20- to 25-year period to be successful.

We would ask that you seriously consider the eligibility of hospital capital projects for long-term financing at preferred interest rates to ensure that the full local share will be achievable as part of the total required financing plan. There is a municipal infrastructure financing plan—I believe the acronym is OMEIFA; I'm not an expert on that—but something along those lines is what we're referring to.

In addition, we are required to undertake infrastructure investment to bring services to the chosen site for the facility, and we are also seeking assistance through our city of North Bay for infrastructure financing around the site servicing issues that are not normally cost-shared by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. That is site servicing off the immediate site. So, bringing water and sewer to a site is not normally cost-shared by the Ministry of Health.

Northern Ontario does not have the luxury of large downtown urban centres with readily available serviced lots for this type of project. In addition, our limited tax base makes the acquisition of the fully required municipal share during the construction period virtually impossible.

Positive action on these two fronts of long-term preferred financing and infrastructure support will allow the project to meet the required local share commitment and proceed to tender in the planned time frame, with significant benefit to accrue to the entire district.

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We are planning this project at a level of due diligence that is extremely high, given some recent experiences in other communities with significant cost overruns and escalation.

From our contact with our Ministry of Health team with whom we're working, we are confident that our project is very well managed, given the structure and approach we have chosen. Our current cost estimates are tracking this project within 1% of budget, and up to tender release we anticipate managing the project within approximately 5% escalation, which would be unprecedented for projects of comparable size.

We are hopeful that the government will be able to find some innovative solutions to assist with this urgently needed project. We have had the opportunity to brief our MPP and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care recently, and they encouraged us to make this presentation and bring the information directly to the standing committee.

With the information I have presented today, I hope that I have enhanced your understanding of a number of key factors and pressures impacting on hospital services in northern Ontario. I'm also hopeful that through your budgetary process you will be able to provide stable, adequate, multi-year operating funding and innovative long-term capital financing that will allow us to contribute to a strong and responsive health care system in the north. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation. We have a little less than three minutes per party. We begin with the official opposition.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation. As we've heard from most of the presenters in northern Ontario, I'm sure it's difficult to provide services. Certainly in health care the shortage issues are very important. Just one little comment, and then I'll sort of ask a question.

The mental health divestment is something I'm very close to because the Whitby centre, as you know, is one of the ones that hasn't been completed, as is the one you mentioned. It's my understanding that it's really the transition dollars—the divestment dollars for severance pay and all that stuff is huge and it doesn't get you one Band-Aid. It doesn't get you anything. It just gets you into a new organization. Maybe you could comment if there's any new way to do that. That's what the problem is in Whitby. Jean Achmatowicz-MacLeod, who is well known in the mental health field and did the implementation task force report, is a personal friend. I'll let you comment on that.

But I'm more interested in the implementation of not just the PAC system, but technology and health care. What I saw when I was in the ministry on the NORTH network is that the work being done there in psychiatry is profound. The services would not be provided—in fact, I've been involved in a consult with Timmins from Sunnybrook with the patient involved and the permission and all that stuff. What's your comment? When you look

at the dispersed population and you look at the high growth in technology and the expense of supporting the infrastructure, the people, the technicians, what's your view of health in the future? Is it institutional or is it some, with the rehabilitation—there are other kinds of things that are being done with the support of the specialist somewhere else. Is it going to play a much larger role in the north? I think it is now, actually.

Mr Hurst: I think it has to. I think regardless of what budgetary decisions are made, we know in health care that the current levels of expenditures with the system as we know it today is not sustainable, and anybody can tell you that.

Mr O'Toole: Are you commenting to the committee that is meeting on Bill 8? It's a very important bill. You'll be reporting directly to the Minister of Health.

Mr Hurst: I probably will either comment or do a written submission. I'm aware of the issues. The changes are very substantive.

Mr O'Toole: The problem is that health can't move forward without the health privacy policy being defined. That's the whole issue. You can't integrate health and patient records digitally unless you've got the health policy defined.

Mr Hurst: Just quickly in answer to your question, I think the technology piece is huge. We're involved in the NORTH network; we're involved in videoconferencing through that. It's an excellent program. For example, we just interviewed candidates for a senior position, all by video conference as far as away as Manitoba. It's like we're sitting in this room with the screen in front of us.

I think the PAC system is an example. It originated in Timmins and I think credit should be given to Timmins. It's the model that we all should pursue, because it's done extremely well. Telemedicine through the stroke network—you may know that in North Bay we have had the experience of being leaders in minimally invasive surgery with telerobotic surgery; the first community-to-community telerobotic procedure having been done by technology.

I think the simple answer to your question is the shortages are not going to go away quickly and there won't be enough money, so if we don't find innovative solutions to enhancing technology, which has an upfront investment requirement—there are significant dollars needed at the front end to make it work. I agree with you; I think it's going to play a large role in the health care system in the future, because we simply can't recruit in an environment where we're competing with every hospital and every health care agency down the road. It's just not doable.

The Chair: We'll move to the NDP and Mr Prue.

Mr Prue: Thank you. It was quite a detailed presentation. I'd like to focus a little bit here on the prevailing statistics in the north, because I think some of them are very troubling. Statistics point out an 18% higher mortality rate. Everybody dies, so I don't understand that. Is that infant mortality?

Mr Hurst: No, it's overall mortality, mortality at any age. It's just that the mortality rate across all age groups for northern Ontario is statistically 18% higher. So obviously the population is at a much higher risk at many levels. I'm not an expert in this, I'm not a statistician, but my understanding is that there are more babies at risk in northern Ontario, there is more alcoholism in northern Ontario—

Mr Bisson: Diabetes.

Mr Hurst:—diabetes, cardiovascular, so just the risk factors being higher regrettably results in higher death rates in northern Ontario than in the rest of the province. The reason I make the point is simply to illustrate that that has a cost impact, so when we create benchmarks or standards to compare hospitals or health care systems to each other, we need to take that into account.

Mr Prue: That's what I'm trying to get through.

Mr Hurst: I'm sorry.

Mr Prue: No, it's fine. You're doing a great job. Is it the type of work, perhaps? I'm trying to figure it out. Being a lumberjack or working in logging is a very dangerous industry. Being a farmer is dangerous. It's probably more dangerous than being a policeman. Is that what is causing some of this, or is it the factor of poverty? Because I will tell you, in downtown Toronto, the people who tend to have tuberculosis and health problems and all of that stuff are the poorer people.

Mr Hurst: I hate to give it a broad stroke, but I think it's all of the above. I think it is the levels of education, the poverty issues, income, all the factors that were outlined in this report, which will be officially released by the committee later this month. I did get their permission to pre-empt it a little bit to get it out there. I don't know precisely why it is so blatantly different except it's a combination of all those factors. In our hospital, I regret to say that we see a number of children's aid interventions with small children, with teenage pregnancies; we see on an ongoing basis that the risk is there. Every report that has been written through the CIHI, the recent cardiac studies, all confirm this. This is not one document that says this is a factor.

The point is, the promotion, prevention and healthy lifestyles—we need to spend more time and more effort in northern Ontario—and perhaps in other parts of the province as well, but certainly I'm familiar with northern Ontario—in ensuring that we're identifying the source of this problem, because if we don't identify the source, we will continue to throw scarce dollars at the solution. That will challenge us all, including the people around this table, to figure out how to do that.

The Chair: We'll move to the government.

Mr Peterson: Excuse my ignorance, but the development of an electronic health record has privacy implications but also has not just some very interesting cost-saving implications but quality of medicine implications. Are you being fairly consulted and included by the government in our discussions about that, and what information would you have, if any, about the federal involvement with the provincial government on that?

Mr Hurst: I know a little about some of the initiatives through Canada Health Infoway because we're in the early stages of our PACS development; again, looking at the Timmins model. On the electronic medical record, we are involved with the eCHN program out of Sick Children's, the electronic Child Health Network, which is a model for the electronic transfer of information. Assuming we can get around the privacy issues and the challenges you mentioned, it allows the template for integrating any type of information system. It debunks the theory that you can't unite systems. This system allows you to unite any system from ABC computers to meditech systems.

So we're involved in that. We're still in the early stages. The electronic medical record is a huge project, but I think that, at the end of the day, my point was that if it's achievable and there is a way to have the information readily available throughout the province—maybe not just in northern Ontario—think of the potential timeliness of access to care, the reduction of unnecessary repeated testing; perhaps even intervention that is being done today may not be necessary if we have that seamless transfer of information.

I don't know a lot more about the details of it. I know the OHA is involved in a significant e-health initiative through the electronic medical record. Our foray into this world right now is primarily through the children's information network, which is an excellent program. I would be happy to provide you with more information if you're interested.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning.

Mr Hurst: I appreciate the time. Thank you.

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TOWN OF HEARST

The Chair: I call on the corporation of the town of Hearst.

Mr O'Toole: Chair, just a point to follow up on Mr Peterson's point: Perhaps we could ask research to look into the whole issue of e-health, telehealth, NORTH Network and all those kinds of resources that he mentioned. The critical piece here that Mr Peterson brings out is the health record, the health card. My view is it should be national, it shouldn't be provincial.

The Chair: Research feels your question is not focused enough for him to—

Mr O'Toole: Just looking up what resources are already in the box. Smart systems for health—

Mr Bisson: I move that we increase the budget of research so he can do all this stuff.

Mr O'Toole: No, the Ministry of Health has a huge amount of money in that whole box already.

The Chair: You cannot move a motion, Mr Bisson.

Our guests are here from the corporation of the town of Hearst. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. You may leave some time within those 20 minutes for questions if you so desire. Please state your name for the purposes of our recording, Hansard.

Mr Roger Sigouin: Thank you very much. My name is Roger Sigouin. I'm the mayor of the town of Hearst.

Mr Claude Laflamme: Claude Laflamme, chief administrative officer and clerk of the town of Hearst.

Mr Sigouin: I'm going to start with an introduction. Hearst is located on Trans-Canada Highway 11, roughly midpoint between North Bay and Thunder Bay. Hearst is a single-industry town entirely reliant on the forest industry for economic support. Hearst is an urban community serving an area population of about 10,000.

The Hearst economy is threatened by globalization of markets and softwood trade impositions from the United States. As a result, some 150 full-time and 30 part-time jobs have been eliminated at Columbia Forest Products since December 2003. Tricept planing mill announced last week the closure of its operation in Hearst, causing the loss of some further 50 jobs. Two other mill operations are still struggling with US softwood duties and tariffs. Competition from Asia and South American countries is fierce and well-known not to be on a level playing field.

With the loss of employment, out-migration may become a reality, and the youth are likely the candidates most prone to leave for good. Hearst is a repeat story from one northern Ontario community to the next.

Mr Laflamme: Business, competitiveness and the provincial role: Hydro, natural gas and insurance comprise a significant component of operating costs, and sharp increases that have become the norm in recent years are cited as a supplementary burden in the overall cost of production. We've met with the mill managers and owners, and those are issues that they have raised. There are others, of course, but we're talking about those that might relate within your jurisdiction.

The government needs to manage controllable costs under its jurisdiction, such as hydro, while implementing further regulatory measures over natural gas and insurance.

We met with the truckers in Hearst in early November. Mr Bisson was there. The mayor had invited the truckers, and some truckers indicated one truck had \$15,000 of insurance, some others had \$25,000. They're just choking. Some larger operations are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars just in insurance, and those are increases in recent years. They're already very marginal, so you add insurance that increases \$100,000 or \$200,000 in a year, they're just having misery.

The Ontario Energy Board should have a broader mandate to monitor and regulate natural gas pricing to a larger extent. We know it's limited to distribution right now. We know the pricing is done at the Alberta border. We're not sure if anything can be done. The industry in Hearst—several of them are very large consumers and have indicated that the cost of natural gas has increased by 50%. We're talking hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. So when the bottom line is in the red and you add that to the formula, you can realize the problem.

Insurance premiums have reached crippling proportions and, in particular, resource-based enterprises have been hard hit. Corporate taxation should be restructured to favour competitiveness of Ontario's industrial sector, in particular the resource-based industries of northern Ontario, whose economies are heavily reliant on a single sector.

Capital gains has been alluded to, and other possibilities, of course.

The tax incentive zones that had been on the table of the Legislature last year we really believe should come about as a program. I was part of discussions for the northeastern Ontario proposal, and this is definitely something that would assist in bringing new industry to Hearst and northern Ontario.

Forest industry: We believe the government should undertake proactive measures to ensure a sufficient and steady supply of crown wood for existing northern Ontario forestry plants. There should be a review of the forest management guides and guidelines as well as the protected lands in order to minimize the anticipated future reduction of crown wood available for harvest. One example could be harvesting with horses. We do have a few companies in our area that have horses. They could go in sensitive areas easily and recover wood that is going to die anyway. When it becomes mature—80 years old or more—it's bound to be infected. Maintaining the current tenure commitment for licensed sawmills to provide some degree of assurance on wood supply will in turn trigger ongoing investment for modernization and business diversification.

Industry has been a cooperative advocate on environmental improvements, but further impositions should be avoided as they are bound to reduce ability to compete in the global marketplace. We know that the competition in other countries do not have the harsh environmental guidelines that our companies have to deal with. Everybody believes in the environment, but there has to be a controlled balance.

Infrastructure: Communities in northern Ontario are isolated and scattered over a vast territory, and northerners need to travel great distances to access a large number of services and conduct business. In the past six days, it's the second time we've been in Timmins. Back and forth is something like seven hours, eight hours. In a few weeks from now, we're going on a journey of 3,000 or so kilometres. That will stretch for about seven days to 10 days. This is all business-related. So rehabilitation of highways is a critical element for travelling and preserving existing industries and attracting new business. A lot of our products are going out in tractor trailers.

I should say also that the Ontario Northland Railway is crucial for our industry, be it the forest industry or the mining industry. It might not be in my presentation, but it's a very important element. In Hearst, I would say that roughly half of the production goes out by rail and half goes out by tractor trailer. You need the transportation competition, again, to maintain the proper control on costs.

It's also well recognized and accepted that municipal infrastructure is in dire need of renewal. For example, the 10-year capital budget for the public works department of the town of Hearst for the fiscal years 2004–13 represents capital expenditures of \$15 million. It was adopted last night by council. In addition, a recent structural and safety study of our recreation centre revealed immediate renewal expenditures of \$850,000, and the list goes on.

1130

In light of the serious economic downturn, the town is facing larger investment in economic development. We are investing in economic development right now, and we're seriously looking at various options, but we know more money has to come. The town is willing to do its share. If provincial funds were available, it would go a long way in multiplying our efforts.

There is then the pressure of huge increases in the delivery of services to residents, and, as set out later on, the policing, social and health fields are prime examples.

Property tax revenue alone cannot suffice to overcome the challenge, and Hearst is certainly not the exception. Tripartite government assistance programs are essential to provide the quality infrastructure that residents as well as industry need to function.

Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp: The NOHFC is crucial to northern Ontario as its funding programs are key to stimulate the northern economy and create jobs, as well as preserve jobs. The NOHFC must be preserved and enhanced. Tourism destination projects should continue to be eligible, as tourism is one sector that remains untapped.

NOHFC programs should be expanded to include private sector funding in instances of economic diversification in primary industry as well as tourism. We should qualify here: We don't think that private sector funding should be eligible to compete with existing businesses; for example, another plywood or particleboard plant in northern Ontario. You see quite a few going down; they're badly struggling right now. We're saying that for new business, new value-added products, it might be a good idea.

Provincial realignment of services: Restructuring and realignment of the provincial-municipal services exercise implemented by the previous government is now a source of uncontrollable cost increases. This is not meant to criticize, but it's just a reality right now. For example, in policing services, the recent collective agreement renewal will result in cost increases to the town of some \$320,000 in 2004 and 2005 alone, as far as its contract obligations go, and the town had no say in the negotiations. Land ambulance, social housing and welfare services are also expected to cause substantial increases.

With the persistent experience of downsizing and job elimination in northern Ontario's resource-based industries, the possibility for an increase in tax revenue is very remote. I believe there's no way we can think of a tax increase in Hearst in 2004 and possibly for years to come, and assessment is likely to go down, not up.

The province will need to implement measures to exert control over health and social services, or local

governments will have great difficulty in maintaining the range and quality of core services.

The province was always clear that the realignment of services would be revenue neutral. The year-end reconciliation exercise for the community reinvestment fund allocations to municipalities is critical, or significant erosion of the local tax base will be experienced.

In conclusion, northern Ontario is obviously hurting, and the government needs to be attentive and play a constructive role to address the unique and pressing issues being faced. Youth out-migration is already becoming an evident consequence. The layoffs in Hearst are, in the vast majority, our youth—youth that Roger and I were coaching in hockey—

Mr Bisson: Your youth?

Mr Laflamme: Yes. We see these kids—I'm a Hearst native, and Roger is from the area. We've known these kids since they were five or six years old. Those are the kids who might be leaving Hearst. I think we all agree that our younger generation is the best insurance toward economic prosperity, and now is the time to take control of our destiny. However, a team approach is essential, and the province is a key player. Thank you.

The Chair: We have two minutes per party, and we'll begin with the NDP.

Mr Prue: The Liberals campaigned on a platform of two cents of the gas tax going to the municipalities. How would you use your two cents? How would you use this money? This might be hundreds of thousands of dollars. Do you use it for transportation, roads?

Mr Laflamme: I think what was talked about was renewal of the infrastructure. Economic development is another area. We've got to do something with economic development. We've got to attract new business; we've got to preserve existing business. We're already doing something, but I think we have to do more.

One thing we've been very careful with is maintaining control over operating expenses as far as we can—the concern is regional boards. But I believe new money would go toward these two areas.

Mr Prue: This government has found itself in a deficit position, maybe through no fault of their own, but there they are: \$5.6 billion. They are now talking about potentially going back on many of the promises they've made. If they don't have the two cents to give to the municipalities, would you favour putting an additional two cents on the gas tax in order that your municipality might see some of that money?

Mr Sigouin: I think that's going to be pretty hard to swallow in the north.

Mr Bisson: Only if it's not suggested by the mayor of Hearst.

Mr Sigouin: Yes. Like we were saying in the document here, the truckers have a hard time to survive. If we put another two cents on, I won't be there for long.

Mr Bisson: And he was acclaimed.

Mr Oraziatti: Thank you for your presentation today. I have a couple of questions for you. Are there any poten-

tial opportunities for cogeneration development to reduce energy costs in some of the mills?

I'd like your feedback on the northern Ontario tax incentive zone. I guess where I'm coming from, being a member from Sault Ste Marie, is that we include areas like Parry Sound and Muskoka and look at their proximity to southern Ontario. If we had a consistent or equitable tax break for businesses to try to bring business to the north, why would a business come to Hearst or Timmins if the same incentive were given to a business much closer to southern Ontario? Why would they move that distance? The tax incentive zone program right now is under review at the Ministry of Finance, and I'd like to know from you if you have any suggestions as to how to amend that program. What suggestions might you put on the table here today to make that program work more effectively for you?

Mr Laflamme: First of all, we do have a cogeneration plant in Hearst. It was developed about six or seven years ago. But it is a good point that you bring up, because it's not interconnected with the transmission of power in Hearst. The reliability of power in Hearst is not very good. Columbia suffers greatly when you have power outages. They go down, and to get back into operation might take them two, three or four hours. That down time hurts profitability a lot. So hydro is one area that should definitely be addressed.

As far as tax incentive zones are concerned, we were under the impression they would mainly be for more isolated areas that are already struggling because of disadvantages due to distances and transportation. I know it would help tremendously in Hearst. We're talking to potential investors, entrepreneurs. There's a possibility right now, but issues that come up are natural gas, hydro and transportation. As I said in my presentation, if there was a restructuring of corporate taxation, that would help. On the tax incentive zones, I think the municipalities are willing to do their share.

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Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation and for bringing a real face to the difficult choices you as a mayor and an administrator have to make. I think you summed it up very well—and for the province, really, it's just a bigger number. When your revenue or income is on the decline, you really have two choices: You have to increase taxes or reduce services. You couldn't have said it more clearly in your presentation. These are very difficult things to have to do. When you look at it in a policy sense, by tinkering with the tax rate on certain property classes, you can actually cause worse problems by raising the tax on the pulp and paper. They're liable to move or close. That's the delicate balance, whether it's at the provincial level, the federal level or the local level.

I just want to ask for your comment on the CRF, the community reinvestment fund. In my community I looked at it, the same as you, as a local councillor for a long time, and I saw this whole thing. You never heard anything but this whole downloading thing. But there

were a number of formulas where the community re-investment fund and the local services realignment calculation did end up revenue neutral at the end of the day, provided you weren't raising your operating costs. I just comment on that, because you know the press love the story, the downloading of all the stuff. Downloading is like water. In housing it's federal, provincial and municipal, and it's finally gone all downhill. It's at your level now. Any comment on CRF?

Mr Laflamme: True, it was revenue-neutral. We've had our recent schedule for reconciliation of the formula and the various services included in the realignment of services. There has been an adjustment for 2002-03 recognizing adjustment in costs. One of the things in the communication to municipalities is that there's no guarantee that formula will continue for 2004 and ongoing years and that there will be a review of the CRF formula. Right now I think the formula is fair.

Mr O'Toole: I guess that's important going into the budget.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning.

TIMMINS AND DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL

The Chair: I call on the Timmins and District Labour Council, please. Good morning, gentlemen. I would ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of Hansard.

Mr John Berry: Good morning, members of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. My name is John Berry. I'm president of the Timmins and District Labour Council.

Mr Joe Godin: Joe Godin, treasurer of the Timmins and District Labour Council.

Mr Ben Lefebvre: I'm Ben Lefebvre, vice president of the council.

Mr Berry: First we would like to thank you for the opportunity for the Timmins and District Labour Council to do a presentation for you here today, and to thank you for coming to Timmins.

The Timmins and District Labour Council represents a variety of unions and affiliated community groups; to name a few, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, the Canadian Auto Workers, the United Steelworkers of America, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association and others. The council is also involved in several aspects of the community, including the board of referees for employment insurance, the board of governors for Northern College, the Far Northeast Training Board and the Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition.

We are volunteers, workers and citizens within the community of Timmins, and we believe in our community. The Labour Council has developed a motto that we live by. We believe in building a stronger community together, a community where no one needs to stand alone. Caring community activists are here before you

today to present a variety of issues that impact our community. Some we have heard, and more presentations are to be heard this afternoon.

I am not going to sit here before you today, and pretend that I know all the issues. I would like to leave the opportunity with those who know their programs the best: the presenters. We are here today to participate in what we hope will be a truly open and full debate about the future of public services in Ontario. That debate cannot happen without looking at both revenue and expenditure. To date, the debate has been restricted by the government's insistence that it would not raise taxes.

Public services in Ontario are in desperate need of rebuilding. More cuts are simply not possible. The people of Ontario understand this. The people of Ontario know they may have to pay higher taxes that will support better public services.

We are not prepared to base our submissions today on the assumption that the people of Ontario are not prepared to pay taxes to pay for better public services. We are not prepared to base our submissions today on the assumption that every dollar more that we succeed in getting for public services in Timmins means a dollar less for services in some other community.

Regarding revenue generation, deficit and taxes, we believe the people of this province value public services and are prepared to pay for them. That was the change they chose last October. The people of Ontario voted for an end to cuts and new investments of \$5.9 billion towards service renewal.

If the government persists in its stated goals of eliminating the deficit next year and not raising taxes, it will not be able to deliver on its promises to renew services. It simply will not add up. The previous government reduced our ability to pay for public services by nearly \$14 billion in annual revenue. Recovering as little as 25% of that amount would enable the government to deliver the service renewal it promised and balance the budget in the last year of its term in office. It can be done, the public would support it and it would put this province on the road toward a more healthy system of public services.

We urge you to consider ideas for revenue recovery that would enable the government to deliver on its promises to renew public services. We are not going to pretend this is easy, and you're not going to hear from us that we can rebuild public services by getting someone else to pay. Everyone in this province benefits from high-quality public services, and we believe that everyone in this province is prepared to pay their fair share.

The Ontario Alternative Budget has put forward a plan to raise an additional \$3.5 billion a year by maximizing the revenue we get from our current tax system by closing tax loopholes and tightening up tax enforcement, and by recovering a portion of the revenue forgone in the eight years of Harris-Eves government income tax cuts. The Ontario Alternative Budget estimates that an increase of only 2% in tax rates across the board would generate an additional \$1.25 billion in personal income

taxes and \$200 million in corporate taxes. This would recover approximately 10% of the revenue forgone through tax cuts.

Closing loopholes in the corporate income tax and the employer health tax would generate almost \$2 billion more. Following up on studies by the provincial auditor on tax administration, the Ontario Alternative Budget estimates that revenue from all taxes could be increased by at least 1% through better administration.

If everybody pays a modest amount—if everybody pays their fair share—we could be on the road to recovery. Of course, no one would suggest that taxes be increased just for the sake of increasing taxes. The whole point of what we have to say today is to get away from the idea promoted by the previous government that taxes are a burden that is imposed on us for no reason. We pay taxes to buy public services, or to put it in the more eloquent terms of the American Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, we pay taxes to buy civilization.

The case for increasing Ontario's revenue must be rooted in the need to renew our public services. We're here to talk to you about what that means in the City of Timmins.

Let's talk about health care. It's easy when you're talking about the billions we spend on health care to lose track of what it actually means to people. Brother Ben Lefebvre and sister Sue Ryckman, co-chairs of the Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition, are here today to present to you the impacts to the health care system across the province and within the community of Timmins. We'll hear their presentation around 3:40 this afternoon.

Under Canada's medicare system, hospitals and hospital services are paid for from the public purse regardless of their financing and ownership regimes. In our publicly funded health care system, the real question is not who pays but rather how much, and there is simply no justification for paying the additional costs associated with the so-called public-private partnership, or P3, model. It has been estimated that such private models can be expected to cost at least 10% more than their public sector equivalents. So in addition to the evidence from other experiments that suggests P3 hospitals would include a deterioration of hospital services and diminished accountability, Ontario simply cannot afford a private health care system.

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On education, people talk in the abstract about the billions involved province-wide in implementing the recommendations of the Rozanski report on education funding. The impacts on the community of Timmins will be presented to you today by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, North East; the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, nord-est catholique; Sudbury Catholic District School Board; and Northern College. According to the widely accepted analysis of education funding in Ontario conducted by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, what it means to this community, again, will be presented to you by our education specialists presenting today.

On social services, in 1995 we had a thriving program that was building thousands of new affordable housing units every year. Since then, there has literally not been a single affordable housing unit built in the entire province. In 1995, the province cut social assistance benefits by 22% and froze them. Think about that. How do you think you would survive if someone cut your income by 22% and then froze it for eight years?

We have fewer child care spaces in Ontario today than we had in 1995. What that means in the city of Timmins is that our food bank is busier than ever; we have homeless people living in the street; working people are struggling to cope with stress to survive while working multiple jobs and little or no support in the form of child care.

Time and time again, the previous government refused to respond to pressure for better public services; instead, dumping responsibility down to local governments. The result is that local public services are suffering everywhere in Ontario. There is more to do and less money to do it with. Everyone sees that every day because local public services are the most immediate and the most visible public services we have.

There has to be a new deal for local governments, especially for our biggest cities. Today, our big cities are the engines of our economic growth. We ignore them. We allow them to decline at our peril, but that's exactly what has been happening.

The role of government needs to change: Finally, we would like to talk about the need to renew Ontario's ability to regulate in the public interest. New governments often want to change or re-invent the way things are done. This is understandable, but deregulation and privatization is not the kind of change the people of Ontario voted for or want.

We don't want or need the high-profile events like Walkerton, the epidemic of deaths among young workers; the crisis of quality in long-term care; the increasing encroachment of for-profit hospitals into our health care system; the weaknesses in our health protection system as exposed by the SARS outbreak; the growing number of smog alert days in the summer; the closure of public beaches; and the serious problems in our education system. Every one of these headline stories stands as a symbol for countless other stories of failure to regulate and protect the public interest.

The previous government turned this province into a happy hunting ground for those who seek to enrich themselves, for private interests at the expense of the public interest. It has to stop.

It is our view that the people of Ontario do not want to sell off public services to enrich private interests. We do not agree with selling hydro, selling the LCBO, de-listing services such as hearing aids, destroying the universality of seniors benefits, selling TVOntario or attacking public sector workers under the guise of re-inventing government.

Conclusion: The damage caused by Ontario's anti-government agenda since 1995 is not going to go away

overnight. It took the Harris-Eves regime eight long years to bring public services in this province to their current state. But we feel strongly that the current government must follow through on the first steps towards services renewal that it promised in its election platform. That will only be possible if the government shows courage and demonstrates faith in the good will and good sense of the people of this province.

We know that Ontario's public services need substantial investment. We know that the province's fiscal position is weak, undermined by years of ill-advised tax cuts—tax cuts that we did not want nor could we afford. We know that the government cannot deliver on the public services renewal we so badly need without increasing revenue. Indeed, Ontario faces a revenue problem, not a spending problem. Don't let the right-wing agenda of the Canadian taxpayers association take precedence over your promise to the people of Ontario.

We are prepared to do our part. The stakes couldn't be higher. If the Liberal government persists in its pledge to not increase taxes, it will be making public services renewal impossible. At the end of its term in office, its only accomplishment will be to have cleaned up the fiscal mess created by the Tories, just in time for the Tories to be re-elected to start the process all over again.

We need a real debate about Ontario's future, a debate that puts everything on the table. It's time to start hoping again. It's time to reinvest in Ontario.

Something that's not in the handout: We'd like to plant a seed of thought. People are our number one resource—youth, elderly, working, unemployed, homeless, disabled. The almighty dollar should not supersede our number one resource. Recreation should not be restricted to those who can afford it. Education should not be restricted to those who can afford it. Health care should be restricted to those who can afford it. We are the people. We care, or we would not be here today.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate.

The Chair: Thank you. We have two minutes per caucus. We'll begin with the government.

Mr Peterson: Thanks for presenting to us. Forestry is a huge industry here in northern Ontario, and so is mining. I'm a parliamentary assistant in Tourism and Recreation, the second-largest industry in Ontario. We're trying to develop more of a northern perspective on it. The emotional heartland of Ontario really is north of Muskoka in terms of the great wilderness, the great tracks of land, and the great resources we have here. I'm just wondering how your organizations can help us do more to get the tourism and service industries going here, as we have less reliance on—from a presentation this morning—forestry and mining.

Mr Berry: I believe a lot of those efforts are being worked on through the Ministry of Natural Resources with the crown lands. There are partnerships being formed and there are continuous, ongoing communications between fish and hunt clubs in smaller communities, as well as larger centres. I'm not 100% sure if that answers your question of our role, but having OPSEU,

which is OPS workers—the ministries fall under their wing and MNR is one of them; the Labour Council as well.

The Chair: I didn't mean to interrupt you, but the questioning is over for the government. We'll move to the official opposition.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you for your presentation. I enjoyed meeting and chatting with you last night in a more positive situation.

I do commend the detailed presentation. We have heard some of it before. In fact, I think you've nailed it. When you talked about the contradiction when they signed the no-tax-increase pledge—it's their nemesis. Hugh Mackenzie made a great presentation on day one in Toronto, and you should get a copy. I think you have a copy of his presentation. It's the alternative budget. He's a very competent guy. We are just going the same place in different vehicles, really.

He said they knew all along in their campaign about the money. Gerry Phillips knew, everybody knew there was a problem, a bump in the road—SARS, West Nile, blackout. All that stuff has an economic penalty. Yet they went right ahead and promised about \$6 billion in promises. So there's a huge challenge.

I put to you that if you look at the government—we actually reduced taxes and increased revenue. It's about \$16 billion more. We never spent more; in fact we have a spending problem. Here's the key: Some 85% of all the spending is wages and benefits to the transfer partners. I have no problem with indexing some sort of formula for increasing your pay; I have no problem with that. I think you work for natural resources—

Mr Bisson: Just like MPPs.

Mr O'Toole: No, wait. But if the economy tanks, it's a loss of about \$700 million for every point the GDP goes down. If it goes down and you lose \$1 billion, and people are—I'm a person too.

The Chair: State your question, please.

Mr O'Toole: My question is, would you be prepared to be part of the solution going forward? What if there is a serious problem? Without reducing services, we just take a general cut. The NDP tried it. It was called the social contract. The reason that Bob Rae did it is because there is no choice. It's payroll. That's the deal. That's how it works—85% of all the spending is payroll.

1200

Mr Berry: I guess in response to that question, I'd like to make reference to London yesterday. There was a hearing. The president of OPSEU, Leah Casselman, made some references—

Mr O'Toole: That was last week. I have a copy of that.

The Chair: Mr O'Toole, let the presenter continue, please.

Mr Berry: —to collecting unpaid corporate taxes, closing corporate tax loopholes, having more tax auditors, reducing the use of high-priced consultants in the Ontario public service.

Mr O'Toole: Bill Farlinger. So they hired Erik Peters. Erik Peters was a consultant.

Mr Berry: Those are areas where you can reduce, and increase revenues without impacting further cuts within the Ontario public service. I am a public service employee. I am also a president of 11 different ministries and I see the stress on people's faces every day. I see the workload on their desks. I see the inefficiencies that have been created through the six years of this government that just passed.

Mr O'Toole: Two out of eight wasn't bad.

Mr Berry: I stand to be corrected—eight years.

The Chair: We'll move to the NDP.

Mr Bisson: Very quickly for me—and my good colleague Mike has a question—I'm just saying, John, you're in the opposition now. You've got to woo support, not push it away.

Mr Prue: We have heard a great deal today, and we all know it's true, of the economic difficulties of northern Ontario. We know that people are leaving the north in great numbers. In fact, if you see the recent redistribution of federal ridings, northern Ontario loses one. That's the equivalent of about 100,000 people.

I appreciate everything you have said today. Is it your belief—and you know the northern people best—that they can afford increased taxation? I know we hear this in the south, but I'm also mindful that the north has its own economic problems and increasing taxation may exacerbate them. So I want to be very clear that you're in the same sort of head space.

Mr Berry: Nobody wants to see a tax increase. I think everybody wants to do their fair share. As far as northern Ontario goes, through the far northeast training board, there have been statistics that show youth migration. So there is a lot of the youth leaving northern Ontario. Part of the problem, and we see it through the labour council, is a job shortage. I see retired people who have a job. Why? They can't keep up with the cost of living with their retirement. I see students who have three jobs. Some of them are overeducated. They could be university students waiting on tables or pumping gas. Why? Because there are not enough jobs.

Those are all impacts in the north, and people will go to try and find job security. Job security is another thing that seems to be a thing of the past. People need job security to get started in life, especially your youth. So there are several different things that impact northern Ontario as well as southern Ontario.

To answer the question with respect to the tax increase, nobody wants to see it, but I think people do want to see the deficit reduced and they do want to see quality public services.

Mr Prue: And they do want to see their towns and cities survive in the north.

Mr Berry: Yes, they do, and the downsizing through the Association of Municipalities of Ontario since 1995 or earlier is starting to have big impacts. The almighty dollar rules.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this morning. This meeting is recessed until 1 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1204 to 1302.

The Chair: The standing committee on finance and economic affairs will come to order.

SUDBURY CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: I call on the Sudbury Catholic District School Board.

Good afternoon. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. You may leave time within those 20 minutes for questions if you so desire. I would ask you to state your name for our recording, Hansard.

Mr Hugh Lee: My name is Hugh Lee. I'm the acting associate director of corporate services and treasurer of the board for the Sudbury Catholic District School Board.

I had a presentation to project today to complement what I was going to say but I guess we won't have a projector, so I'll just proceed. I apologize for that.

On behalf of the Sudbury Catholic District School Board, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to make a presentation to your standing committee on finance and economic affairs as part of the pre-budget consultation.

The jurisdiction of the Sudbury Catholic District School Board is centred on the city of greater Sudbury and encompasses the surrounding areas of Markstay, Coniston and Garson to the west, Capreol, Val Caron, Val Therese, Blezard Valley to the north, Levack, Onaping, Chelmsford, Lively and Copper Cliff to the east, and Killarney and the French River area to the south.

The Sudbury Catholic District School Board has a total enrolment of 7,469 students, 5,286 of them elementary and 2,183 secondary. These students receive their education in 21 elementary and four secondary schools. The elementary panel consists of a mix of JK to 6, JK to 8, one 7 and 8 school, and we have four high schools offering programming in both English and French immersion.

The board employs 973 staff, consisting of 550 elementary and secondary school teachers, 20 continuing education staff, 37 principals and vice-principals, 34 school secretaries, 53 educational assistants, 100 custodial and maintenance staff, 25 central administration, supervisory, curriculum, special education and para-professional staff, and we also have 30 central clerical staff and 124 lunchroom supervisors. These employees are represented by four collective bargaining units: OECTA elementary, OECTA secondary, OECTA occasional and CUPE, one principals' association and one non-union employee group.

Not unlike several boards across the province, and particularly in the north, the Sudbury Catholic District School Board is experiencing declining enrolment. Elementary enrolment has declined from 6,401 students in September 1992 to 5,286 students as of October 31,

2003, a decline of 1,115 students. This trend is projected to continue.

Support for the current educational funding model: The Sudbury Catholic District School Board would first like to express its support for the current educational funding model. The Sudbury Catholic District School Board sees the funding model and the basic principles and structures upon which it is built as fundamentally sound and workable. The board echoes the position of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and our partner Catholic boards on this matter. Their position is that the foundation of equity for all children, upon which the funding model is built, now a legal requirement under the Education Act, must be maintained. The fundamental structure of the current funding model, which guaranteed fairness, remains sound and must be continued.

Questions of adequacy and review: While the Sudbury Catholic District School Board supports the basic structures and principles of the education funding model, the question of adequacy still remains as the central issue which needs to be addressed. It is critical that the benchmarks in the model are aligned to accommodate inflationary pressures with which school boards must contend.

Our first recommendation is that in support of this objective, there is a need for a mechanism to review the components of the educational funding formula on a regular, ongoing basis to ensure it remains responsive to changing educational needs and boards' real costs. The Sudbury Catholic District School Board urges the government to implement the recommendation of Dr Rozanski and the Education Equality Task Force that regular costing reviews are required to ensure that funding is maintained at a level that will allow boards to meet the province's education objectives. The Ministry of Education, in consultation with school boards and other members of the education community, needs to develop mechanisms for annually reviewing and updating benchmarks in the funding formula and for conducting a more comprehensive overall review of the funding formula every five years.

Limitations of annual funding and planning horizon: Another key concern we and all school boards across the province have is the manner in which revenue has been made available to school boards under the model, and that is on an annual basis. School boards require multi-year grant forecasts in order to engage in effective long-range planning and to effectively negotiate long-term, three-year collective agreements with their employee bargaining units. Boards need to know in advance, and with certainty, the level of their allocations in order to negotiate reasonable and responsible collective agreements with their employees. This is especially critical in light of the fact that for the first time this year, all school boards across the province will be in a position of having to simultaneously negotiate their collective agreements with all of their teacher groups.

Second recommendation: The Sudbury Catholic District School Board was encouraged by the direction of

the previous government to move to multi-year funding for school boards and urges this government to continue to move in that direction. Reliable multi-year grant forecasts, coupled with adequate resources, will enable boards to engage in effective long-term planning and will afford increased spending flexibility.

We'd like to acknowledge the work of the Education Equality Task Force and the response of the government. Dr Mordechai Rozanski's Education Equality Task Force recommendations came forward in December 2002. The board was encouraged by the response of the government to many of those recommendations and urges this government to continue its support for many of the initiatives that emerged and many of the recommendations of the Rozanski report which have yet to be addressed.

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The government's response to increase the salary benchmarks by 3% for both the 2002-03 and 2003-04 fiscal years was encouraging, along with the increase of an additional \$22 million in 2003-04 for textbooks, learning materials, classroom computers and supplies, as part of a new annual funding amount for the next two years to \$66 million over three years. The increase to the SEPPA grant benchmarks and increase in ISA funding was also encouraging and supported by this board. Funding for at-risk students, literacy, and small and remote schools under the rural education strategy showed some recognition of the problems with which northern and rural boards must cope. Additionally, the extension of the declining enrolment adjustment from two to three years to provide boards with more time to adjust to a reduced cost structure and was welcomed and needed. The increase to the transportation grant of 3.32% responded to some of the cost pressures operators are experiencing, but represented only half of the benchmark update recommended by the Rozanski Education Equality Task Force. These are positive directions, but the question of adequacy still remains.

While the recommendations of the report and the government's response for the 2002-03 and 2003-04 fiscal years were encouraging, there is still considerable work to be done to address the central problems of adequacy in the educational funding model. The following are areas of primary concern for the Sudbury Catholic District School Board.

The critical issue for us is school renewal. According to Dr Rozanski, the current stock of schools in Ontario is in significant need of repair and renovation or replacement. It is estimated that over \$5.8 billion is required to raise the existing stock of schools in the province, valued at approximately \$28 billion, to acceptable standards. Boards across the province are facing an estimated \$5.8-billion backlog of deferred maintenance and this is continuing to grow at an exponential rate.

Some school boards have more need for school renewal dollars than others. Previously, assessment-poor boards, because of lack of funds, deferred needed maintenance in order to provide classroom programs. The Sudbury Catholic District School Board is one of

these boards. We are growing increasingly concerned about our ability to maintain our aging stock of school facilities at even present levels of repair within the current funding allocations. Our schools have an average age of 42 years and have higher maintenance and facility renewal requirements than newer buildings.

Recognizing this problem, the Ministry of Education began working with school boards in 2002-03 under the real estate capital asset priority planning initiative to assess school repair needs in an objective and systematic fashion. Under this program, qualified building professionals inspected every school in the province to provide data with which to evaluate the full extent of the deferred maintenance problem. This work has just been completed in December.

There are two key school renewal issues. The first is related to deferred maintenance or the backlog of repairs needed by schools that have accumulated over an extended period of time. The Sudbury Catholic District School Board estimates that it has its own deferred maintenance cost, built up over years of under funding, of \$28 million.

In his report, Dr Mordechai Rozanski made the following recommendation to address the deferred maintenance problem of school boards: "The Ministry of Education allocate a new strategic investment of \$200 million annually to a 'deferred maintenance amortization fund,' which would fund the principal and interest costs of school boards' payments to service the debts boards would incur in borrowing funds so that they could begin to address their deferred maintenance needs. The annual allocation of \$200 million would be a 'deferred maintenance amortization fund,' which I estimate that boards could use to leverage \$2 billion worth of financing for renewal work. Such an amortization fund could significantly reduce the deferred maintenance problem faced by school boards."

He further commented: "The Ontario School Board Financing Corp and the Ontario Financing Authority are discussing ways to secure the capital financing required for boards' deferred maintenance costs through the issuing of debentures." He supports these discussions because "the debenture route would ensure that boards obtain financing under the most favourable terms available in the investment market."

The Sudbury Catholic District School Board strongly endorses this recommendation and urges the government to begin to flow the funds in the amount of \$200 million annually to a deferred maintenance amortization fund immediately for the 2004-05 budget year, and further, that the eligibility for the use of these funds by school boards to leverage financing be guided by the school renewal needs identified under the real estate capital asset priority planning initiative.

The second key school renewal issue relates to the adequacy of annual school renewal grants which exist to address the routine, cyclical requirement to repair and replace items such as roofs, windows, heating and ventilation systems and electrical systems, including

alterations that change the building's use, as well as those that are made to conform to changes in building codes, building standards and meet access requirements. At present, the Ministry of Education allocates \$266 million to school renewal on an asset base of approximately \$28 billion, which amounts to less than 1% of the current facilities' estimated replacement value.

At our board we receive \$1 million a year under the funding model for school renewal, but our estimated costs on an annual basis are \$2 million, thus resulting in a \$1-million shortfall in needed repair work annually. Unattended repairs have a compounding effect on the deterioration of major building components. An old, leaky roof structure will cause damage to the insulation of the roof and wall of a structure as to the membranes of these components, and to the floor structure, creating rotten cavities, mildew, odours and health and safety problems.

Last year, air-quality concerns raised by the staff at one of our elementary schools resulted in the discovery of mould and high concentrations of CO₂ in the school's classrooms. This resulted in the intervention of both the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health and resulted in the issuing of work orders to the board to immediately undertake measures to find and remove the mould and install a new ventilation system. This process became very public, involving the press and even members of the provincial government.

Although health officials acknowledged the board had been doing the appropriate remedial work in undertaking the necessary measures to resolve the issues identified and the school was able to remain open, escalating public concern over potential health concerns left the board with no choice but to vacate the school in late November, relocate the students to a closed secondary school of another board and begin work immediately to identify and remove the mould and install a new ventilation system. This work has just been completed, and air-quality testing begins next Monday. Pending the results of the testing, the board hopes to return the students to the school by the end of February.

To date, this event has cost the board approximately \$1.2 million in unbudgeted expenditure and resulted in 44 students permanently leaving the board to enrol in another school system. The financing of these costs will drain existing school renewal resources and thus compound our deferred maintenance problem even more. Because of the high visibility of this event, there is a heightened sensitivity by employees and parents to the air quality in our other schools. Our fear is that a snowballing effect could lead to similar events at other schools. This would put us in an untenable situation.

Our fourth recommendation is that in terms of the annual allocation for school renewal, it is essential that current benchmark renewal costs per square foot be adjusted to reflect current construction and renovation costs and the costs required to comply with current building code requirements. It is also essential that these benchmark renewal costs per square foot be graduated to

recognize the higher costs associated with maintaining older buildings. The deteriorating condition of the 42-year average aged schools of the Sudbury Catholic District School Board has reached a critical point and requires an immediate response from the government on both the deferred maintenance and the annual school renewal allocation components, as we have recommended.

In regard to the elementary school matter I've described, the Sudbury Catholic District School Board feels it is important to note that control over its processes and budget expenditure in this matter were in large part being directed by the Ministries of Labour and Health and not the Ministry of Education. It was these ministries that dictated the hiring of consultants and set out the work to be undertaken. This situation continues as we await the test results on the mould and CO₂ levels in the school. The experience has highlighted to us the importance of, and need for, communication and a coordinated approach between provincial ministries in these types of matters to ensure a fair and equitable process that adheres to accepted standards and is sensitive to, and respects, the system with which it is intervening.

Our fifth recommendation is that the board urges the government to develop a protocol for communication and coordination between ministries in matters such as health and safety and air quality concerns in schools where ministries outside the ministry of education are mandated to intervene.

There are other key areas that need consideration. Special education is one, in terms of adequacy and in terms of the administrative burden. We are concerned that funding for special education continues to be an area of major concern. Almost all Catholic school boards in the province find it necessary to spend more than their current allocations in order to meet the needs of their most challenged students. Despite the government's response to increase adjustments to the SEPPA and ISA funding model in 2003-04, the Sudbury Catholic District School Board still has to draw approximately \$500,000, or 8.6%, of its \$58-million budget to support special education costs, which we're drawing from other lines in our budget.

So our sixth recommendation is that the board encourages the government to consider increasing the support currently being provided for special education.

The next issue in special education is the administrative burden associated with the ISA claims process, which requires boards to submit annual claims that document assessments and diagnoses of students with special needs. This continues to be a problem. The establishment of a permanent baseline for boards' ISA—intensive support allocation—funding and the clarification of ISA criteria will considerably reduce the administrative burden and increase boards' ability to maximize their funding.

Our seventh recommendation is that the board encourages the Ministry of Education and its ISA working group to continue their efforts to reduce the adminis-

trative burden of the process by which boards qualify for ISA funding. It's hoped that an effective mechanism can be developed for assessing the efficient use of special education resources.

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Information communication technology is the next big one—adequacy and direction. ICT is an integral part of the educational curriculum in Ontario schools and a key component in students' ability to achieve success in school. There is a definite need for improvement of ICT systems in the classroom and in board administration at our board. According to Rozanski, this is also the case for most school boards across the province.

There are two key issues in ICT that Sudbury feels the government needs to address. The first relates to adequacy and the second to the need for a direction or vision. In regard to adequacy, the funding formula through the foundation grant and the school board administration and governance grant does not adequately provide for the costs which are required to develop successful ICT strategies: in the academic context, ICT strategies such as providing training for teachers in the effective use of ICT to teach the curriculum and the hiring and managing of technical support staff to assist teachers in undertaking these initiatives; and in the business and administration context, providing for the hardware, software and technical support that are needed to appropriately manage increasingly complex school and board business functions. New investment is required to provide for effective and efficient management at a time when boards find themselves having to cope with additional administrative burdens associated with the introduction of new programming and increased accountability requirements.

The Chair: I'd like to point out that you have two minutes left in your presentation.

Mr Lee: Thank you.

The eighth recommendation is that the board urges the government to recognize the real costs associated with delivering effective ICT strategies and increase the amounts provided in the funding formula for ICT in both the foundation and administration and governance grants.

In regard to direction, the Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning was established in the spring of 2000 to oversee the development of a vision and plan of action for integrating ICT education in Ontario. The education committee is still looking for guidance in this area, and we recommend that the government be urged to respond to the reports that have already been generated by OKNL on this issue.

Other key areas that we'd like to draw to your attention are:

—Escalating employee benefit, insurance and utility costs;

—Recognition for our uniquely disadvantaged position of being a northern board in an urban setting, because we struggle to finance administration and support staff for small schools. Because we're in an urban setting, we don't qualify for distance funding but other northern

boards do, which makes it difficult for us to keep those small schools open;

—Funding for Early Years education to offset the current unfunded annual cost of \$1.2 million that we spend annually to provide full-time senior kindergarten at our elementary schools;

—Financial support to allow boards such as ours to cope with the increased administrative burden associated with implementing new initiatives and increased requirements for reporting, accountability and transparency.

There are many other issues that are beyond the scope of this presentation and our time today. Our partners in education—the Ontario Catholic Trustees' Association, the Council of Senior Business Officials, the Council of Directors of Education, the Ontario Catholic School Business Officials' Association and the Ontario Association of School Business Officials—will also, I'm sure, bring many of the other issues to the table.

In summary, the Sudbury Catholic District School Board believes we've made significant progress toward achieving equity in the allocation of funds between school boards. The funding system has also become more accountable to parents and the general public. These are positive developments, but they are in danger of being overshadowed by the inadequate level of funding that the model provides in several key areas. If the quality of education for all our students is to be ensured, and if the unique needs of some of our most challenged students are to be met, the overall amount of funding for education in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools must be increased to recognize legitimate increases in costs.

It is the hope of the Sudbury Catholic District School Board that this presentation has highlighted for you some of the critical funding issues with which the board must currently contend and that require a response from the government in fiscal 2004-05.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to come today and present to you. I hope it wasn't too hurried, but those are the issues we wanted to bring to you today.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

NORTHERN COLLEGE

The Chair: I call on Northern College. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

Mr Fred Gibbons: My name is Fred Gibbons. I'm the acting president of Northern College. To my right is the chair of our board of governors, Michael Doody.

Mr Michael Doody: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the north. Bonjour. Bienvenu. Welcome to the city of Timmins. It's a pleasure to have you with us.

I don't have a great deal of verbiage to pass along to you, but just want to give you an overview of Northern College, which, by the way, gets into some 48 communities in the north. We go as far north as Attawapiskat and all the way south to the Haileybury campus, which includes the Haileybury School of Mines.

Ontario's smallest English-language college has developed an impressive ability to stand out and attract students who value personalized education. For the past two years, Northern has achieved a 97% student retention rate, the highest in the college's 37-year history. The success in attracting and keeping students can be attributed to a number of new initiatives at the college, including success centres where learners can obtain immediate academic assistance.

Northern College has also introduced many new programs and innovative ways of delivering them that have proven extremely popular with high school graduates and returning learners. The veterinary technician and paramedic programs are in high demand, and the province's first fast-track architecture and civil engineering technology programs allow students to obtain a technologist's diploma in just two years instead of three.

Emerging as a leader in health and emergency services training, Northern offers paramedic, pre-service firefighter education and training, police foundations and a new two-year practical nursing diploma program, as well as a Bachelor of Science nursing degree program in collaboration with Laurentian University.

Natural resources technician is another new program offered at the college's Haileybury campus. In fact, Northern College's geography and regional economic base offers rich opportunities for related training in mining, timber operations and skills.

Northern College's three-year welding engineering technology program, which includes a co-op option, prepares graduates for supervisory positions in fields ranging from consulting to research and development. Other programs of note include mining and instrumentation at the Haileybury School of Mines, which was established in 1912. Representatives of the mining industry in Ontario are presently working with Northern to implement the mining school's new vision: a global network of leaders in mining and related technologies, successful and sustainable in all resource enterprises.

Furthermore, Northern prides itself on its relationship with indigenous peoples. The college's Aboriginal council has helped shape many programs and services, and Northern has been able to maintain a 300% increase in Aboriginal student enrolment, which occurred in just two years.

Northern College has produced a number of highly successful graduates who have gone on to top positions in the fields of business, technology, human services and health sciences at home and abroad, and the board of governors, faculty, support staff and administration are continuing their efforts to ensure that Northern remains a northern educational community network.

May I say in closing, before I pass it over to the acting president, that having been in municipal politics for over 30 years, I know that the simple answer to our problems would be a bigger cheque. Let me say very honestly, as someone who didn't have the opportunity to finish high school, I didn't realize that some day I'd end up being chairman of the board of governors of a college. But with

now four years' experience in the college system, I can tell you very truthfully that every student who graduates from a college, whether it be a high school student or someone who has come back, is someone who is going to a potential job. We are an economic engine, and certainly for this huge area of northern Ontario we are a huge economic engine.

I would like to say in closing that one of the things this committee could take back is that I certainly believe there needs to be a new model of funding, certainly for colleges that are in the built-up areas, whether it's in the city or in a large town or a large community. There should also be a funding formula that takes in colleges in rural areas. But certainly the north needs a new deal. I'm sure the president will tell you that although we've turned things around over the last three years at Northern College, we're being penalized in funding for being successful, and that should not be the case.

I'll pass it over now to acting president Mr Gibbons.

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Mr Gibbons: Thank you, Michael, and thank you very much for the opportunity to address you. I will be talking for the most part about a proposal that was submitted to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities on January 16. It's a multi-year funding proposal. This is an approach we've taken for the last three years in identifying the funding requirements of the Ontario college system to our parent ministry.

It is budget time again in Ontario, and our new provincial government finds itself moving head-on into the oncoming headlights of a deficit. In times like these, governments have to differentiate between requests that will drain the public treasury further and those that will add to its capacity to meet the ever-increasing costs it faces. We are confident, however, that this government will not respond to every request for funding with the mantra, "There is no money," but will recognize the opportunities for smart investment.

By looking at community colleges as a cost centre, every government in the past 15 years has decreased its investment to the point where the colleges' capacity to operate effectively as instruments of economic activity is in jeopardy. We cannot continue to provide high-quality career education when we receive \$4,700 per student from our provincial government, in contrast to the national average of \$6,800, or in contrast to the \$7,300 allocated to secondary school student funding or the \$6,300 allocated per university student.

Ontario cannot remain competitive when its community colleges receive the lowest funding support in the country and, by comparison, only 74% of the funding received by colleges in the neighbouring US states. Yet according to Statistics Canada, since the mid-70s the number of jobs requiring high school education has dropped, those requiring university preparation have doubled and those requiring college education have actually tripled.

The public has recognized this shift, but isn't aware of some very dramatic statistics. Enrolment in the provincial

college system has grown by 49% in 15 years, to about 500,000 full-time and part-time students, but the Ontario government is investing 44% less than it did in constant dollars for that same period, the last 15 years.

Some would say this is a model of efficiency. But at what cost? To maintain their programs, colleges have deferred maintenance on their buildings. Approximately \$300 million of deferred maintenance was outstanding at the end of 2002-03, and it's expected to increase to \$600 million by 2005-06. Colleges have been unable to invest adequately in classroom resources, professors and equipment. Escalating utility costs and collective agreement obligations bring new costs to the colleges without any offsetting funding from the province. The effect is to further erode an already insufficient operating budget and operating grant.

On January 16, 2004, Ontario's community colleges presented the government with a four-year investment plan entitled Investing in Ontario's Workforce: Strong Colleges for a Strong Ontario. This was produced by the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario, requesting funding increases of approximately \$90 million a year for four years and bringing the per student funding level from \$4,700 today to \$6,300 by 2007-08. Copies of the multi-year investment proposal are available through the association's Web site, as noted. In your package, there is an executive summary. At \$6,300, our objective by 2007-08, this funding level would still be \$500 below today's national average college funding level.

This is not the way to keep our economy competitive. Ontario's productivity is directly related to healthy investment in its colleges. Is there a return on the investment of public tax dollars? Indeed there is. A report by CCbenefits, Inc, commissioned by the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, reveals that Ontario's colleges are economic engines that are a uniquely attractive investment for provincial governments, and not a drain on public coffers.

Their analysis says:

—Ontario's colleges provide an average annual rate of return of approximately 12% on taxpayer investment measured in terms of increased revenues and cost savings.

—All government investment in colleges is recovered in less than 11 years.

—Annual earnings in the Ontario economy are \$11.4 billion greater every year than they would otherwise have been as a result of the past and present operations of Ontario colleges.

Incredibly, these are very conservative figures that look only at the impact of government-funded work by the colleges.

The full text of this report, entitled The Socio-economic Benefits Generated by 24 Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology in Ontario, is also available through the ACAATO Web site. Again, an executive summary is contained in your package.

In order for Ontario's community colleges to carry out their respective mandates and missions, Northern College

is asking the government to take a close look at how it funds the college system, both in its base grant formula and in its special initiative funding envelopes that arise from time to time, such as the Access to Opportunities Program or the quality assurance fund. It will soon become apparent that the current funding structure is rewarding the large urban colleges located in areas of high industrial and technical growth and development while penalizing small rural colleges, particularly those in the north where the economy is based on a declining resource-based industry.

I'd like to put a slant on some of the information that was provided in the provincial report and talk about the context as it relates to Northern College now.

In fact, as industry declines, we see a corresponding decline in the population and economy of northern Ontario. As we see small northern Ontario communities struggling to survive, the college becomes an even more significant factor and partner in the economic development of northern Ontario.

Northern College believes that the formula used to fund community colleges should be changed to reflect the differing needs of the differing institutions. We are no longer a college system; we are a system with different types of institutions, all with different needs. The small and northern/rural colleges should have a different formula that reflects their needs and the needs of the communities they serve.

The current formula rewards growth in colleges by increasing their market share of the total grant dollars available for distribution. Unless all colleges grow at the same rate, there will be winners and there will be losers. The winners are the larger GTA colleges that are advantaged by this system of distribution, not only pertaining to the general purpose operating grant but also all of the other grants that are distributed based on a college's proportion of the total full-time equivalent funding units—for example, the quality assurance fund and the accessibility fund. The losers are northern and rural colleges that, due to economic and demographic factors, are not growing at the same rate as the GTA colleges.

The enrolment target agreements that are being developed at the request of the province could be a tool for a differentiated funding model, with funding being distributed at an established per-student amount. This per-student amount should also be tiered based on average class size. The current funding amount is based on a class size of 25. Many of the smaller and remote colleges experience average class sizes much smaller than 25 yet are still bound by the same fixed costs required to provide quality education and training to our students.

However, we need to see elements added to any new funding formula that reflect that all the colleges have different visions, missions and mandates. We need to recognize that an area of the province that is experiencing economic challenges, a downturn of resource-based industry and out-migration of youth and population in general cannot compete with areas of the province that

are experiencing economic, industrial and population growth.

The current formula responds differently based on how much and how quickly you grow. You could experience incredible growth for your college and still have decreased funding. As Chair Doody mentioned in his opening remarks, Northern College has grown in the last three consecutive years: 23% in the first year, 4% in the second year and 3% in the third year. The 23% growth led the province. We are a small institution with a small enrolment, so numbers are relative, for sure. Even with that kind of growth, in the current economy, in the context of northern Ontario, the net result is, we receive less operating money because we did not grow as fast as the other colleges in Ontario.

The current formula responds very quickly when enrolment declines—too quickly. Not only does market share decrease if a small college's enrolment is not increasing as quickly as other colleges are, the additional market share reduction is devastating if your enrolment is actually shrinking.

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We think the whole college funding mechanism should be revamped and separated into sections relating to geography and size. Northern colleges cannot compete with the GTA colleges and should not have to. There must be a recognition of the niche that each college fills in our communities and our regions.

Northern College is convinced that this government values post-secondary education and is as committed to equipping young people for the future as it is to balancing the budget and remaining fiscally accountable. It is hoped that the government also values and respects the college's ability to find northern solutions for northern challenges. It is a fact that solutions mandated from the south do not always reflect the economic, geographic, demographic or political realities of the north. Colleges in the north have collaborated on many fronts for several years. As we all find ourselves in the same fiscal difficulty, it is important for us to look to our individual regions for solutions while reaching out to the rest of the province for assistance as required.

Ontario's community colleges are chronically underfunded after more than one and a half decades of neglect. For Ontario's sake, this situation must end. The present deficit situation of the province demands intelligent spending of every tax dollar. However, increased funding for Ontario's colleges is a smart investment, not only now but in the future, yielding both strong monetary and social returns. Given Ontario's deficit and given the compelling results of this independent study by CCBenefits, how can any government afford to ignore an investment that will give them a 12% return on its investment annually?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

The Chair: We have time for only one question, about two minutes in length. This will go to the official opposition. You have two minutes.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Thank you for your presentation. It was very interesting.

Certainly, I agree that investing in community colleges is money well spent. In my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, we are served by Georgian College, and I have met with Brian Tamblyn, the president of Georgian.

I do have a question about tuition. Is tuition currently frozen for community colleges as it is for universities?

Mr Gibbons: Tuition is frozen, just as it is for universities, and tuition has also been capped for the last four years.

Mr Miller: What is an average tuition at your college?

Mr Gibbons: Basic tuition at the college is about \$1,800 for a two-semester program. Added to that, a student would pay various ancillary fees which vary from college to college. Ancillary fees include things like student administrative council fees, locker fees, that type of thing.

Mr Miller: When you're struggling for money, as you are when you're showing that you're funded at \$1,800, does it make sense to have frozen tuitions?

Mr Gibbons: Not at the same time that you're asking for additional monies. It compounds the problem for government.

Mr Miller: It seems to me that \$1,800, or \$3,600 for the year, I assume, per student—

Mr Gibbons: No, it's \$1,800 for the year.

Mr Miller: OK. That's pretty good value.

Mr Gibbons: It's excellent value for your money. By the way, Mr Miller, Northern College also serves Parry Sound.

Mr Miller: Oh, good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

POVERTY ACTION COALITION OF TIMMINS

The Chair: I call on the Poverty Action Coalition of Timmins. Good afternoon. You have 20 minutes for your presentation. You may leave time for questions within that 20 minutes if you so desire. I would ask you to identify yourself for the purposes of our recording Hansard.

Rev Marcus Germaine: I am Marcus Germaine, dean of St Matthew's Cathedral, and this is Michelle Cranney, a member of PACT. We're here to speak on behalf of PACT, the Poverty Action Coalition of Timmins.

PACT was formed early last year, in April 2003, and we're an organization that consists of people representing roughly 50 to 60 organizations in the community of various sorts. Some of us are in health-related areas, some of us teach literacy, some feed the hungry, some obviously represent religious organizations, and some themselves have experienced and are experiencing poverty.

All of us are concerned with what's happening to low-income people here in Timmins. We're concerned especially about those least able to protect themselves: those on welfare, our children and the disabled. All we

want is to do something to help people help themselves. All of us want that.

The election of a new provincial government in October 2003—I'm sure you're all familiar with that bit of local history—offered new hope to those who want to improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable in our society. The Liberal government, I'm happy to say, has already brought about some positive changes. For example, it has scrapped the lifetime ban on social assistance for welfare fraud. It has also committed more than \$3 million to help the homeless in Toronto. These are good first steps, and we congratulate the government on making good on the spirit of some of its campaign promises. Still, there's much to be done, and we hope the spirit of generosity behind these measures will extend considerably further.

Since 1995, low-income people, both parents and children, have been suffering in this province. Those on social assistance have been particularly hard hit. Vicious cuts to welfare rates, along with a steep rise in the cost of living, have had devastating effects. Few can afford to both pay their rent and feed the kids; some can't afford to do either. We all know that Ontario's welfare rates were cut by almost 22% in 1995. In one stroke, those on welfare lost more than one fifth of their income. Since then, the cost of many necessities of life has climbed steeply. Since 1995, there has been a 26% average increase in rent, a 14% average increase in the cost of food, and a 30% increase in water, fuel and electricity costs.

The results are appalling. The incomes of those on welfare in this province today are more than 50% below the poverty line. The incomes of those on provincial disability pensions are only marginally better; there's still a range of between 45% and 55% below the poverty line.

The result is that those on social assistance are too often underhoused and underfed. Food banks, as you may know, are not the solution to the problem of hunger in Ontario. Visitors to the food banks in Timmins get one bag of groceries for each adult once a month. That bag consists of bread and whatever canned goods happen to be on hand. Make no mistake: The food banks here do wonderful work and we wouldn't want to be without them, but they aren't a substitute for adequate social assistance rates.

Ms Michelle Cranney: I'd like to say something about higher social assistance rates.

In the past two years, I have been on social assistance twice. I'm the single step-parent of two aboriginal girls aged 9 and 11. I've been looking after them on my own for over two years now. Now that I have legal custody, my social assistance rates have been cut. I'm not from Timmins originally. I come from Markham, near Toronto, where most of my family and friends are. Fighting to keep my family together and healthy has been very time-consuming and very stressful. Recently, it hasn't been possible for me to take on paid employment.

I came here today because I wanted to tell you what the number one issue is for me. It's the money. The most

important thing for me and people like myself are higher social assistance rates. I have been raising my girls on \$770 a month from welfare. After paying for housing, that leaves less than \$500 a month for food, clothing, transportation and all our other expenses, which doesn't include health care. Even though I make most of my food from scratch, it's been hard to make that money stretch far enough.

I've been asked what I would do if I had some more money to spend. First of all, I'd have spent it on food. Social assistance doesn't pay enough for the three of us to eat a healthy diet. At times, I'd go without so that my kids wouldn't. I've lost a lot of weight and I'm not as healthy as I used to be. Part of that's from stress; another part of that is from lack of proper nutrition.

Second, I'd have spent it on transportation. Where I live now is close to the girls' school, but it's far from the grocery store. It costs the three of us \$10 to get to the grocery store and back. Using the bus, even the three of us can't carry all the groceries, so you have to buy everything in small quantities. I'm sure you know that a 20-pound bag of flour doesn't cost much more than a 5-pound bag of flour, but you can't carry 20-pound bags of flour home on the bus. I don't even want to talk about the potatoes, because that's nearly impossible. So if I had a little bit more money to spend, I'd use it for transportation. That would help me also to find a job, to get to daycare etc.

The other thing I'd like to spend it on would be dental care. Just before Christmas I lost a filling. I'd like to keep my smile, but being on welfare, that's pretty hard to do. They won't pay for a filling, only to have your tooth taken out. I don't want to do that. I've had a toothache for six weeks now. If I had a bit more money, I could put some of it aside to save for the dentist.

1350

Rev Germaine: The experience of poverty is different in the north than elsewhere in the province. In a couple of days you wouldn't have experienced this, but it is generally colder here than it is elsewhere, especially in the south. It starts to snow often in September, and real winter can start as early as October. Last year, for example, we had snow and freeze-up by October 8. This means that winter clothes are a more pressing concern. Frostbite is a constant winter danger.

Costs are also higher for fuel, gas and food, especially in the coastal communities. I don't know how many of you know this, but in Attawapiskat you could pay as much as \$10 for a quart of milk. We need to address these kinds of issues for people on social assistance, especially in the north.

There are other reasons why poverty is different in the north. Consider the employment rates. In the northeastern region, where Timmins is, the employment rate in December was only 56%. That means that more than 40% of the population aged 15 and over are not working. This is the result, according to federal government sources, of less economic activity in the primary sector—in forestry, fishing, mining, and oil and gas. It may be

that the provincial government will develop some long-range strategies to turn this situation around. In the meantime, though, there is a desperate need for a raise in social assistance rates.

Ms Cranney: One way to put more money in the hands of people like me is to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement from people on social assistance. Every month I was on welfare, I saw more than \$200 taken right off my cheque. It comes off the cheques of everybody on social assistance. This doesn't seem fair. That money was set aside by the federal government specifically to help the poorest children in Canada. In Ontario, if you are not on any social assistance or disability program, the provincial government lets you keep the supplement, but otherwise you don't get it. This money is being taken from the poorest members of society, the very people it was intended to benefit. The result? The poorest children suffer the most. They go without: without food, without proper clothing and without school supplies. In the north, there are special reasons for concern about this. Children in the north are not as healthy as children in the south. It is the poorest children who are most at risk. Children like mine need better nutrition; they need warmer clothes. Ending the clawback of the supplement will help me and families like mine achieve this.

Rev Germaine: Michelle is not alone in wanting to see the end of the clawback. The city of Timmins and the district of Cochrane fully agree with her. Last fall, PACT—Poverty Action Coalition of Timmins—addressed both Timmins city council and the Cochrane district social services board on this subject. Both of them unanimously endorsed our resolution calling for an end to the clawback. Not incidentally, Premier Dalton McGuinty actually promised to end the clawback. This was last September in answer to a questionnaire from the Campaign Against Child Poverty. We understand that other worthwhile programs are funded from the clawback. Nevertheless, that money was specifically intended for the benefit of low-income children. Every cent of it should go to them.

I want to say a few words also about the programs funded from the money clawed back. In the Cochrane district, some of that money helps support things like breakfast programs throughout the city of Timmins. It also provides funding for the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children initiative. These programs have been supported by the Cochrane district social services administration board in response to local needs. They have very strong support in the community. We urge you to recommend not only that the clawback come to an end, but also that the province step in and continue to fund programs like these that are responsive to the special needs of particular communities.

Many people would argue that we shouldn't raise social assistance rates because we can't afford to. They point to the large provincial deficit and argue that it simply can't be done.

The fact is that the Liberal Party made two promises to the people of Ontario in 2003. One was not to raise taxes;

the other was to improve public services. It seems that they can't keep both promises. The people of Ontario had a chance to make their opinions known in the recent provincial election. We all know how they voted. They voted for a government that promised to raise social assistance rates, to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement, and to end the lifetime ban for welfare fraud. These are priorities of the people of Ontario. These priorities should be translated into action. We join many others in urging this government to do its utmost to find sources of funding, whether from cost savings or tax increases, that will allow this to happen. We urge the government to use this money to raise social assistance rates to reflect the real cost of living.

I want to say this: There has been some talk about leaving the rates as they are but pegging them to the cost of living. That will perpetuate an already unjust situation. The rates that are already present are rates that everybody, across the board, on the other side of the House before the election condemned. Let's not enshrine those by simply tagging them to the cost of living.

The Liberal Party of Ontario makes the following commitment on its Web page: "We will bring northern Ontario to the table. We will ensure that the voice of the north is heard in the cabinet and we will respect that voice."

We're here to tell you that a lot of voices here in the north are in favour of a new deal in social assistance. The supporters of PACT think so. The Timmins city council and the Cochrane district social services administration board are also on record as endorsing that kind of change.

For a lot of people—people like Michelle's family and many others in the community—changes can't come too soon. There have already been many studies examining the effects of poverty—I'm sure most of you have read them—and still, every day, children in the Cochrane district go hungry, go to school without adequate food, go to school without adequate clothing in quite piercing cold temperatures. Every day, people are cold. They're hungry. Please act and help bring an end to this terrible injustice.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you. We have two minutes per party for questions.

Mr Prue: The whole question of the clawback—I'm going to ask research to tell us what it would cost the treasury if we stopped the clawback, because I think you've made a good point on that.

The poverty rates, as we've heard earlier today from someone from the North Bay hospital, are much higher in the north. I guess that's due to the shutdown of industry or mining or forestry. Do you have any sort of idea what we can do to try to get jobs and experience back here? I've heard tourism, but I don't know how well that's going to go. Is there anything else that this government can do to try to get some money back into the north, to try to get some jobs and prosperity so that 44% aren't unemployed?

Rev Germaine: It's a question I don't know exactly how to answer, because I'm not an economist, but one of

the things I can tell you is that one way to fund government-run projects is to increase the minimum wage to a reasonable level. The current increase is woefully inadequate. As someone pointed out to me at city council last year, the money that people get through increased minimum wage isn't going to be ferreted away somewhere. It's going to be spent and it's going to benefit local communities in terms of local businesses. It's also going to roll into the tax coffers of the government.

So I think an increase in minimum wage would help, but I also think there are a lot of jobs concerning the environment, which is at risk in many areas of the north, much more at risk than people would realize. It may be pristine wilderness, but it's in danger. There could be a lot of money spent—or invested, if you like—in improving the safeguards and the state of our environment.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll move to the government and Mr Wilkinson.

Mr Wilkinson: Thank you for coming today. I want you to know that we've heard across the province as we're going through a lot of similar situations. Reverend, you are an eloquent speaker, but Michelle, I was quite taken with your comments. It takes bravery to come here in front of other people and discuss your situation, and I want you to know that we appreciate that.

Ms Cranney: Good, because I'm very nervous. But you know what? I'm still mad about the whole thing. That's why I even ended up coming.

Mr Wilkinson: I just want to ask you a specific question. In my own riding—I'm new to being an MPP, so we have people who come to my riding, but I wasn't aware of this at all. I know a lot of the issues that you raise—you were saying that you have a filling that needs to be replaced. Let's get this straight. All you have is a filling that needs to be replaced, and the government will not pay for that—

Ms Cranney: They'll pay to get it taken out.

Mr Wilkinson: —but after your tooth abscesses, then they'll pay to take it out. Then will they put a crown in, or is it just supposed to be—

Mr Prue: Come on.

Mr Wilkinson: My point is, as a government, we won't pay to replace a filling, but we'll pay to extract—

Ms Cranney: You pay for support hose.

Mr Wilkinson: I'm just shocked by this. I can't believe how some people who have run this province can sleep at night, because it just seems to me we see these negative cost spirals where we waste money by being cheap and turn around and spend more and more money. A lack of good dental health just results in other complications, which then cost us as a government and as a people more and more money because we don't spend money.

Ms Cranney: It's preventive and it is health.

Mr Wilkinson: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and we're stuck with \$5.6 billion worth of pounds that we have to pay because some people didn't put money into prevention.

Again, I commend you for coming here today. Thank you.

Ms Cranney: Well, I hope it has an effect.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll move to the official opposition.

1400

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): Thank you for making the presentation today. You are certainly very high-minded, and I mean that sincerely, in your recommendations to the committee and to the government. Do you expect politicians to keep their promises?

Rev Germaine: Do you?

Mr Flaherty: Yes, I do.

Rev Germaine: Good. So let me answer the question. I expect that. What creates disappointment often is that our expectations aren't met, however much those expectations are raised by people who make promises. I expect the government to keep its promise. I expected more of the previous government as well.

I guess what I want to say, though, is with respect to these competing promises: the promise, on the one hand, of increased social services and, on the other hand, no taxes. The taxpayer has been a sacred cow in this province for a long time, but what about ordinary citizens who don't contribute a lot in taxes, who are at the bottom? When do they become as important as their high-taxpaying counterparts?

I think it's time that governments, who have been looking after the taxpayer for quite a long while in this province by cutting taxes, finally decide that maybe there is an end to that wisdom, that it's already been reached. We need to improve our tax base to pay for some of the neglect that's happened and to repair some of the damage that's happened by the previous government.

Mr Flaherty: I agree. We had the opportunity in the previous years to, in most of our budgets, take people at the bottom end of the socio-economic scale who were paying provincial income tax off the tax rolls, so that they don't pay provincial income tax in the province of Ontario.

Let me ask you, in the nature of social assistance here—and I know you've made the points about the north being different, and of course that is so. Leaving aside persons with disabilities who cannot engage in the workforce, for those who can engage in the workforce, what's the role of training, particularly skills training here? How adequate or inadequate is it in order to assist people to enter the workforce gainfully?

Rev Germaine: The two gentlemen who were here previously could probably speak more to that question. What I can say—my wife works in literacy training—is that there is not enough money provided by various levels of governments for people to improve their capacity to work at skilled jobs, so that people who are on the bottom, who are perhaps there because they don't have skills that they might need in the marketplace, can't get the money from various levels of government to improve their skills. I think that the solution to the problem, I hate to say it—the whole notion of throwing

money on problems has been given a kind of bad colour—but I think there needs to be a lot of money thrown at this problem.

When did it become a fact that education is expenditure? I've always thought it was investment. For example, the Vancouver Board of Trade, not known as a left-wing think tank, a couple of years ago came up with an interesting fact: that education of children—daycare, child care—is an investment that returns \$2 for every dollar spent. So I think it's time that governments start to refocus on the problem and start calling it investment. When are we going to invest in people in such a way that we improve the skill base of workers in this country?

Mr Flaherty: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

COCHRANE TEMISKAMING CHILDREN'S TREATMENT CENTRE

The Chair: I call on the Cochrane Temiskaming Children's Treatment Centre. Good afternoon.

Mrs Mary MacKay: Thank you very much for allowing me to present to you this afternoon. I am Mary MacKay, and I'm the executive director of the Cochrane Temiskaming Children's Treatment Centre.

All children's treatment centres in the province are facing major deficits. This is because of budgets that were frozen from 1990 to 2000. An infusion of dollars was provided to centres in 2000, which helped to deal with some but not all of the pressures. Centres do not receive rate increases on an annual basis to reflect the cost of living. Consequently, budgets are eroded every year. We are now in crisis. Many centres are facing layoffs, cancellations of various programs and increasing wait lists.

We are one of 19 centres in the province of Ontario providing services to children with special needs. Along with the integrated services for northern children program, of which we are a sponsor, we provide paediatric occupational therapy, paediatric physical therapy and speech language pathology on a weekly basis to all the communities in the districts of Cochrane and Timiskaming. We are the only agency in our district that can provide the specialty paediatric OT and PT services. In Timmins we also provide social work, various specialty clinics such as medical clinics, orthotics clinics and equipment clinics and various therapy groups geared to toddlers and elementary school children. We also operate a ski program for children with motor difficulties.

Children being actively seen by our centre staff number 350. About half of these children reside in Timmins and the other half reside up and down the highway, from Hearst, which is three hours north of here, to the Tri-Town, which is two and a half hours south of here. We have wait lists. There are 150 children currently who will wait one month to two years, depending on the child's age and the nature and the severity of a disability. Children are seen in their homes, schools, day cares and

at the centre in Timmins, or at the satellite offices located in Hearst, Kapuskasing, Cochrane, Kirkland Lake and New Liskeard.

Our centre believes that early intervention is important and affects the prognosis of the child and the family. Many of our children are referred at birth. Many children remain on the centre caseload until the age of 19 or 21. These children have complex needs, often for intense direct therapy early on, often requiring two or more disciplines to intervene as well as the social worker.

Once the child enters school, these interventions continue to be important so that the child's education is not compromised by a lack of understanding of his disability by the school, or by a need of mobility or communication devices to assist in attaining his maximum at school. Assessment, direct therapy and consultation to school teachers are all provided. As the child's needs change, so does the need for the level and type of intervention. For example, if the child has surgery, often this is a time of increased therapy. If a child is newly diagnosed because of a motor vehicle accident, a tumour, or any other kind of trauma, the intervention needs to be intense as well.

When the child enters high school the question of what he will do in his adult years becomes more important to both him and his family. It is the centre's role to assist youth and their families to make sound and realistic decisions about their future. Special needs children require much more planning than the average child. Plans could entail many supports from other agencies in the community. Plans could also include specialized training and special supports from post-secondary education providers.

Most special needs children need additional life skills training so that they can learn and better cope with the demands of the adult world and maximize their independence. Much of this training should be the responsibility of our centre. The goal of the services of the centre is to assist each child to become a happy, healthy, productive adult who is living as independently as possible and feeling that he is a contributing member of society.

In summary, without the centre's services and support, most families would be completely at a loss as to how to manage their child's difficulties. They would not know what services their child would need and how to ensure he received them. Disabled youth would be ill-prepared for any kind of meaningful life as an adult. We saw that. We came into existence here in 1980 and for the first five years we saw many youth and children who had not received the ongoing support of a treatment centre and the kinds of situations that they found themselves in. The centre has made a difference in many people's lives.

Rising costs have put pressure on what was already a bit of a shoestring operation. We are a small centre covering a wide geographical area. We have lost staff positions due to attrition. We're not able to afford to replace staff members who have left our employ. This year we will have to consider layoffs. We are looking at contracting out our staff to provide services outside our

catchment area and contracting our staff to provide services for other agencies in order to increase our revenues and maintain our staff.

1410

What does that mean? Our already long wait lists for our core services will increase dramatically. In addition, plans to add a living skills program at our centre to consistently address the needs of teens has been put on hold for yet another year.

Increases in the cost of living since 1990 have been dramatic. The hospital sector has experienced wage settlements that we cannot even approach for our own staff. Recruiting and retaining staff is critical for all centres, but especially in northern Ontario, where vacancies are rampant. The gap between what our centre offers therapists versus our local hospital is over \$10,000 per annum per therapist.

Our provincial association, the Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services, has strongly advocated for additional funding and annual rate increases for centres as well as funds to close the gaps in the services so that the wait-lists become more reasonable. You have heard that this kind of measure would be approximately \$32 million annually.

We recognize that the Liberal government will need time to organize and prioritize. I am echoing the request for consideration of at least a 3% cost-of-living increase for our centres to assist us to manage our staff and services until such time as you have had the opportunity to thoroughly review our mandates and services. As you are aware, hospitals and many other community agencies receive these rate increases automatically. Centres do not.

Thank you again for your time. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair: We have about four minutes per party. We begin this rotation with the government.

Mr Peterson: We've had presentations from several groups that are caregivers to our youth. I think the work you're doing is very commendable. I'm concerned that in our society, in our education system, in our institutions we might not have a method for testing for psychosis in children at an early enough age to assist them. The statistics are quite compelling. If we get early diagnosis of a problem and get on it, we can save a heck of a lot of money and improve the quality of the person's life much faster than if we let it wait. I don't know how to address this question any better than that. Do you have any sense of how we could improve?

Ms MacKay: I'm not an expert in what you're talking about, psychosis, but because our centre deals mainly with children with physical disabilities and not psychological aspects, although of course we work closely with agencies that do provide that kind of service, I could say that what you're expressing is very similar for physically disabled children or children with motor issues. The issues only compound themselves over time and affect every area of a child's life, from self-esteem and behavioural issues at school—if the child is not being dealt with properly at school, then he becomes a problem.

It just snowballs into a lot of other issues. If the original problem had been intervened with initially, you wouldn't be seeing all these other, secondary issues. So I would say that whether it's a psychological issue or certainly a physical issue, which is the kind that I deal with, it would be the same.

Mr Flaherty: Thank you very much for the presentation, which I'm sure reflects the views of all of the children's treatment centres in Ontario, the 19 of them.

Ms MacKay: Yes.

Mr Flaherty: I was interested in your comment early on, talking about funding between 1990 and 2000. I want to ask you about the funding issues too. In 2001, the children's treatment centres came to the government of the day, of which I was the Minister of Finance, and said, "We need \$20 million." That was the amount of money they needed to set things straight. It was the same issue of competitiveness with other public sectors and so on. We provided for that in the budget in 2001—not half of it, not \$12 million, not \$15 million, but \$20 million, exactly what was asked for, and rightly so. I think it was the right thing to do because of the great work that children's treatment centres do, and the absolute imperative that children with disabilities be seen early and receive the therapies they need early in their little lives.

Now what has happened in the last few years—that's really what I'm getting at—in terms of your cost structure? One of the things I fear that we often see is that there's a growth in human resource costs without an increase in services. That is undesirable, and I think you would view it as undesirable; I certainly view it as undesirable. So I'd like to know, what are the components that are driving these costs up, and can the government be assured that more money means more services?

Ms MacKay: I think that's what happened in 2001. The government was very interested in having more services and in having children's treatment centres certainly prove that they were going to be able to provide more services, and I think we did. But the problem was that for 10 years the erosion to our budgets with regard to cost-of-living increases—we're talking about fuel and hydro and all those other things that weren't really taken into account. You can provide more services, but in fact every unit of cost is more expensive.

What happens is that, yes, we added a number of staff at that time in order to provide more services—we certainly are providing more services—but in fact we're still all underpaid. Not only that, but fuel costs in any place, but certainly in northern Ontario, are an issue. We have longer, colder winters. We have much-increased costs in gasoline fuel for our cars. We are a travelling operation. We're experiencing the same kinds of insurance rate increases, extended health increases and all the other increases that everybody else has experienced, but we don't get an increase every year in order to accommodate that. So over time our budget becomes eroded again.

Then, on the other hand, as I mentioned to you, we have other people in the community who are able to

address human resource rates, and those are increasing, and we're not able to compete. Staff are our bread and butter. If we don't have staff, we don't have services. It becomes an issue.

Mr Flaherty: I certainly hope the government listens.

Mr Prue: Right back on that same point, you have here on a sheet of paper that you cannot offer comparable salaries to our community competitors. There is at least a \$10,000 difference in the salary for a professional. What is the rate at which you lose staff? Is it 10%, 15%, 20% a year?

Ms MacKay: Everybody has to travel; this is not considered a perk, especially on winter roads and that sort of thing. But we do a lot to retain staff at our centre and we've been fairly lucky. For years and years we had a lot of vacancies and we couldn't even attract staff in order to fill these vacancies. Now we have the need for staff but we can't afford to pay them. We're losing staff because of the other reason: When they leave, we're not able to replace them.

Mr Prue: Not for every place in Ontario but just for yours, in dollar terms, how much money would you need from this government in additional funding in order to pay staff the competitive wage that they could get elsewhere in Timmins?

Ms MacKay: Probably at this point we're looking at between \$40,000 and \$50,000.

Mr Prue: That's the total that you would need in your organization?

Ms MacKay: That's right.

Mr Prue: The second area, waiting lists: How long is the waiting list? I know every program is different, but how long are waiting lists generally for children to get access to your centre?

Ms MacKay: If a child comes to our centre, and it's a baby that has some severe problems, he's going to be seen right away because we prioritize our waiting lists. But if you're a child with some fine motor problems which are creating some difficulty in school and you're eight years old, you're probably going to wait a year and a half. We don't consider that to be acceptable.

Mr Prue: Obviously not.

Ms MacKay: But that's as fast as we can get to them. What happens is that as we are about to address some of the people further down the waiting list, we have higher-priority children referred that we have to see right away.

1420

Mr Prue: What additional monies or staff would you need to make sure that the waiting list was reduced to an acceptable level of, say, no longer than a month?

Ms MacKay: No longer than a month? OK, we'd need probably \$200,000. We'd need to increase by four staff.

Mr Prue: This government has a very thorny problem, as we all know. They've inherited a deficit. They have three choices, in my view, or a combination of three choices: (1) They can continue with the deficit, which I don't think they'll do; (2) they can slash programs; and (3) they can raise taxes. Which one would you advise them to do?

Ms MacKay: Personally? Raise taxes.

Mr Prue: And you'd be willing to pay that? Because you end up paying too.

Ms MacKay: Absolutely, I pay through the nose. Yes.

Mr Prue: But you think that's the best option they have.

Ms MacKay: I think it's the only option they have. Most of the services I see in town—we're not living off the fat of the land. I'll tell you, we're pretty well bare bones at this point, and I can't see how they can slash services. That will affect the most vulnerable people in our society. I've listened to two presentations since I've been here, and I think the one just before me was excellent. I would disagree with slashing services.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

PORCUPINE DISTRICT MEDICAL SOCIETY

The Chair: I call upon the Porcupine District Medical Society. Good afternoon. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Dr Eric Labelle: Mr Chairman and committee members, good afternoon. I'm Dr Eric Labelle, a general surgeon at Timmins and District Hospital, and also the president of the Porcupine District Medical Society. I'm expecting Dr Dave Huggins to join me shortly. He's a family physician here in Timmins as well. My presentation will not take the entire 20 minutes. Should you have any questions after, I'd be more than happy to answer them.

The people of Ontario greatly value our health care system. Year in and year out, it ranks as the clear number one priority for Ontario voters, and the rest of Canada for that matter. That is nowhere more true than right here in northern Ontario. The people of the north are often the first to feel the effects of cutbacks, waiting lists and what has now reached large cities in southern Ontario, the doctor shortage. Managing scarce resources and trying to find our patients the timely care they deserve is a constant challenge to my colleagues and me. As this committee travels the province and puts forward its recommendations, I ask you to remember this and understand the vital and necessary service physicians, nurses and hospitals deliver to the people of the north. Spending on health care is an investment in the people of this province.

Running a practice today is becoming increasingly difficult. Extra paperwork, a growing and aging population, combined with fewer doctors has physicians pushed to the limit. Working conditions for all health care workers are increasing the rates of burnout, early retirement and, unfortunately, overall dissatisfaction with the system.

As well, Ontario doctors are looking to other provinces, and other countries, in fact, to practise medicine for more competitive remuneration. This government cannot ignore this fact. Government has repeatedly stated its desire to hire more doctors, yet we are having trouble

keeping the ones we already have. If we are to retain the physicians we currently have and also attract new physicians, we need to make Ontario's fee schedule number one and once again make Ontario an attractive place to work. Premier McGuinty has to recognize that there is a global shortage of doctors, and we need to make physicians a budgetary priority to keep Ontario competitive.

In the early 1980s, Ontario ranked number one in fees compared to the other provinces. In the early 1990s, that ranking slipped to third, and unfortunately today we have fallen as low as seventh. Over the course of the last four years, fee increases in Ontario have not even kept pace with inflation and the rising cost of running our practices. As a result, we are experiencing extreme difficulties in recruiting and retaining doctors in this province, particularly in the north. In turn, we have a million people in Ontario without the expert care of a family doctor, and this is expected to double in the next eight years.

I read on the weekend an article in the *Globe and Mail* by Murray Campbell in which the Minister of Health talks about stakeholders being more efficient. Well, there is no more efficient or responsible partner than doctors. Under the terms of our last agreement, we have managed to deliver care within the budget set aside by the government for physician services. No other partner in the health care system can say that. Investment in physician services is money well spent.

When it comes to delivering care to our patients, physicians have demonstrated initiative and ingenuity in developing new ways to meet the ever-growing demand for the medical expertise only a doctor can provide. Physicians have worked with the government to introduce new payment plans for emergency room physicians, community service contracts for smaller towns and regions, and the northern group funding plan, which has helped in recruiting and retaining colleagues working up here in the north.

Despite a serious commitment by the doctors of Ontario, most of us find a health care system today that falls short of the one we knew when many of us started practising several years ago. The Ontario Medical Association recently surveyed 2,000 doctors in the province and it has found that almost one out of every six doctors is seriously considering moving outside of the province or even outside of the country. The survey suggests that an inability to treat their patients in a timely manner, the chronic shortage of physicians and a declining quality of life are contributing factors as to why physicians are considering moving to other jurisdictions.

When asked about the state of the health care system in Ontario, the survey clearly shows that doctors are most concerned about the negative impact that physician shortages, general underfunding of the health care system and delays in treatment caused by waiting lists are having on patient care. In a similar survey done by the strategic council in 2000, only 75% of doctors felt that increasing the number of physicians in Ontario should be a priority. Today that number is 97%. It has become critical.

When asked about their working lives and life satisfaction, doctors in the province reported low levels of

satisfaction due to the inability to treat and refer patients adequately. Only 20% of physicians reported being very satisfied with their lives as a physician in Ontario, and 75% felt that their quality of life has declined over the last three years. The survey suggests that working 50 hours a week, on average, having difficulty in accessing specialty care and diagnostic tests for their patients and sending patients out of province for care are factors attributable to this dissatisfaction in their profession.

Ontario doctors are deeply concerned about the physician shortage in this province. We are not training enough doctors to meet the current, let alone future, requirements. The average age of general surgeons, for example, is over 55, and this is absolute nonsense. There are critical shortages in every single specialty, from anaesthetists to obstetricians and gynaecologists.

The OMA has produced strong and practical recommendations to improve the physician human resource situation in Ontario. A copy of these can be found on the OMA Web site at www.oma.org.

Ontario's doctors are leading by example and are not asking from government anything they themselves are not prepared to do.

Many people today talk about primary care reform: teams of doctors working with other health care professionals to provide around-the-clock access to primary care. In this area Ontario is leading the country. Family health networks and, more recently, family health groups are groundbreaking models that help to extend care to patients around the clock and offer flexibility to our overworked, dedicated family physicians.

1430

Contrary to misconceptions, Ontario doctors have positively responded to these new models. As of last week, over 2,000 family doctors are caring for over three million Ontario patients. They provide proper reward to our front-line family doctors for the delivery of comprehensive care, and they offer the flexibility that so many of our younger doctors are also wishing for.

The fact remains, however, that the system in Ontario remains woefully underfunded. Our population is growing and aging, and per capita health care spending has not kept up. Our patients need more specialized, expensive care. There are major gaps in the continuity of care for many of our most vulnerable citizens, especially geriatric patients.

Wait lists to see a family doctor or a specialist consult are unacceptably long as well. Our emergency departments are overloaded. Doctors share in the public's frustration with poor access to limited health system resources. We have cut back and consolidated in the name of efficiency. The end result, however, is too often increased stress for providers, and frustration and fear for our sick patients and their families.

There is no more room for cutting. It is time to move beyond the rhetoric and platitudes and demonstrate the fiscal commitment that we have seen in other jurisdictions, to improve the professional lives of our physicians and provide the resources necessary to allow

doctors to do the job they are trained to do: to take care for the people of Ontario.

Physicians spend plenty of their valuable time—almost 10 hours a week—filling out forms. This is time that would much better be spent taking care of our patients. It is time we removed this red tape and helped our overburdened physicians do what they were so expertly trained to do.

We also need to improve physician morale. We need to improve doctors' perceptions of this province.

Working in a hospital environment, I understand the challenge of setting a budget and trying to live within one's means, even when the demands for more spending arrive on a daily basis. Our negotiations with the government to enhance medical care in Ontario are not about options and luxuries and things that can be put off until tomorrow or next year or the year after. We're fighting for more operating room time, better equipment and shorter waiting lists.

As president of the Porcupine District Medical Society, I believe the current talks between the OMA and the government are a fork in the road for health care in Ontario. Our doctors are tired, frustrated and undervalued. The patients we see are sicker, they require more time, and the support systems to meet their needs at home and in the community are lacking. There is nothing more upsetting to a physician than to have to explain to an anxious patient or family member that they will have to wait to receive the medical care that I know they need now.

The Premier and the health minister must step up to the plate and address the real issues that are driving doctors out of the province. We can no longer wait. The time to act is now. Thank you.

The Chair: We have about two minutes per party. We'll begin with the official opposition.

Mr Barrett: You indicated, and many of us have read in the media, the survey indicating that one in six doctors in Ontario is seriously considering moving outside of Ontario. That's 17% or 18%. I'm very surprised to see that because we know, year by year, normally 1% leave and about 1% return—pretty well neutral. You talk about red tape and poor morale, but is this solely the underlying reason for this? Is it all about the need or the desire for competitive remuneration? Is that what is driving this increase from virtually zero to 17% or 18%?

Dr Labelle: The reason it has been zero is because other jurisdictions have not been competitive. We've seen over the past few years a major shift in the remuneration packages, and that's going to make a huge difference over the next few years if there continues to be that imbalance. We're generally a population that has the means to move, pick up our things and go elsewhere. That's unfortunate, but this is what's going to happen. I firmly believe that we are going to lose more physicians over the next few years if things are not redressed.

Myself, I'm from northern Ontario. I came back to this area because this is where I was born and raised. The financial aspects aren't as important to me with respect to

where I work, but there are other physicians who aren't from Ontario and we need to attract them. How are you going to attract people when the jurisdiction next door is offering to pay them higher? It's very difficult. I get two, perhaps three, job offers from different jurisdictions in the country or even in the United States; 12 to 20 every year. That's a lot of offers, and those are unsolicited. I'm not even looking to leave anywhere.

Mr Barrett: When you refer to cutbacks and underfunding—and we all know there were no cutbacks in the health care budget; it went from \$17.4 billion in 1995 to about \$28 billion now—you're referring specifically to cutbacks or underfunding with respect to physicians?

Dr Labelle: At this point, I'm speaking only to physician services, but I think the whole system in general is underfunded presently, and it's wreaking havoc with the care of our patients. Speaking on behalf of the situation in Timmins, because that's obviously what I'm most familiar with, we've been very fortunate. This is part of the reason why I am in Timmins, because this hospital has generally been very well run and the patient care does not seem to be as affected as in other places. But over the past years things have really gone downhill. We frequently have up to 13 or 14 beds in the emergency department. People who have no beds to be admitted to on the medical floor, for example, are waiting in the hall. One of the major contributing factors to that has been this ALC system. I don't know if you're aware of this ALC designation, whereby alternate-level-of-care status is given to patients. These patients have nowhere else to go, unfortunately.

The Chair: We need to move on to the next question. Mr Prue of the NDP.

Mr Prue: On the first page of your presentation you say that Ontario used to rank number one in fees and has now fallen to seventh. What would it cost to have Ontario again be number one in terms of fees?

Dr Labelle: I'm sorry but I don't know the answer to that. I would refer you to the OMA and the negotiations process going on. I don't know to what degree we have fallen but it's significant.

Mr Prue: Who is number one now?

Dr Labelle: I'm not sure but I believe it's British Columbia.

Mr Prue: You don't know how much more they make in fees than in Ontario?

Dr Labelle: I'm not aware of that.

Mr Prue: I think you should know that.

Dr Labelle: I think I would know that if I was interested in moving, sir. If I was looking to a different jurisdiction that would give me the most monetary satisfaction, I would be looking into that, but that is not my interest personally.

Mr Prue: The red tape also interests me. I'll move on to that. You said you spend up to 10 hours a week filling out forms.

Dr Labelle: At least a day.

Mr Prue: Could you give us some examples of forms you think are ridiculous to fill out? I used to be a civil

servant and I used to think some of the forms I filled out were ridiculous. You must think some of them serve no purpose. Can you give us some examples of those forms you fill out that serve no purpose?

Dr Labelle: Some of the insurance forms. There are triplicate forms for the same situation that we have to fill out, going-back-to-work slips, going-off-work slips. It's just never-ending. The number of forms that I personally deal with is much less than most family physicians. The family physicians bear the brunt of that problem much more than we do. I don't see people regularly over the course of their lives; I see people during crisis periods when they have cancer, hernias or whatever job-related injury they might have. Usually the burden of the forms on myself is limited to the event causing this patient's problem. So for me it has not been that much of a problem, but it is still quite significant.

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The Chair: We'll move to the government.

Mr Colle: First of all, Doctor, I want to say that I think you're one of the unsung heroes for coming back to the north and being a front-line surgeon and doctor here. It's people like you who should be the role models for Ontario children. I don't say that because I'm trying to be patronizing; I think I speak on behalf of all of us to say that we need people like you to practise medicine more than ever. So on behalf of all my colleagues, I want to say thank you for staying here and doing such important work. I wish more would follow the lead you've shown. You're a credit to your profession.

I guess our real dilemma here as a committee is that the last government—

Laughter.

Mr Colle: Mr Flaherty thinks it's funny but I don't. I think it's very serious.

Interjection.

Mr Colle: We're trying to grapple with the problem that there have been more gross dollars spent, but on a per capita basis there hasn't been, on the needs of individuals. As a front-line doctor, besides what you mentioned about the bureaucracy and red tape and other things, what area can you direct us to to try and find ways of fixing this huge challenge? Is there anything else you might suggest we should be looking at or going toward or digging?

Dr Labelle: I think there is something that's going to happen in the next few years that will happen, unfortunately, haphazardly. I think if it was organized, there would be major cost savings available.

Since I am a general surgeon, I'm speaking on behalf of all the specialists but particularly in general surgery. You've got a district here that has the Timmins and District Hospital—Hearst, Kapuskasing, Cochrane, Kirkland Lake and even Moose Factory—that has a surgeon on call. Most of these other places have one surgeon on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You've got the anaesthetist who has to be on call with them, the nurses, the OR staff, the equipment, and it is woefully underutilized. You go to the Toronto General

Hospital, they have a set number of operating rooms and they use them all. We've got a bunch of little satellite operations here that can't be used adequately, and unfortunately there's a tremendous loss of money associated with that.

Unfortunately it impacts us personally as well, because right now we're down to two general surgeons in Timmins. When the guy in Hearst calls us saying that he's got a patient he can't take care of, who has to take care of him? It's us. We're doing one and two calls for a district of 120,000. Unfortunately the most beneficial part of care financially involves elective surgeries. For example, we've got locum surgeons coming from out of town, from down south, to Hearst or wherever, to do the nice little easy cases and we're stuck at 2 o'clock in the morning dealing with the disasters. If we would centralize and regionalize our specialist services through the Timmins and District Hospital—and I know this is not going to be a very popular topic to discuss here right now with people from other communities, but I don't see any other possible way of doing this—and allow this hospital to be the district hospital it was meant to be, there would be tremendous savings. There have to be.

Mr Prue: Mr Chair, on a point of order: I wonder if I could have the research officer find out who has the highest rate of pay for doctors in Canada, and if indeed it is British Columbia, and second, what it would cost to match that in terms of dollars.

The Chair: Research will look for that and provide it to all members.

Mr Colle: Could I also ask research to contact the Ministry of Health to comment on the doctor's proposal, the impacts of that and why it can't be done or why it isn't done, the regional—what did you call it, sir?

Dr Labelle: Regionalization of at least general surgery services, but the same would apply to obstetrical services—which is happening right now—orthopaedic services, internal medicine services.

Mr O'Toole: Could I ask research to look into what it would cost to give nurse practitioners one billing code to help ease the burden in primary care?

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation here this afternoon..

SUDBURY COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC

The Chair: I call on the Sudbury Community Legal Clinic. Kindly state your name for the purposes of Hansard.

Ms Grace Kurke: My name is Grace Kurke, and I'm a lawyer at the Sudbury Community Legal Clinic. The Sudbury legal clinic has been working with a community organization called the Justice with Dignity Campaign committee to advocate for changes to Ontario's public assistance programs. The inspiration for this work is an individual named Kimberly Rogers, whose experiences while on public assistance highlight the pressing need to help Ontario's poor live in a just society, while providing financial assistance that reflects the actual cost of living.

The Sudbury Community Legal Clinic is a non-profit organization, funded by Legal Aid Ontario, which provides legal services to low-income individuals in the Sudbury district in areas of law that include housing and government income programs. The Justice with Dignity Campaign committee is a grassroots organization made up of concerned citizens whose goal is to change public assistance programs to provide both justice and dignity to those on public assistance in this province.

Kimberly Rogers was a client of the Sudbury Community Legal Clinic. She was my client. In 2001, she challenged a provincial law that automatically disqualified her from receiving public assistance benefits for three months because she had been convicted of welfare fraud for collecting both student loans and welfare benefits at the same time. At the time her public assistance benefits were terminated, she was five months pregnant and under house arrest with no income to feed or house herself. Although the Ontario Superior Court of Justice had reinstated her benefits pending a full hearing of her constitutional challenge, Ms Rogers did not have enough money to adequately feed herself after paying rent.

Monthly public assistance payments are made up of two components. There is something called a shelter allowance, and then there is a basic needs allowance. The maximum monthly benefit that a single person in Ontario can get today is \$520, and that's broken down as \$325 for rent and \$195 for everything else. In Ms Rogers's case, her rent was \$450 a month. The welfare office reduced her maximum entitlement by 10% to collect the amount she had been overpaid while a student and collecting welfare benefits at the same time, and this left her with \$18 a month for all her other expenses.

You probably have all heard about her case. She died while under house arrest, while still serving her sentence. The baby she was carrying did not survive. A coroner's inquest was called and was held in Sudbury in 2002. The jury that presided over that inquest made about 14 recommendations, two of which, in my practise, I consider quite key.

The first key recommendation was a call to end automatic bans that happen when someone is convicted of fraud against public assistance. The second key recommendation was a call to increase the rates of assistance to actually reflect what people pay in rent and the actual costs of food and other necessities. In December 2003, the Ontario government implemented the first recommendation and should be commended for following up on that.

The jury's other recommendation was number 4 and was worded this way by the jury:

"The Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services and the Ontario Works program should assess the adequacy of all social assistance rates. Allowances for housing and basic needs should be based on actual costs within a particular community or region. In developing the allowance, data about the nutritional food basket prepared annually by local health units and the average rent data prepared by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp should be considered."

The rationale that the jury gave for this recommendation was to ensure that social assistance rates are adequate and that they are adjusted annually, if necessary.

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The data that is referred to in that recommendation was presented to the jury. What they showed was that average rent costs in Ontario are significantly above the shelter portion allowance of Ontario Works benefits and also Ontario disability benefits, and the cost of food and other necessities is significantly above the basic needs allowance that is provided to people on Ontario Works.

At page 4 of the written submission I have provided, you'll see a breakdown of the current maximum shelter allowances under Ontario Works. For a one-person household, it's \$325 a month; for two people, it's \$511; for three people, it's \$554; and for a four-person household, it's \$602. When you look at the ranges of average rents across the province, you'll see that these allowances are significantly below even the lowest average range per city.

Faced with this reality, many individuals and families on public assistance have no choice but to use their basic allowance to pay their rent. In Ms Rogers's case, although her rent was lower than the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment in Sudbury, it was still \$125 more than her shelter allowance. So in order to pay her rent, she had to use most of that \$195 basic needs allowance toward rent, which meant she had little left over to buy food or any of the other necessities.

With respect to the cost of food, the 37 public health units in Ontario are required on a yearly basis to complete something called a nutritious food basket survey. They price 66 nutritionally balanced food items, and then they use that data to report on how this information is used to promote and support policy development that would increase access to healthy foods.

In 2001, when Ms Rogers was pregnant and on public assistance, the nutritious food basket survey conducted by the Sudbury and District Health Unit reported that a pregnant woman in her age range and at her stage of pregnancy would need \$30.15 a week to eat a healthy, balanced diet, and that translates to approximately \$130 per month. As I already said, in her case, she had only \$18 left. She had to sue the Ontario government to get that \$18, because her benefits had been cancelled.

The medical officer of health for the Sudbury health unit testified at the inquest. What she said—and I'm generalizing what probably came to about two hours of evidence—was that poverty affects health, not only on the individual level but on the societal level as well. So the more financially secure an individual is, the healthier, in general, that individual is, and the more equally that wealth is shared, the higher the overall health status of that community. The conclusion is that the costs that may be saved by not providing adequately in the present will translate into higher medical costs for the province in the future.

People on public assistance in this province are unable to meet the costs of basic necessities like rent and food.

That is absolutely clear. Unless public assistance rates are increased to reflect the actual costs of rent and food, we are condemning those who are the least able to carry the burden of fiscal restraint. Their health and dignity may depend on whether or not they can keep a roof over their head and put food in their stomach. The provincial government can alleviate this burden by raising the rates of public assistance to place them in line with reality.

That's my submission. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair: We have about three minutes per caucus for questions, and under our rotation I will start with the NDP.

Mr Prue: Anne Golden reported on poverty some years ago now, maybe five, and she suggested in her report, which was adopted by the city of Toronto, that welfare rates for housing should be 85% of the average rate in each of the towns. I think the rationale behind that was maybe trying to find some of the cheaper rents rather than the average. Would you agree with that, because that is slightly different from what you're suggesting?

Ms Kurke: I'm here to present what the jury recommended. I think there is also mention of that 85% in the Ontario Alternative Budget with respect to this, and that's the perspective that group has on it as well. I think raising the shelter component to 85% of average rents certainly makes it easier for people, so they're not taking as much out of that basic needs allowance to pay the rent. It would be a wonderful way to start.

Mr Prue: Twice now, I have participated with the Daily Bread Food Bank, trying to be on a welfare diet. The last time it was down to \$12 for a week. It's very difficult. Even \$30 seems kind of marginal to me in terms of good-quality food, particularly if you're from a rural or isolated place around the province. I know that when I went to Attawapiskat, potatoes were \$10 a bag. Is this something that also should be regionalized?

Ms Kurke: That's certainly what the jury recommended. The public health units in different jurisdictions do this pricing annually. So you will see variations in what it actually costs to eat a healthy diet, depending on where a person lives. In Sudbury, fortunately, people don't need to pay \$10 for a bag of potatoes—at least not yet—so it is relatively inexpensive compared to some of the more remote northern communities.

Mr Colle: Thank you for your presentation. As you know, we have moved to repeal the lifetime ban, and I hope we can move quickly on the other recommendations—you have some of them in your paper. I hope we can do that as quickly as possible.

We've had a lot of deputations from mental health organizations. What component of the problems people have or the poverty issues you deal with are a result of people being partially disabled or are health-related or have more to do with their inability, either mentally or physically, to take care of themselves? I know that even in the case of Kimberly Rogers, she was also in poor health when she was on assistance.

Ms Kurke: I can speak from experience, having worked in a legal clinic for almost nine years. What we

are seeing more and more is that the people who are on Ontario Works welfare benefits in Sudbury are people who have fallen through the cracks, and it's not a simple answer about why they are there. There are some who are only on public assistance very briefly and manage to avail themselves of some of the services there to find work and get off the system. But there are others who stay on it chronically.

In our clinic, we saw a dramatic increase in the caseload of people trying to get on to Ontario disability benefits. In fact, we were overwhelmed by the service demand in that regard. Currently, a lot of the people in our jurisdiction who are on Ontario Works have some medical problems. They have some other very complicated social problems. Being on the system actually aggravates those problems, so you end up with a situation where, as much as someone might genuinely want to better themselves, because they don't have enough in their stomach, because they live with the stress of perhaps being evicted at any given moment because they can't pay their rent, that actually exacerbates the problems they have. So more and more people who are on Ontario Works are actually developing, in my experience, the kind of mental health issue that becomes chronic.

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Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for your presentation and for bringing light to an important and tragic event. I would say that sometimes it's not a matter of blaming, in my estimation; it's really a community of people who need to be there so these tragedies don't happen. The money issues are extremely important.

I want to comment and then ask a question specifically. On the first day of hearings we had Hugh Mackenzie, who you might be familiar with, or maybe not, but I expect you are.

Ms Kurke: I've read some of his things.

Mr O'Toole: You should read the one he submitted to the committee, because it's quite fascinating. He uncovered the complete charade that was going on during the election. Very succinctly, he said that all experts knew there was a considerable deficit. Then—surprise—the instant the election was called, in fact that night, he acknowledged the weaknesses of the economy, even though he promised \$6 billion. It's about integrity and honesty, and this is what we're trying to do here.

Then he went on to outline their four-step strategy to deal with it. Step one is shock and dismay, which they've done. Step two is independent verification—that's Erik Peters. Step three is to maximize the bad news, which is nearly \$5.6 billion—every door we open, every rock we turn over. Step four is to dampen expectations, which is what this is about, because no money has been committed to health care and education; it's a lot of platitudes and niceties. It's worth reading how he disclosed that. It's excellent. He's a very intelligent guy. This is it. This is the secret road map. He found it. It was all bunk: \$6 billion is what they promised, and they can't do it.

I've looked at what you're saying. What could they do to strengthen the empowerment of people by programs

like Ontario Works? At the end of the day, the dignity of a job is really the most important thing. It's not the cheque; it's the empowerment of people with Ontario Works retraining or whatever it is. We need to fix that. What do you think they should do to invest in that program to make it more successful?

Ms Kurke: I think the rates of assistance have to be raised. Money is like a sixth sense.

Mr O'Toole: What did they promise in their campaign? Do you know what they promised during their campaign?

Ms Kurke: It's my understanding that there was a promise by the Liberal government to raise the rates of assistance. I think there wasn't anything very specific about by what amount.

Mr O'Toole: How much are you expecting? That's what they need to know.

Ms Kurke: What I would like to advocate for is to immediately reinstate the 21.6% that had been cut.

Mr O'Toole: The researcher will give us that number.

Ms Kurke: Mr Mackenzie also wrote a paper with respect to social assistance issues and also recommends that. You've already highlighted his competence.

Mr O'Toole: I don't want to carry that too far. I think this particular paper is a definitive discovery, as far as I'm concerned. Hugh and I might agree with what the destination is, but we might disagree on how we get there.

Ms Kurke: There's one other thing: What got Kimberly Rogers in trouble in the first place was that she went to community college and applied for and obtained OSAP assistance while she remained on welfare benefits. The welfare benefits were not adequate for her to survive with, and OSAP is not adequate. So you can see how there might have been that temptation.

I think what we need to do to help people get out of the trap of poverty is do as much as can be done to assist them to get the education, because then they become much more able to compete out there in the job force. But you've got to give them enough money to do that, enough to eat properly so their brain is functioning and they're not worried about the stress of where the next meal is going to come from.

I think some consideration needs to be given to allowing people on public assistance to collect student loans and remain on public assistance if they happen to be in the category of people who are considered poor.

Mr O'Toole: Maybe the researcher could get us that number too: what it should be when they're taking training, maybe \$25,000 a year or something like that.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you. The committee appreciates your input this afternoon.

AIDS COMMITTEE OF TIMMINS AND DISTRICT

The Vice-Chair: Now I call upon the AIDS Committee of Timmins and District.

Welcome. You'll have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Dan Goulet: My name is Dan Goulet. I'm the president and founder of the AIDS Committee of Timmins and District. I had somebody put something together for me on the first page.

"The AIDS Committee of Timmins and District was the project of Dan Goulet, a person with HIV who found himself alone and without resources after he was diagnosed in" 1995. "The medical community could not provide the support and direction that he needed and he was unable to travel to Sudbury, the nearest centre.

"Dan started the committee in his home and found that it gave him purpose and focus. He went public with his diagnosis and homosexuality and to his surprise, he found that there were indeed people in the district who understood his difficulties (apart from the infection) and wanted to help."

We live in northern Ontario, in a sparsely populated region of less than 100,000. It's hard to find a voice when there are hundreds of thousands elsewhere with their needs and projects. We were fortunate to qualify for a Trillium Foundation grant over two years. The office was established in a residential area and a team was able to travel and speak out about HIV and AIDS and to raise awareness.

When does a high school student get to meet a person with HIV or a family member of such a person? When does a teen in a group home in a small town have the opportunity to speak one on one with someone who has this disease called HIV/AIDS? When does a mother whose son is ailing with AIDS in southern Ontario have the opportunity to speak to another son about what she should do to support her son and understand this disease? When do you really find out that it is okay to share a table and shake hands with someone with HIV/AIDS?

We must continue to have some form of support for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. This is a disease that will not go away and cannot yet be cured; and, yes, it is in our community.

Our little committee has done what seemed impossible. It was the fourth attempt to form a group in the area and it is the only agency of its kind in Timmins. We have liaised with school boards, churches, community groups, health agencies and the public in general. The inroads that have been made cannot be lost. Northern Ontario residents must be able to return to their community to be with their families when they need support during the lengthy course of the disease.

It's not so much about health care; it's people care. We are prepared to scale down and do whatever it takes to survive. Our most important components are personal support and education, education, education. Through education comes understanding and hopefully gaining tools that help us to make the right decisions for ourselves and for others.

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Because of the cutbacks, it's kind of hurting our education, our health care. It's very important when it comes to health. With the AIDS committee, because of the cutbacks, as of March we have to move our office back

into the home because there is no funding for us to run our office in an office space. Our budget for rent was \$6,000-something a year and right now our funding is running out. What do we do?

I have done talks in schools to 1,200 teens in one day. The kids in the schools are tired of the videos, and hearing it from a person living with HIV has a big impact. The message is sinking in.

I cover all the way to Hearst, New Liskeard, Cochrane. We go into detention homes and so on. I'm a volunteer with the organization and it's very important that we are able to get some kind of funding because education and health are very important out there. It's hard to do things when you have no money to do it. I don't know what else to say.

The Vice-Chair: Would you like to entertain questions, then?

Mr Goulet: Sure.

The Vice-Chair: That would be great. We have about four minutes available per caucus. Under the rotation, we would start with the government.

Mr Colle: Dan, I was just quickly going through the presentation and I think you've done some great work here. It seems to be single-handedly AIDS walks and sessions at schools. I think it's the type of volunteerism that is really needed out there. I just want to make sure you understand that we do appreciate the kind of effort you're putting into it. I hope you continue and I hope we can find ways of perhaps restoring some of that funding.

Where did you get your funding before? Where did that come from previously?

Mr Goulet: I started the organization in 1998. I ran the organization until two years ago with just fundraising in the community, and the community helped us out. Our funding came from Trillium. We got funding for two years.

Mr Colle: Start-up funds?

Mr Goulet: Yes, to finally get into a space. Other than that, we've just done fundraising. It got to some point before the funding that I sold a few personal things because of the lack of funding out there. I had a hard time getting funding from anybody.

Mr Colle: Has the organization asked for any funding from the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education?

Mr Goulet: I tried the AIDS Bureau. They said they had no funding for new organizations. We're not new, but because we started in 1998, there was no funding there, and they keep closing the doors on me. Other than that, we tried for ACAP last year but we didn't qualify.

Mr Colle: What is that?

Mr Goulet: It's another government—

Mr Colle: OK.

Mr Goulet: But we were refused, so we didn't qualify last year. It's coming up again in March. But if we apply for it and if we get accepted, that's only in 2005. So what do we do in 2004?

Mr Colle: We're going to have to ask for more funding for research here, but if we could just try and

find a direction of where a local AIDS committee like this would go through the government bureaucracy to seek some funding—if we could find those for you and at least get back to you. Have you been in touch with your MPP?

Mr Goulet: Gilles Bisson. He's quite involved in the organization.

Mr Colle: I'm sure he has knocked on a few doors too.

Again, we appreciate your coming here today. You're doing great work, it's necessary work and you shouldn't have to do it without any support. Thank you very much.

Mr Miller: Thank you, Dan, for coming before the committee today. It looks like a lot of the work you're doing is educational, working toward prevention and making more people aware of HIV/AIDS. Is that correct?

Mr Goulet: Yes. The thing is, we had some families that were scared to come into the organization when we were at our other location, and because we're in a residential area, we've got people coming in now and we've got people calling.

The thing is, if they're not able to come, we go to the home sometimes because they're not well enough to come to us. We're able to help them get to proper channels for housing; we try to help them with getting set up with ODSP, different things. It's really hard to do things when you're worried about where you're going to be the next day. I don't mind doing the work I'm doing. I've dedicated my time from day one and I still will. But you're living it, you're working it, and now it's got to come back into your home. So it's 24 hours of AIDS. Having an organization out of the home would be a great asset for us, because it's not easy living with the virus.

Mr Miller: How many people are involved with your AIDS committee?

Mr Goulet: We have a board of 12. We do functions with the First United Church. We do functions with different organizations. We're involved in the native community. We go to youth detention homes. We work with a lot of organizations all over Timmins and the district.

Mr Miller: How much was the Trillium funding that you got a couple of years ago?

Mr Goulet: The funding we got was \$100,000 over two years. We had a paid employee. Once our funding runs out, we'll have nobody. Then it's put back on to my shoulders again to do the work.

Mr Miller: How big an area are you—

Mr Goulet: We cover from Timmins to Hearst. We cover up to Foleyet, Gogama, all the way to New Liskeard and Cochrane. We cover quite a few communities, almost 32 communities, I think.

Mr Miller: A lot of your work is educational, but then it's also assisting people who have HIV or AIDS.

Mr Goulet: That's right.

Mr Miller: How big a problem is that in the area?

Mr Goulet: It's hard. Sometimes there's a person in Kapuskasing who needs something—and it's hard for them to come here. Sometimes it's hard for us to go there

because we don't have the funding to get there. It costs money for gas; it costs money for this.

Mr Miller: But in terms of the numbers of people who have AIDS or HIV, any idea of how big a problem it is?

Mr Goulet: I'm not sure of the numbers because some people from Timmins get tested in Sudbury, so it's hard to—

Mr Miller: It's hard to know.

Mr Goulet: In my opinion, there are about 20 to 25 in Timmins and district, but it's hard to say, because when you get tested in Sudbury, your thing goes to Sudbury or Toronto.

Mr Miller: Thank you for coming. I know Toby wanted to ask something as well.

Mr Barrett: I just want to compliment you on the package and the information on educational programs. So much of what I feel is key is obviously disease prevention and health promotion and if you can continue to tie in, say, businesses and industry throughout the area here with the health care sector. Your media coverage looks very, very good. I think that's key. We've seen other successful programs in the north like anti-drinking-and-driving programs 15 years or 20 years ago. Continue to follow that model. I think there's a payoff.

Mr Goulet: OK. Thanks.

Mr Prue: Thank you very much. Before I forget, Gilles will be back later, but he said to say hello.

Mr Goulet: Thanks.

Mr Prue: I take it from what you have described so far that you have never received government funding from the province of Ontario.

Mr Goulet: No.

Mr Prue: Have you ever received any funding from the city of Timmins or its health unit?

Mr Goulet: No, nothing.

Mr Prue: Nothing from them. Might I suggest—I don't want to burden the city of Timmins—many cities, larger municipalities, fund AIDS groups like yours either directly or through their boards of health. I know that Toronto does that, and I know that's a great big place. I was on the board of health, and might I suggest you do that.

I also have a question, though. I was just leafing through this as rapidly as I could. There are several stories about the increase of AIDS in the north getting quite staggering. I saw one newspaper article that said that in the native population the incidence of AIDS has increased by 91%. Are you the only AIDS group in this part of the world? Are you the only one who gives out information?

Mr Goulet: The only other AIDS organization would be Sudbury and North Bay. I cover the rest. The AIDS committee covers the middle of the district, where there is nothing. It's kind of hard to do things when you don't have the proper things to do it with. With the cutbacks, it really hurts different organizations. It hurts the AIDS committee, but other organizations in—

Mr Prue: We've heard from a whole bunch of them, but this is a staggering, worldwide health problem. It's

devastating sub-Saharan Africa. It's just devastating. I don't want to see the same thing happen in northern Ontario or to our native population. You are it. So if this government, or any recommendation we might make to fund either the city that could, in turn, mentor you or do whatever they do, this needs to be done, in my considered view. Would you agree with that?

1520

Mr Goulet: Yes, I really do, because something has to be done. You can only do so much, but something's got to be done with the health care and the education because it's very important. AIDS is a big thing. It's not going to stop. Something just has to be done with it.

Mr Prue: When you first started, I would imagine it was little bit difficult getting your message out in this community. Would I be mistaken in thinking that?

Mr Goulet: It was really hard to do anything. I knew nothing about HIV and AIDS. Being diagnosed with it, I was given a death sentence because there was nothing in Timmins for me—no support, nothing. I went through heck. I snapped out of it and I called the Toronto People with Aids Foundation. I became good friends with someone there. I went to a conference in Quebec City and I educated myself to the best I could. I told Dr Malo in Timmins and a few health nurses that I want to start an organization because nobody should have to go through what I went through. That's why it's fairly important to have an AIDS organization in our community, because someone's got to do the education. With money or without, I will not give up on it. I will do what I have to do to keep this organization going and educate my community because it's very important.

The Vice-Chair: You had a point of order, Mr Peterson?

Mr Peterson: No, just—are you satisfied with the quality of the medical care here?

The Vice-Chair: Just a brief response.

Mr Peterson: There are a few fabulous new cocktails out for AIDS victims. Are you accessing that information?

Mr Goulet: Yes, I've accessed a lot of it. I've been on almost every drug that's out there. Right now there's a new one out in the States and I've just signed myself up for it because all the other drugs that are out there haven't done a thing for me.

The Vice-Chair: The committee thanks you for coming today.

JAMES CHISHOLM

BARRY SIMPSON

The Vice-Chair: I call on Dr James Chisholm, please. Good afternoon and welcome to the committee. We would ask that you begin by identifying yourself for Hansard.

Dr James Chisholm: I'm James Chisholm.

Dr Barry Simpson: I'm Barry Simpson.

Dr Chisholm: I brought Barry along as moral support and, I hope, to answer questions. I think what I'll do, hearing the others present, is forget about the preliminary stuff that I wrote on the first page. You know you are welcome to Timmins and all the reasons this is a great place. It's in the report here.

I graduated from optometry in 1954. My home was originally Ingersoll, near London, and I came north in steps: first to North Bay working for a fellow, then I came to Timmins and established my practice and got married. I have four children: two optometrists, one family physician and one OPP officer in the Toronto area.

I hope that I can prove to you that optometrists need a substantial fee increase for their OHIP services.

I'm a member of the Ontario Association of Optometrists, which is a voluntary professional association dedicated to improving the profession through education seminars and educating the public about the necessity and importance of a professional optometric eye examination. This association represents 90% of all Ontario optometrists. I believe they've made presentations to you over the past.

Optometry is a primary care profession seeing more than three million patients annually. We certainly do eye examinations to correct myopia, hyperopia, astigmatism and presbyopia with eyeglasses or contact lenses, but we are also concerned and examine patients for eye-related diseases or complications from conditions like glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration, retinal detachments, and diabetes, to name only a few. Optometry is the most accessible profession to patients who complain of various eye problems in small-town or big-city Ontario. Many are then referred for further medical treatment when necessary, and family physicians often ask our opinions on red eyes simply because we're more easily accessible.

We are few in number when compared to other health professions. There are 1,300 of us in Ontario, but we are a necessary prime source of health care for millions of patients and we deserve to be treated fairly by the Ministry of Health, not ignored. We have been ignored by the ministry for 15 years.

Our fee for eye examinations has not increased for 15 years, although during our examinations we are checking for more conditions now than we did years ago. I am sure you would not be happy if your wages did not increase for that long a period. The cost of living has increased, I would guess, by 40%. Things like hydro, telephone, business, taxes and staff salaries have certainly increased, so we are losing money on our diagnostic services.

I've been an optometrist for 50 years and I've been able to acquire new and necessary instruments over the years as concern for things like glaucoma became apparent. But a young person starting a practice today is really in a tough situation since the examination fee of \$39.15 will not cover his chair cost, which is the cost of having a person come into your office for an eye examination. Our fees are ludicrous when compared to other provinces and to our American peers.

In 2002, the cost to examine a patient's eyes, the chair cost, was \$55.60 in one office. This is the base cost of service with no return to the optometrist. Diagnostic services should be financially viable to allow us to obtain state-of-the-art instrumentation to diagnose such things as glaucoma and other health concerns. This is not now the case.

The young optometrist has to finance the purchase of instruments, furniture, rent, and perhaps pay off a student loan. He has still not made any take-home pay from the fee for the examination.

It costs at least \$59,000 to buy a minimum amount of instrumentation to begin a practice, plus another \$30,000 to be able to diagnose and follow glaucoma patients, depending on the instrumentation that is purchased. Add to that the cost of computers, office furniture and supplies, and waiting room furniture, and the total certainly climbs. Those of us who dispense frames have fees which are controlled by market forces and give better value to the patient if we compare quality materials. The diagnostic side of our practice has fees which are woefully behind.

It was really simple when I started practice a long time ago, but as the science of eye care has advanced, so too has the education, training and scope of practice of optometrists. Today, OHIP-insured optometry services include the assessing and correcting of visual problems, the diagnosis and management of eye diseases, and the diagnosis and management of eye problems related to systemic diseases such as diabetes.

We need a substantial increase in our fee, or perhaps we should be able to balance-bill the patient. The answer often given is that these are hard times, but that, in my opinion, is baloney. There always seems to be money for programs deemed necessary by the government in power. As a matter of fact, an increase in optometric services was proposed by the OHIP optometry schedule review commission to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in 1999. Again, nothing happened.

I have another concern and that's, for me, the fee paid for glasses by the Ministry of Community and Social Services under the Ontario disability program. It has not been increased for years and some members of the profession have wondered if they should stop serving these vulnerable members of the Ontario public. This has not happened, since members feel our professional duty to the vulnerable group is more important than financial considerations. This again is a sign of an unfair, uncaring government.

The association has tried to be professional and fair over the years and not try to mobilize our patients, but I get very angry when the resources of my association, which means my dues, are being used to meet and lobby government to no avail, or answer some bureaucrat's request.

Nothing has been resolved for 15 years, even after all my association's work. Members of the profession have left their offices, losing time and money to meet with the government to plead for fair remuneration, to no avail.

No pleading should be necessary if fairness was the criterion. Perhaps the golden rule could be a good guide to government.

Please remember, millions of our patients need us, and it is time to do the right thing: Recommend a substantial increase in our fee, or allow us to balance-bill an increase over the OHIP fee to the patient.

1530

The Chair: Thank you. We have approximately four minutes per party, and we begin with the official opposition.

Mr Miller: Thank you for your presentation. I just want to be clear: So the fee that you get paid is \$39.15 and hasn't increased in a number of years. You say the chair cost is \$55. So does that basically mean you lose money on each person who comes?

Dr Chisholm: That's right. Yes. I don't lose as much money as that because I didn't put it down there. We have an office of three fellows all the time, and so the number of staff needed to support the diagnostic services is not as great as if it's either two fellows in the office or one fellow. We have four girls looking after that end of our practice. The way the chair cost works, you take the part of the rent of that part of the office, plus the staff for that part of the office, and try and work out something with—

Mr Miller: The overhead costs. Also, just so I understand what you get paid for—I do use contacts myself and since becoming a politician, my eyes seem to have gone downhill dramatically; it could be from looking at things like this all the time, or old age, one or the other.

Dr Chisholm: Don't blame politics.

Mr Miller: Is it one checkup every two years that's currently covered?

Dr Chisholm: Yes, it's one checkup every two years between ages 19 and 64. Kids can be checked every year, and seniors like me can be checked every year.

Mr Miller: OK. Because actually, I did go in between, I guess, and discovered that it—

Dr Chisholm: You had to pay it yourself.

Mr Miller: Which I did. So at this time, you basically don't extra-bill or balance-bill. Ideally, you'd like to have an increase in the amount you get paid, or be able to balance-bill, as you say, to cover that extra cost. When I decided on a checkup in between years, you can charge whatever you want for that one?

Dr Chisholm: We charge \$60. I think Barry does too. Most of us charge \$60 for an examination if you're not covered.

The other thing I guess we should mention is that seniors over 80, as you know, have to have their eyes checked and OHIP won't pay that bill either because it's demanded by a third party. So they pay for that checkup.

Mr Miller: What's the ODSP fee for glasses? You mentioned that it hasn't increased. How much is that?

Dr Chisholm: Just to give you an idea, the single-vision lens fee is \$37.60, and our fee at the office is \$89.

Mr Miller: OK. Very good. Would you folks like to ask any questions?

Mr Flaherty: Sure. Thank you very much, Mr Miller.

The Chair: You have about a minute.

Mr Flaherty: I have about a minute. All right. I'll talk fast.

A lot of the services that are performed by optometrists are also performed by ophthalmologists, I believe.

Dr Chisholm: That's right.

Mr Flaherty: What's the cost saving for an optometrist?

Dr Chisholm: I don't know what they get paid for their eye examinations, to be honest with you. Most ophthalmologists don't refract because they're too busy doing the medical procedures.

Mr Flaherty: What I'm getting at is whether we can form any estimate. Maybe we can research this about what the additional cost to our health care system would be were optometrists not to perform the services that they do perform to about three million patients annually in the province of Ontario. I think we have to look at the health care system as a whole and do some of those comparators in order to intelligently appropriate resources.

Dr Chisholm: We have to check for things like glaucoma, diabetes and all those things simply because the college, for one thing, said so, and if you don't, then you're liable for lawsuits. These things were not even known when I got out of school, but they've all come to fruition in the past few years.

Mr Flaherty: What I'm getting at is that if every patient of an optometrist in Ontario had the same service performed by an ophthalmologist, what would the increased cost be to the province of Ontario?

Dr Chisholm: I don't know what their fee is. I have no idea.

Mr Flaherty: Could I ask research?

The Chair: Before we move to Mr Prue and the NDP, I want to point out to members of the committee: We have a considerable number of requests upon research. Some of them have become quite voluminous in nature. I want the committee in the future to consider the length of time that it would take research to provide you with all the answers as well. I know your intentions are good to discover information. Could you keep the scope of your requests to a very narrow range and consider that we need an appropriate amount of time to fulfill all the requests coming from the committee. We have a report-writing stage that has to be submitted, and research has to have that done prior to that. So I'd just ask you to consider your requests for research. They are quite voluminous to date and I think the committee is quite aware of the number of dates we have left on our schedule.

I'll now move to Mr Prue and the NDP. You will get your four minutes.

Mr Prue: I don't know if I'm going to need it all. We have heard similar presentations from some of your colleagues in other cities, so I want you to know we've had a handle on this already. My understanding is that you attempted to negotiate with the previous government around the raising of the fees last summer and nothing happened to that.

Dr Chisholm: That's right. That's what I'm told, anyway, by the association at our annual meeting, and nothing happened. They demand more information, and finally, after umpteen meetings—because the cost is pretty horrendous. Our dues now to belong to the Ontario association are roughly \$2,400. So the costs are pretty horrendous if they keep sandbagging you, and that's what they seem to be doing.

Mr Prue: What do optometrists get paid in other jurisdictions in Canada?

Dr Chisholm: I didn't look that up, and I should have before I made that statement.

Mr Prue: I just wonder. We're probably a couple of hours' drive, maybe a bit more, from the Quebec border. I wondered what somebody in Quebec might make doing this kind of work.

Dr Chisholm: I'm not sure. I can't answer that. Sorry. I'll find out, though.

Mr Prue: I'm not going to burden the research officer.

Dr Chisholm: I'll find out and send it to you.

Mr Prue: Perhaps you could have the optometrists tell us that kind of information.

Dr Chisholm: Yes, sure.

Mr Prue: What kind of increase do you think would be necessary for the average optometrist to be satisfied that they are at least getting their money back from the system? Are they looking at a \$50 fee?

Dr Chisholm: Yes, I think they'd be looking at a \$50 or \$55 fee.

Mr Prue: And that would be just sort of to break even?

Dr Chisholm: Yes.

Mr Prue: You've made the case very well here in terms of inflation over all of these past 14 or 15 years. That's a long time to not have any additional monies. One optometrist came and told us that she actually loses money on her practice and the only way she makes any money at all is that she's sidelined into selling glasses and frames.

Dr Chisholm: That's right, yes. I agree. We all survive that way.

Dr Simpson: There's no other way.

Mr Prue: But the actual service that you provide, looking into—I've done it a couple of times, as you can see. You lose money on that.

Dr Chisholm: That's right.

Mr Prue: This is probably the only profession I know of in the world that loses money on its profession.

Dr Chisholm: And makes money on the other end.

Mr Prue: And still continues to do the first part. It's pretty amazing.

Mr Bisson: That sounds like my optometrist.

Mr Prue: Have you applied for mediation? Have you attempted to get somebody to mediate, to sit down with Ministry of Health officials to—

Dr Chisholm: I thought they had, but it was a no-go situation. They refused mediation.

Mr Prue: Who? The previous government?

Dr Chisholm: I'm assuming that. I don't think it would be this government. They haven't had time.

Mr Prue: But I would hope that you hope this government will not refuse mediation.

Dr Chisholm: I would hope so.

Mr Prue: These guys, you think, are kinder and gentler, right?

Dr Chisholm: I hope so.

Mr Prue: I hope so too. Those would be my questions.

Mr Oraziotti: Thank you for your presentation. I would just ask you to comment and follow up, somewhat similar to what Mr Prue was asking. We have heard from other medical professionals at various locations in the committee hearings about the exodus of physicians, for example. Do you have any information on the number of optometrists who may or may not be leaving Ontario, and are there any recruitment efforts by your association to bring additional optometrists here? And I guess I'll leave you with one more question: How restrictive is the association in terms of allowing optometrists from other jurisdictions to come and practise in Ontario?

1540

Dr Chisholm: The college does that. The college was—this is 15 years ago—very strict and bigoted, I guess you would call it, with people coming from outside the area, but they have mellowed a bit and now there is no real barrier from the United States schools and some of the European schools. As far as I know, there is no barrier. They have to pass their boards, but that's—previously they were being failed horrendously, but now they're not.

Mr Oraziotti: I guess they've recognized the pressures as well.

Dr Chisholm: They recognized the need, yes.

Mr Oraziotti: We heard the comparison with chiropractors from one of your colleagues in Windsor in terms of the ability to additionally charge fees. Is that something your—

Dr Chisholm: That's something, yes. We've always admired them for being able to do that.

Dr Simpson: If the government can't afford to pay what an eye examination is worth, then we have to be able to get the money from somewhere. So balanced billing is what we're proposing if the government can't afford it.

Mr Oraziotti: Are there any other suggestions that you'd like to put on the table for the committee to consider, either the fee increases through OHIP or additional surcharges left to the individual optometrist to determine?

Dr Chisholm: I think the talk is that you almost have to double the fee, but let's say \$50 or \$55 is a good start.

Dr Simpson: We've been at this for 15 years, so we've had a chance to negotiate with all three governments and we've run into the same walls every time. It's, "Do a study and get us this information," and that will take six months, and then it will take six months to get another meeting. Then it will be, "Oh, we've got a new

Minister of Health now so we have to go back and start again," and then, "We're going to have an election," and then, "We've got a new government," and it's back again. The same thing has been happening for 15 years. In 1999, we did finally get somebody to do a study, and they recommended a very large increase in our fees, but that was a recommendation that wasn't acted upon, of course.

Mr Oraziotti: Just back to the first question for a moment, do you get the sense that optometrists are leaving or coming to Ontario? Do you have any idea?

Mr Bisson: What was that? I didn't hear the question. Sorry.

Mr Oraziotti: Do you get the sense, when asking the optometrists, whether or not they feel there are optometrists being attracted to this province? I guess that gets back to what Mr Prue was saying with regard to the fees. Do you have the sense that there are additional pressures because of shortages or that optometrists are leaving and going to other jurisdictions like the United States?

Dr Chisholm: Some are leaving. When my boys graduated, some stayed; some went to the States. So some are leaving. We don't feel we really have a shortage, do we?

Dr Simpson: Well, it's getting to the point where the average age of optometrists in Canada, I think, is somewhere around the early 50s right now. Many of the younger people who are being educated right now are going to the States because there is only one English-speaking school in all of Canada, and that's the University of Waterloo. They have just upped the number. They used to graduate 60 a year and they're up to 75, but they feel that number is not going to be enough to provide services for the country. Many are going to the States and paying the extra money to get educated there because that's the only place they can get in, and they're staying there.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

NORTHEASTERN ONTARIO HEALTH COALITION

The Chair: I call the Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition to come forward, please. Good afternoon. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Ben Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr Chair. My name is Ben Lefebvre. I'm co-chair of the Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition. Unfortunately, my fellow co-chair hasn't been able to make it here, and I'll allude to that a little bit later on in my presentation. I also beg your indulgence. I know it's been a long day for each and every one of you and I hope you'll pay special attention to this presentation, because they always save the best for last.

The Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition has been in existence for the past three years. We are affiliated with the Ontario Health Coalition, which of course is based out of Toronto. As community activists, our membership

came together to address perceived attacks on our health care system by private service providers, seemingly aided and abetted by both senior levels of government.

Our mission is to spread the word to residents of northeastern Ontario to help raise awareness about what is at stake for them and to provide information with regard to how they will be negatively affected as our publicly managed health care system becomes ever more privatized.

The Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition believes in the principles of the Canada Health Act. We fully support the Romanow commission report on the Future of Health Care in Canada delivered to the federal Liberals last November. Let me make it clear right off the bat that we are totally against any extra-billing for any health care service provided in Ontario.

The five basic principles of the Canada Health Act are accessibility, universality, portability, comprehensiveness and public administration, and we all know that Romanow recommended adding accountability as a sixth principle.

The Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition recognizes that governments have taken some liberties with the guiding principles of the Canada Health Act and have stretched its meaning through interpretations of their own to suit both their political agenda and financial circumstances. It is our opinion that the act has not been enforced the way it should have been. We also contend that our health care system has been badly underfunded by all levels of government.

We are very concerned that so little has been done to address the 47 recommendations contained in Mr Romanow's report. Although there have been some encouraging signs of progress lately with the recent financial commitment by Ottawa, we believe that it is taking far too long to institute many of the other important initiatives such as the establishment of the Canada health council.

Ottawa must do more to repair the damage done to our precious health care system, as must our government at Queen's Park. It needs more than an occasional shot in the arm; it needs long-term funding commitments from all levels of government. This necessarily includes municipal fundraising activities, which are so necessary to supporting the local health care field, and full democratic participation both on local hospital boards and on community care access centres, which of course had been denied by the previous government.

The system requires political will, not only to maintain but to make the improvements demanded by the residents and taxpayers of this province and of this country. Our health care system has become the number one priority of the people for very good reasons. It defines us as Canadians and affects each and every one of us in one way or another at some point in our lives.

The Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition believes that Ontario can play a pivotal leadership role in Canada's overdue health care reforms. We did not support the direction our last provincial government was taking

in privatizing many services within the health care field and we will not support any government efforts to further undermine this valuable social program.

There is sufficient evidence from around the globe to prove that the direction Ontario has embarked upon simply does not work. Privatization in the health care field costs more and provides less service to those in need of medical treatment. We believe in the principle of universality, where everyone is treated fairly and equitably, where need, not money, gets you the best medical service available in the shortest time possible. Perhaps more importantly, we firmly believe that our health care system must remain in public hands, not only in terms of who pays for that health care but in terms of who actually delivers those services.

Ontario's public health care system is massive, yet it continues to provide some of the best care in the world. This alone speaks volumes for the dedication of those who are still working within the system. However, the crises manufactured by both senior levels of government through 10 years of budget cuts are taking their toll. The negative results of failed management policies are evident throughout the system.

There has been a huge out-of-province exodus of qualified health care workers, particularly nurses, over the past 10 years. Attempts at bringing them home from other jurisdictions have been painfully slow, if not a complete failure. While money was perhaps a primary contributing factor leading to this loss of personnel, the loss of dignity and respect was and continues to be equally important to health care providers. By and large, those who work in health-related fields are dedicated individuals who want to deliver the best possible care to those they serve.

Reduction in personnel necessitated by these budgetary constraints has created a crisis for those who remain in the system. Too many hours of work, combined with high levels of workplace stress, have convinced many nurses to leave their chosen field altogether. Some have taken part-time work offered by the ever-increasing number of private service providers, where benefits and job protection are virtually non-existent. To get back to my co-chair, she happens to be a nurse within the system here in northeastern Ontario and she's gone sick today and unfortunately couldn't attend. Long, 12-hour shifts of course do tend to wear them down.

1550

Existing shortages of medical practitioners in remote areas of Ontario are totally unacceptable. Meanwhile, fully qualified foreign-trained nurses and doctors are on the sidelines, working outside their chosen fields while the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario as well as the College of Nurses of Ontario throw up roadblocks to their integration into the system. Something must be done to correct this outrageous situation.

Obviously there needs to be more emphasis on training nurses and other health care workers to supply the demand of an ever-aging population of seniors and baby boomers. We need to be innovative in our approach

to fast-tracking the certification of foreign-trained professionals. We must look seriously at the possibilities that exist for training and deploying nurse practitioners particularly to serve the more remote areas of this province. But above all, we must give these people good reason to want to serve within the public health care system in the first place, in a system that respects their individual and collective rights, needs and skills.

The concept of community health centres has been fully examined and is well-established in certain regions of this country. The opportunities provided in these settings, where health services are supplied by a team of professionals on a 24/7 time schedule, are proven to be cost-efficient and medically effective.

The government of Ontario must be bold if it is to contain its health care costs while maintaining control of service delivery. We believe it can all be done within a public delivery system. The government can expect, and should receive, the full co-operation from health care professionals, their associations and their unions if the required negotiations are approached with open minds, sensitivity and good leadership, something that's been lacking in the last eight years in Ontario.

Although there may be excellent reasons why health care workers should provide essential services during any work disruption caused by a failed collective bargaining process, the use of back-to-work legislation undermines workers' rights and serves to frustrate all those involved.

Interjection.

Mr Lefebvre: I beg the Chair's indulgence. Perhaps this individual can keep his comments for later, when he can ask questions.

Unions are mature enough to understand budgetary constraints and are fully aware of the philosophical and ideological directions taken by governments that have resulted in the systemic crises we are experiencing today.

Collective bargaining principles must include the right to deny one's labour in the event that an agreement has not been reached in a timely fashion. Additionally, some mechanism must be provided where both sides would be bound by the ruling of a respected independent arbitrator who has been agreed upon by both sides in the dispute.

I would be remiss at this point to not indicate to the committee that I am a trade unionist, and as such I am pleased to report that the Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition fully supports the reintroduction of anti-scab legislation as a means to encourage the collective bargaining process in all workplaces in Ontario. Since the Conservative government got rid of the previous NDP legislation banning replacement workers in this province, or scabs, as we prefer to call them, there has been more time lost to strikes and other work disruptions such as work-to-rule methods than at any other time in provincial history.

Coupled with the right-wing ideology of the Harris-Eves regime, Ontario has become a beachhead for an anti-union, anti-worker agenda that the Liberals have now inherited. The Ontario government would be well advised to get off the track that has pitted it against the

labour and social movements in this province. Its energies would be better spent fixing the mess they have inherited.

The Liberals campaigned on a slogan that it was time for change. The overwhelming majority of support Dalton McGuinty received from the electorate clearly proved that they want to see a real change in direction from this new government, not just a change in leadership with the same familiar agenda. I do not believe that the good people of Ontario want a Gordon Campbell-style government, one that is prepared to sell off valuable public resources in a bid to balance the books at all costs.

The models that are most often cited as examples of efficiency in health care delivery simply do not hold up to scrutiny. Once you get past the glitzy sales pitch and the glossy reports put out by these would-be service providers and promoters of a privatized health care system, reality soon sets in. All these private health care providers want is unencumbered access to what they see as a growing industry in health care delivery in Ontario. All they really care about are the huge profits that can be realized for their shareholders, at the expense of the taxpaying public and off the backs of some of the most vulnerable in society, those who are sick and dying.

Public-private partnerships, or P3s, as we prefer to call them, have become very popular in Ontario over the past couple of years. We now have more private providers supplying services to our health care system than ever before. We have developers and speculators lined up ready to build hospitals and long-term-care facilities so that our government doesn't have to go into debt to finance such infrastructure. The P3 financing arrangements your government seems bound and determined to jump into are creating a false economy. The burden of payment will not disappear. In fact, it is simply being amortized over several years. Joe Public will still end up paying the going mortgage rate for the new facilities, plus a substantial profit margin to the project developers and their financiers.

Instead of reaping the economic benefits previously available through the issuance of secure government bonds that help pay down public debt incurred to build our existing publicly owned and operated infrastructure, it now appears that the Ontario government is preparing us for sacrifice on the altar of corporatization, much the same way the previous government did.

Are we to interpret that this government's acquiescence to the demands of the health care privateers is a repayment for past loyalties demonstrated through large corporate political donations? I would hope not. Surely corporations are clear in their single-mindedness to make a profit at all costs. Are we so naïve to believe that this is not so, or that they will limit their expectations to a reasonable and acceptable dividend level? I think not.

Private companies have been lining up to provide community care access centres with health care and other ancillary services to hospitals and long-term-care facilities such as laundry, cleaning and maintenance, while promising to reduce costs. The vast majority of these

service providers are anti-union and their employees have few of the benefits that collective bargaining has provided to the workers now being displaced by this insecure and contingent workforce. Why are governments bound and determined to allow these private corporations to ghettoize these once well-compensated employment opportunities? Surely the fallout of reduced wages and benefits is self-evident, the negative impact of which will continue to affect the socio-economic well-being of communities large and small right across this province.

The Northeastern Ontario Health Coalition believes that the new Liberal government in Ontario has a very clear choice to make. They can continue down the road to privatization of our health care system and the false economy that it will inevitably produce, or it can reintroduce a progressive tax system in this province to help pay for the medical services Ontarians have repeatedly said they want. We think that choice is crystal clear.

I've also put in here some interesting factual information and stats that you might find quite interesting. Just briefly, out-of-pocket health care costs have risen by 25% for Ontarians since 1995. Of course, pharmaceutical costs alone have risen by a whopping 130% since 1995. When we're talking about increased costs in the health care field, it's pretty obvious where those costs have gone: to corporations and to private health care.

Forty-five medical procedures have been delisted from OHIP in the last eight years alone. For approved P3 hospital projects, budgeted costs have increased substantially from \$300 million to \$350 million in the case of the private hospital in Brampton, and from \$100 million to \$150 million in the Ottawa case. That's unacceptable, and that's what we can expect from a privatized health care system.

The British Medical Association journal calls Britain's experiment with P3 hospitals "perfidious financial idiocy," while in Australia, the New South Wales state auditor found that their P3 hospital could have been built twice over in the public sector. New Zealand has totally abandoned its experiments with public-private partnerships and many of their other privatization efforts.

CUPE estimates that a redirection of health care dollars in this province, the ballooning administration costs, duplication of services, inefficient staffing and excess profit-taking costs the provincial home care program just under \$250 million per year, or 21% of the home care budget in Ontario.

I could go on. Some of the more interesting ones—of course, we model ourselves after the British model, after the Australian model and certainly the American model because it's the American companies that are in here, licking their chops, trying to get hold of our health care system. Keep in mind that in America, they pay twice as much as Canadians do for health care already, yet 43 million Americans, roughly 15% of the population, is not covered by health care whatsoever, while many others are underinsured. The infant mortality rate in the United States is 40% higher than it is in Canada. Life expectancy

in Canada is number two in the world. The United States is ranked number 25.

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The prestigious New England Journal of Medicine reported in their August 5, 1999, issue that, "For decades, studies have shown that for-profit hospitals are 3% to 11% more expensive than not-for-profit hospitals; no peer-reviewed study has found that for-profit hospitals are less expensive." The Journal of the American Medical Association reported, again in a 1999 study, comparing quality of care in investor-owned health maintenance organizations, or HMOs as they're called, to non-profit HMOs in the United States that "The decade-old experiment with market medicine is a" complete "failure. The drive for profit is compromising care, the number of uninsured persons is increasing ... costs are escalating rapidly." I pose to you the simple question: Do we really want to go down this road any further?

With the package, I've added on four backgrounders, one on home care, one on long-term-care facilities, one on for-profit MRI and CT clinics and, of course, the P3 hospital fiasco that we spoke of.

I thank you very much and I appreciate your attention. If there are any questions, I'd be happy to answer. By the way, my schedule is open, so we can just go on for hours if you like.

The Chair: Thank you. We don't have hours, but what we do have is two minutes per caucus, and we'll begin with the NDP.

Mr Flaherty: Oh.

Mr Lefebvre: Oh, Jeez. Don't worry, Jim. You'll get your chance.

Mr Prue: Yes, the easy ones first.

Interjections.

The Chair: Order, please.

Mr Prue: Do my two minutes start now? OK, thank you.

You've written here and you've said about the nurses and the doctors leaving in great numbers. I remember they were called hula-hoop workers at one point. It has been a total failure, and I agree about getting them back. But part of the problem is the money. We don't pay as much as the Americans, and I think that's where most of them went.

The other one, though, I'd like you to expand upon is respect. How do we get them to respect us again as a government, as a province?

Mr Lefebvre: By treating them with the dignity that they deserve, I suppose, like most workers—and I consider doctors and nurses in this province to be workers like I am, like everybody else is. They deserve dignity and respect for delivering a service to the public in particular, and respect for the long hours and the hard work and the educational levels that they've achieved. I think they deserve a lot better than what they receive. I believe that's probably a much larger portion of the reasons why they left, rather than the actual money, because we have a lifestyle that we offer here in Canada, and in Ontario in particular, that is second to none. At

least we don't have to live in gated communities—yet. Of course, we could be going down that road soon enough, if we're not careful in how we follow the good old US of A. I think you'd probably attract more people if you just treated them properly.

Mr Prue: My next question, and it'll be a brief one, is: You have targeted the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the College of Nurses as two groups that throw up roadblocks to foreign-trained professionals.

Mr Lefebvre: Yes.

Mr Prue: What can or what should this government do to move them from their extremely rigid position—and I say “rigid position” because I think that's what it is. They are the roadblock; there's no question. What should this government do? Should the government in turn consider licensing themselves?

Mr Lefebvre: I suppose that's one option. I'd prefer to have the college continue to operate in the very professional manner that they have in the past. But I think they have to bring down the barriers. I think they have to open up a little bit and allow the competition—I think it's actually an issue of competition for them more than anything because they just love to have that money rolling in. Unfortunately, as we heard earlier on, maybe the fees aren't quite high enough and maybe it's a money situation. Maybe if they were paid an adequate rate, they wouldn't have to put the roadblocks up quite as high.

The Chair: We'll move to the government. No? Then we'll move to the official opposition.

Mr Flaherty: I would like to, pursuant to the agreement that applies here, provide the committee with notice of motion that I feel will allow future consultations and deliberations to be more meaningful and more inclusive for Ontarians who live in some of the more remote areas of our province.

The Chair: Do you have a question?

Mr Flaherty: I think I had to do the notice of motion, didn't I?

The Chair: Do you have a question, though?

Mr O'Toole: I have a question.

Mr Flaherty: You have a question? All right. I'll look at this now, and then my colleague Mr O'Toole from the great riding of Durham, which is near Whitby, has a question.

Mr O'Toole: Just a couple of things.

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr O'Toole: Yes, just a couple of quick points. The importance of the northern medical school—I think that's an indication you'd probably support one of the things.

Mr Lefebvre: Absolutely.

Mr O'Toole: I'm just trying to get a “Yes” here on some of this stuff. The other thing is, we really have increased the spending in health care too. In building in some mechanism here, that's important—find that we get value for our money. We have increased the spending by \$10 billion, and I don't think it's ever going to end.

One other thing too is that currently in health care, you're aware that about 30% of all health care provided before Eves and Harris was actually private? All dental,

most vision, almost all counselling, physiotherapy—it's already private. All auto insurance, all workplace insurance—that's insurance, that's paid-for medical coverage. There is a lot of big misconception. I think you're kind of misconceiving or misconstruing what's really happening, because that's insurance. That's another model of providing care or a degree of risk. There are quite a few models out there, so it isn't, as Romanow said, that it's the sacred cow, the public health. I want public health.

The Chair: Come to your question.

Mr O'Toole: My question is, are you really being honest with the people when you tell them the public-health-at-all-cost model, when about 30% of it isn't and never has been public? Or were you aware of that?

Mr Lefebvre: No, I'm quite aware of it. I appreciate the input. But I'd certainly like to point out as well that there have been escalating costs throughout the system. A lot of these services, MRIs and the rest, have exorbitant costs attached to them, and a lot of these services have come on line during your government's term in office. So there is certainly an understanding as to why the budget has increased.

But per capita and adjusted for inflation, my understanding is—I'm no economist; I'm simply an instrument technician working in the mining industry—that basically the expenditures have actually gone down, regardless of what the total at the bottom is, so that the services have been delisted, that we're getting less service. It's really not a good situation. I think the crisis is there for everybody to see and recognize, not only in the long waiting times in hospitals. So your argument about insurance programs and the rest of it really doesn't sit well with me. I appreciate your position about it.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Flaherty had given notice of a motion.

Mr Flaherty: I do. Today we have heard from many people and associations that have travelled great distances to represent their communities and to bring forward to us unique issues that affect people of the north and rural remote parts of Ontario.

Historically, this committee has travelled to major urban centres for hearings such as this—cities like Toronto, London, Ottawa and Windsor. While it is important to hear from people in these larger centres, today's deliberations have shown that we should be making a greater effort to reach out to people who may not have the flexibility or the means to travel to the centres to be heard.

Therefore I would like to ask that the committee have a discussion about how we may extend the reach of our consultations into some of these more remote areas in the future, and to move that next year, or when we are tasked with deliberating legislation in the coming months, we make a better effort to reach out and possibly visit communities such as Hearst, Pickle Lake, Sault Ste Marie—that's a sizable community—and perhaps even some of our larger aboriginal communities, and in the south communities such as Clinton, Winchester, Owen Sound,

including smaller communities in the southern part of Ontario as well.

The Chair: Thank you. There can be comment up to two minutes.

Mr Barrett: Of course, oftentimes we think of logistics—how do you get to the smaller communities? I know that question was raised several years ago with the nutrient management consultations through the standing committee on justice and social policy. There will be some experience here with the Legislative Assembly. It worked out very well. Oftentimes we were travelling by car or by bus. We would stay at a hotel in a larger community. As I recall, the hearings would start at 10 in the morning and the bus would take us to a community hall or a community centre in one of the smaller towns. We found, in some of the very small communities, the attendance was very large at these sessions. It became truly a community event. It reflected well on the Ontario government. In many of those counties it was the very first visit of the Legislative Assembly to that county. It truly was, in a sense, a town hall meeting, in contrast to the atmosphere that we're all aware of in some of the larger hotels in Ottawa, London or Hamilton.

The Chair: Any other comment?

Mr Bisson: I'm obviously going to support the motion. I'm glad there has finally been a conversion in the Tory caucus, that they finally see the worth of consultation.

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Seriously, we didn't do much of this in the time—especially the latter years—of the government. We will support the motion. We think it's a good idea. I know that any time the committees travel, it's a good

thing in regard to hearing from the people, but trying to get into the smaller communities, I think, is really important because we don't often hear from them. I would just add to that, it would be interesting to get in, as Mr Flaherty has suggested, to a place like Moosonee sometime along the line with something that particularly refers to their way of life and what their communities are about. I think we, as members, can do nothing but come out stronger and understanding what the issues are by travelling like that. I will support the motion and welcome it and welcome you to the fold, Jim.

The Chair: Any other comment?

Mr Wilkinson: I just want to say, being from a rural riding, how important it is that we do consult people who normally are not consulted. Obviously, the road to Damascus leads through Timmins for members of the official opposition.

I might add that what I find somewhat concerning is that there is a subcommittee of this committee that agreed and there was all-party agreement as to where we would meet.

Mr Bisson: No, he's talking about next time.

Mr Wilkinson: So he's talking about next time. I think it would be wonderful if this input were to be referred to the subcommittee of this committee so that this can be taken into consideration. I might add that the smallest community that we are to visit is Timmins and by far the warmest reception we received here last evening, particularly with the great hospitality of the mayor and our member.

The Chair: Thank you. I thank all the members. We will deal with this during report writing.

The committee adjourned at 1614.

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