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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 30 March 2004

Mardi 30 mars 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 30 March 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 30 mars 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CRIME PREVENTION

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I rise in the Legislature today to remind the McGuinty Liberals yet again of a very important promise they made during the recent election campaign. You might recognize it as promise number 53, or you may have seen it on page 23 of section 2 of your Liberal plan, entitled Growing Strong Communities. Check under the heading "Getting Tough on Crime." That's where you and leader Dalton McGuinty made the following promise: "We will put 1,000 more cops on the street."

This promise is of particular significance right now, because representatives and members of the Police Association of Ontario will be in the building later today. I'm sure they'd like to hear what the Liberals have to say about it, if and when this promise will be honoured. In fact, the PAO is holding an informal reception in the legislative dining room this evening between 5 o'clock and 9 o'clock.

When we were in office, we delivered on our promise to get 1,000 more police officers working in communities across this province. During the recent election campaign, Ernie Eves promised funding for at least another 1,000 front-line police officers. Just to be clear, that's in addition to the first 1,000 I've already mentioned. Given our track record on community safety, you can bet we would have delivered again. We would have kept our promise.

While I look forward to an announcement of money for more police officers in the upcoming budget, I'm not holding my breath. After all, Dalton McGuinty and his government, just like their Liberal cousins in Ottawa, are hard on your pocketbook but soft on crime.

BRAMPTON SPRING CLEANUP MONTH

Mr Vic Dhillon (Brampton West-Mississauga): I'm pleased to announce that April is Brampton Spring Cleanup month, and to commend Brampton city council and the citizens of Brampton for their enthusiastic support of the event. So far, more than 20,000 individuals from community groups and schools have made the commitment to clean up our city in the coming month.

Brampton Spring Cleanup is a joint venture that has seen city of Brampton community services, works and transportation departments, Tim Hortons of Brampton and the region of Peel partner to help keep Brampton clean and a beautiful place to live. These groups have all worked hard to ensure that the keep-Brampton-clean-and-green message is getting out to residents throughout the city.

As the snow gives way to reveal the ground below, and as citizens return to enjoy our province's green spaces, it is critical that we promote and encourage such initiatives in every riding. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to offer my sincere thanks, on behalf of all of Brampton's residents, to the organizers of the event and to each of the 20,000 people who have already made this important commitment to our environment. I would also like to encourage the rest of Brampton West-Mississauga to follow their lead in April and help make our parks, rivers and forests into community spaces that we can all enjoy and be proud of.

WATERLOO-WELLINGTON TRANSPORTATION ACTION PLAN

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I'm rising this afternoon to express support for the Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan and urge the provincial government to expedite the projects our municipal councils and I have identified as priorities. This action plan, which is vitally important for safety, the environment and the strength of our local economy, is visionary in its scope and will be exciting in its application.

The plan includes completion of the work identified in the corridor study of Highways 7 and 8 through Wilmot township, between Kitchener and Stratford; a new four-lane Highway 7 between Guelph and Kitchener; assistance for the county of Wellington to rebuild Highway 24 from Guelph to Cambridge; a repaired and upgraded Highway 6 from Fergus north to Mount Forest; Waterloo region's light rail transit initiative; as well as the need for a new grant program like OSTAR to help rural municipalities and other important projects.

I want to congratulate the planning, environment and transportation committee of the city of Guelph for its recent expression of conditional support for the ministry's proposed new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph. This is an important development that merits positive recognition, as the past city of Guelph council was not prepared to support the proposed new Highway 7 route and was the only area council opposing it.

However, we were disappointed to learn that the new government does not yet appreciate the importance of our new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph. In fact, according to a recent press report, our local mayors were informed by the member for Kitchener Centre that it may take until 2012 for a new Highway 7, a project that has already been discussed for some 30 years.

I say to the Minister of Transportation, we cannot wait that long. As MPP for Waterloo-Wellington, I will not sit back quietly while the government neglects our important transportation needs. It's time the new government took them seriously and began to address them.

VAISAKHI

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I would like to highlight an important day for the Sikh community. April 13 marks the 305th anniversary of Vaisakhi. Vaisakhi marks the birth of the order of Khalsa, the Sikh religion. This is one of the most important festivals for this religion, which was founded over 500 years ago.

Vaisakhi began as a harvest festival in the Indian state of Punjab. However, it gained another dimension when the 10th and last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, founded the order of Khalsa in 1699.

The Sikh religion has a worldwide following of over 200 million people and is ranked as the world's fifth-largest religion. Sikhism preaches a message of love, understanding, devotion, remembrance of God at all times, truthful living and equality of mankind. Sikhism is open to all through the teachings of its 10 gurus, which are enshrined in the Sikh holy book.

The Sikh community has become an integral part of Canadian society. The first Sikh pioneers settled in Canada over 100 years ago. Brampton has one of the largest Sikh communities in Canada. In fact, approximately 34,000 members of Ontario's Sikh community call Brampton home. To celebrate this occasion, there will be a parade in Peel region on April 18. I encourage all members of this House to join me in celebrating this rich culture and important religion.

LONG-TERM-CARE FACILITIES

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Yet another broken Liberal promise, this time the Liberal promise to our folks and our grandparents living in long-term care. Foyer Richelieu Welland, a non-profit long-term-care facility that does an exemplary job of taking care of old folks, senior citizens, retirees down there in our community, especially those from the francophone community—what they're telling me is that they were counting on the promise made by the Liberals to put new money, new investment into long-term care.

The folks at Foyer Richelieu tell me that they can simply no longer afford to feed our folks and grandparents on the meagre budget of \$5.24 per person per day; that they don't have enough money to hire the nurses and personal support workers they need; that staff burnout and higher turnover rates are increasingly com-

mon; that a registered nurse at Foyer now looks after 60 residents on day and night shifts, with only two PSWs during the night shift; that only about 12% of residents with rehabilitation potential actually receive physical therapy—the other residents have physiotherapy services once every two weeks or in case of emergency; that during the evening, there are only three persons available in the Alzheimer's and dementia section at the time of meals. They have to help 12 residents eat their meals and supervise and encourage 10 others.

You see, this isn't fair to our seniors. The Liberals have failed them. The Liberals misled them to get elected, and it's now time for them to keep their promise.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member from Niagara Centre, would you like to withdraw that unparliamentary comment?

Mr Kormos: Of course, Speaker. I withdraw.

1340

BRIAN COLLINS

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Today, I want to pay tribute to the London chief of police, Brian Collins. Chief Collins is retiring tomorrow after 33 years on the London Police Service.

In January 1970, he immigrated to London, Ontario, from Ireland to join the London police force as an officer, and in the year 2000, Brian became chief of police during a period of uncertainty and shaken morale. He has led the force with integrity and dignity, and is an example to all Londoners of solid leadership during difficult times. Because of his leadership, the London Police Service is a strong, united and essential feature of the city of London.

Chief Collins has been an advocate of community policing and has highlighted the need for more government funding to resolve mental health issues that affect not just citizens but also the people who serve to protect them.

I congratulate Chief Brian Collins on his 33-year career, and I wish him the very best as he retires from the London Police Service.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I rise today to bring to your attention a very disturbing issue that I became aware of this past weekend. An article in the Ottawa Citizen indicated that filmmaker Ken Takahashi was awarded a grant from the Independent Filmmakers' Cooperative of Ottawa, which received provincial government funding through the Ontario Arts Council, to produce a film about pedophilic relationships entitled "Last Night with Jessie."

Hardly a day goes by that we don't read a story about some despicable account of sexual abuse perpetrated against children in this province. While our police officers go out each day and try to prevent these events from taking place, and bring the criminals to justice when

they do, governments give tacit approval by funding organizations that produce and promote this kind of garbage.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm the minister responsible, and in fact no such money has flowed.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order, really. Do you want to continue?

Mr Yakabuski: I have received many calls on this subject from constituents in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke who are just sickened by the fact that their tax dollars can be used to fund something that endorses a sexual relationship between adults and children. I too am disgusted by this. I call on this government to cancel all funding to any organization or agency that supports this. Not one penny of our tax dollars should be used to encourage this type of trash. Our children are simply too precious to allow them to be treated in this fashion.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Today is a red-letter day for public transit, for the TTC, for the people of Toronto and all the men and women who built this amazing subway 50 years ago and for the millions who ride it every day.

For the first time in history, it was wonderful to see the Prime Minister of Canada, Paul Martin, the Premier of Ontario, Dalton McGuinty, and the mayor of Toronto, David Miller, signing an historic agreement to invest \$1 billion in public transit as the TTC marks its golden anniversary.

It's a welcome change to see the provincial government back funding public transit and working together with the city and the federal government in helping to improve the TTC and restore its former glory and build upon its amazing record of efficiency. This billion dollars today builds upon \$126 million that the McGuinty government already provided last fall for subway safety.

As a former TTC chairman and long-time transit advocate, I congratulate Prime Minister Martin, Premier McGuinty and Mayor Miller for signing this historic agreement that benefits not only transit but also our economy, our environment and the very air we breathe. Long live the TTC. Subway forever. Let's hear it for the TTC, subway, transit. Yes, yes.

TRAFFIC SIGNALS

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Today, I'd like to take this opportunity to call upon the Minister of Transportation of the Liberal government to help me with a local issue that involves traffic signals at the intersection of Highway 89 and the entrance road to the Green Briar development and the Nottawasaga Inn in Alliston.

In June 2003, the Honourable Frank Klees, as Minister of Transportation, and I announced, along with the ministry engineers and the ministry staff at the Nottawasaga

Inn, that traffic lights would be installed. Some money was set aside. At that time the idea was to realign two side roads—the Tenth Side Road of New Tecumseth north-south with the Sixth Line of Essa—and put stop-lights there, which could create a gap so that the residents of Green Briar and the guests at the Nottawasaga Inn could get out on to the highway.

Here's the problem. Honda has over 5,400 associates or employees. About 3 o'clock in the afternoon, 2,000 cars are going east, 2,000 cars going west. People are lined up 15 to 20 cars deep trying to get out of the Nottawasaga Inn, trying to get out of Green Briar.

Green Briar consists of several hundred residents, most of whom are senior citizens. They deserve some safety on this highway. There is going to be an accident. There was a very serious two-person fatal accident last year near this location. So, I call upon you, Minister, and your government, to fix the problem that we already had plans to fix.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I beg leave to present a report on pre-budget consultation 2004 from the standing committee on finance and economic affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mr Hoy presents the committee report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Interjection: No.

The Speaker: Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Mr Hoy: I want to thank all members of the committee, and I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Mr Hoy moves adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, "nay."

I think that the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1348 to 1353.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

Ayes

Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Oraziotti, David
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Patten, Richard
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Peters, Steve
Bradley, James J.	Gravelle, Michael	Qaadri, Shafiq
Brotten, Laurel C.	Hoy, Pat	Racco, Mario G.
Brown, Michael A.	Jeffrey, Linda	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Kennedy, Gerard	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Kular, Kuldip	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique

Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	McGuinty, Dalton	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wong, Tony C.
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All those against, please rise.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Hudak, Tim	O'Toole, John
Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Tascona, Joseph N.
Eves, Ernie	Martel, Shelley	Wilson, Jim
Hampton, Howard	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill	Yakabuski, John

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 57; the nays are 24.

The Speaker: The motion is carried.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL PARKWAY ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PROMENADE ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

Mr Levac moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 44, An Act to amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to name Highway 403 the Alexander Graham Bell Parkway / Projet de loi 44, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement des voies publiques et des transports en commun afin de nommer l'autoroute 403 promenade Alexander Graham Bell.

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

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): The majority portion of Highway 403 runs from Woodstock through to Burlington. At the heart of this road is the city of Brantford. While many try to claim Alexander Graham Bell as their own, Brantford is where he spent most of his formative years. It is here that he did much of his creative work that fundamentally changed the way we work and live in our society today. He will ever be remembered as the inventor of the telephone, but what you don't know in some cases is that he was the forerunner of the iron lung, all the hydrofoils we see on the lakes today, and improving the lives of the hearing impaired. Alexander Graham Bell is an extremely great man who needs to be recognized in this province and indeed around the world.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 pm to 9:30 pm on Tuesday, March 30, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the motion is carried. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1359 to 1404.

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

Ayes

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

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

Nays

Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
Hampton, Howard	Martel, Shelley	
Kormos, Peter	Murdoch, Bill	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 77; the nays are 7.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ROLE OF THE SPEAKER

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg the indulgence of the House to allow me to address you briefly on the matter of the presiding role of the Speaker.

Let me first say that I have been getting tremendous co-operation from all members in my quest to improve decorum in this House, and I greatly appreciate it.

As a long-serving parliamentarian and a keen observer of the proceedings of this House, I have arrived at certain opinions with respect to order and decorum and effective methods of preserving it.

While the Speaker is the servant of the House, he also has the delicate responsibility of maintaining order in such a way as to facilitate the business of the House while respecting the rights of all members.

As Erskine May notes, "it is absolutely necessary that the Speaker should be invested with authority to repress disorder and to give effect promptly and decisively to the rules and orders of the House." In this regard, the Speaker has significant powers. Among these is the power to name a member. It is my view that naming is the most severe disciplinary tool at my disposal and one that should be reserved and applied as a last resort. It should be held not only by the Speaker, but by the House itself, as a profoundly serious consequence of disregard for the authority of the Chair.

It is my opinion that the Chair has exercised the naming option so frequently in recent years that its effectiveness has been eroded. In fact, at times it has become a method of demonstration, even garnering applause from members themselves. When a member is named, it should be understood that the Speaker is exercising that option only as a last resort, and that the infraction is one that is an affront not just to the Chair but to this institution as well.

1410

Naming, therefore, has its unfortunate place. But in somewhat less serious circumstances, where the firm intervention of the Speaker is nevertheless still required, I see much merit in the approach used occasionally by Speakers of this House and more frequently by Speakers of the Canadian House of Commons, as set out in Marleau and Montpetit's House of Commons Procedure and Practice as follows:

"If the Speaker has found it necessary to intervene in order to call a member to order, he or she may then choose to recognize another member, thus declining to give the floor back to the offending member. On occasion, a member who is called to order by the Speaker may not immediately comply with the Speaker's instructions; in such a case, the Speaker has given the member time to reflect on his or her position and upon the duty of the Chair, exercising in the meantime the prerogative of the Chair not to 'see' the member if he or she should rise to be recognized."

In my view, these other options, when applied judiciously, can be more effective methods by which to preserve order and decorum.

Recently, I have employed these methods in this House, and it is my intention to continue to do so. Naming will not be my first inclination when addressing instances of disorder. Instead, if members will not heed my requests, I may just move on to another member, as

the House witnessed last week. In other cases, I may simply decline to recognize the offending member.

In clarifying this matter, my purpose is to be as effective, balanced and fair as possible in my presiding role.

Finally, I want to say that in hindsight I recognize that it may have been prudent of me to formally advise you of my intent at the outset, and I will endeavour to do so in the future.

ORAL QUESTIONS

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Mr Speaker, through to you the Premier: You've stated on several occasions over the last few days that your Minister of Finance is not under investigation, even though the company he served as a director on is apparently under investigation by the Ontario Securities Commission, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the CCRA, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. If, as you claim, your Minister of Finance is not under investigation in any way, shape or form, either as a director, exercising his responsibilities for that company, or otherwise, why would you remove from him the responsibilities he had under the Ontario Securities Commission?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm happy to return to this matter. I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition, and Ontarians as well, that it was out of an abundance of caution that I felt it was important to remove those particular responsibilities from the Minister of Finance. By the way, the Integrity Commissioner agreed with that approach.

Mr Eves: But you haven't cut to the crux of the issue. If he's under no investigation in any way, shape or form, either in his actions as a director, along with other directors or others, there would be absolutely no need to remove him from his responsibilities under the Ontario Securities Act. Then a week later, you took a further precaution, as you would put it, or unprecedented step, by removing his responsibilities for the Toronto Stock Exchange Act, the Commodity Futures Act and the Toronto Futures Exchange Act. Why would you have taken those steps, and why would you take them a week later?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, purely out of an abundance of caution. I say to the Leader of the Opposition that to the very best of my knowledge, no one has produced any evidence that would suggest the minister is the subject of any investigation. If the leader has information that he might care to share with this House, we'd be pleased to receive that.

Mr Eves: That makes absolutely no sense at all. If the Minister of Finance is not in any way, shape or form, other than his responsibilities as a director or otherwise, under any type of investigation or subject to any type of

investigation, he would not be stepping aside under the Ontario Securities Act, the Toronto Stock Exchange Act or any other act, for that matter. Isn't the reality, Premier, that for the week between February 26 and March 4, you allowed the Minister of Finance to continue to exercise his responsibilities under those three acts even though he was in a potential conflict position?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I say to the Leader of the Opposition, he can't have it both ways. He can't, on the one hand, claim that the minister was at one time in a position of conflict, and now tell us that I should not remove him from those responsibilities. I have acted appropriately in the circumstances that have been agreed to by the Integrity Commissioner. There is no evidence of any kind that the minister is under any kind of investigation. What we have done is the right thing.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question, the member from Nepean-Carleton.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Premier, I don't think you understand just how important this is. It's about the ethical standards that you enforce on your cabinet and on your administration.

On February 26, your Minister of Finance invoked section 16 of the Members' Integrity Act. I'm going to read that for you so it's clear: "A member of the executive council who has reasonable grounds to believe that he or she has a conflict of interest in a matter requiring the member's decision shall ask the Premier ... to appoint another member" of cabinet to perform these duties.

If your man Sorbara is under no cloud, is under no investigation and there is no problem, why would you invoke the potential conflict of interest clauses of this act? Would you stand in your place and tell us that, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I want to remind the member opposite of a very specific finding within the Integrity Commissioner's letter of March 8, where he says, "I see no violation of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994," none whatsoever.

Mr Baird: Premier, in fact the reason you stripped your minister of responsibility for the OSE and then followed it up a week later, under the cover of darkness, behind closed doors, for three additional acts was that he was in a conflict of interest. What you won't acknowledge is that he had been in a conflict of interest for 66 days.

Dozens of newspapers around the province of Ontario have come to similar conclusions. He kept you in the dark for five months, and as Premier that should be unacceptable. It would have been unacceptable to Bill Davis, to Frank Miller, to David Peterson, to Bob Rae, to Mike Harris and to Ernie Eves, and it should be unacceptable to you. What you're doing, Premier, is lowering ethical standards.

Can you stand in your place and tell the people of Ontario, without reservation, that your Minister of Finance is not under investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—a criminal probe—and that his actions are not subject to an investigation at the OSE or by

Revenue Canada? Can you stand in your place and, without reservation, confirm to this House that he is not under investigation?

Hon Mr McGuinty: For the life of me, I can't understand how the member opposite can talk about standards of integrity in government when what weighs heavily when it comes to the absence of responsibility would be Hydro One and OPG and his government's failure to bring transparency, credibility and integrity to the dealings of that particular institution.

I say to the member opposite again—I'll quote again from the letter from the Integrity Commissioner: "I see no violation of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994.... I do not think that you were in a position of conflict as a result of not taking the remedial action you took on February 25, 2004, earlier."

Mr Baird: You just don't seem to get it. You've said repeatedly outside this House, and then just a few moments ago to my leader, "To the best of my knowledge, he's not under investigation." Premier, "to the best of my knowledge" doesn't cut it when you've got the corner office and when you're heading a government. You are chiefly responsible for informing your cabinet of the ethical standards that you personally impose on them as servants of the people of Ontario.

There is an option, Premier. You can ask Mr Justice Coulter Osborne to make inquiries of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the OSE and Revenue Canada, and report back to this House and tell us that on no way, shape or form are the minister or his actions part of the serious investigations going on at these three agencies. Will you stick your head in the sand, or will you come clean with the people of Ontario and commit to us that you will do that and confirm that neither your minister nor his actions are the subject of investigation? Will you do that, Premier?

1420

Hon Mr McGuinty: No, I will not personally, directly or indirectly contact any body that might be conducting any kind of investigation in connection with this matter.

I know that the members opposite don't want to allow the facts to get in the way of their particular story, but here are the facts: To the very best of our knowledge, the Minister of Finance is not under investigation. The province's independent Integrity Commissioner has specifically found that the minister at all times acted appropriately and never was in a conflict of interest.

Here is the final fact that I will put before the members opposite: I have every confidence in our Minister of Finance.

TRANSIT SERVICES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I have a question for the Premier. Your TTC announcement today with the Prime Minister—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I would appreciate it if you didn't do that.

Mr Hampton: I would suggest that this is a situation where they doth demonstrate too much, because their announcement was long on spin and short on substance.

Premier, this is your pre-election document, Growing Strong Communities, where you said that two cents a litre of the gas tax would go to municipalities. In Toronto, that would have meant \$200 million a year. In your announcement today, you couldn't even whisper the words "two cents a litre of the gas tax," and you didn't deliver \$200 million a year for the TTC.

Interjections.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Tell him the truth, Michael. You were there.

The Speaker: Order. May I ask the Minister of Health to withdraw?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I withdraw.

Mr Hampton: As I said, methinks they doth protest too much, and that's the heart of the issue. You didn't deliver \$200 million; you didn't deliver two cents a litre of the gas tax; you delivered far less. Why did you break your promise, not just to Toronto but to other municipalities across the province?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to a very important announcement that was made this morning. For the first time in recorded history, the federal government, the provincial government and the municipal government came together with an unprecedented plan to invest in public transit. What we have done today, all three levels—it's remarkable what you can accomplish when you actually work together. All three levels of government have come together. We've agreed to a capital investment plan that will extend over the next five years. It lends certainty and predictability to the TTC. It's going to involve the expenditure of \$1.05 billion by all three levels of government. I say to the leader of the NDP, that is nothing at all to be laughed at.

Mr Hampton: Premier, it's about your promise of two cents a litre of the gas tax, which comes to \$200 million a year for the TTC, which you didn't deliver today. Not only that; what you announced today is less than the Conservatives were going to contribute to the TTC. They were putting forward \$100 million a year; you're only putting forward \$70 million a year. Mike Harris, no friend of public transit, was prepared to invest more than you are investing. Premier, can you tell us why Mike Harris was even more committed to public transit than you are?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I could say that the mayor of Toronto, David Miller, was most appreciative of this step forward. I have made it clear to the mayor, to the people of Toronto and to people throughout the province that this is not our first investment in public transit and it is not our last investment in public transit. We very much look forward to delivering on our two cents of the gas tax when it comes to investment in public transit in Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: To the Premier, it's not just Toronto. Yesterday, there was an historic meeting. The mayor of Toronto, the mayor of all the GTA municipalities and the mayor of Hamilton all came together and unanimously agreed to press your government to keep your promises to the municipalities.

Another example: The city of Hamilton has an \$83-million deficit. They haven't seen their two cents a litre of the gas tax, which would come to something like \$30 million. So they asked you to at least pool their social assistance costs with the neighbouring city of Burlington, which could give them about \$19 million in relief. You said no to that too.

You've broken your promise, Premier, and now you're saying no to another municipality. What happened to your promises? Did they just evaporate after the election?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I obviously disagree entirely with the leader of the NDP's interpretation of recent events. We are working as hard as we can to develop a new approach when it comes to dealing with our municipal partners. We want to work together with them, not against them. We intend to treat them with respect.

The other thing that we have done today that I am so pleased about is that instead of, as the previous government did, going out of its way to pick fight after fight with whatever other level of government they could possibly find, we encouraged, we urged, we cajoled the federal government into delivering \$350 million to the city of Toronto for public transit. That has never been done before, and we're proud of the work we did in getting that to happen.

Mr Hampton: Surely the Premier isn't so naive. Surely he understands there's a federal election coming and Mr Martin wants to buy his way out of a scandal. Surely you must know that. This is about your promises—your promises. You were the one who said, "Two cents a litre of the gas tax."

Hamilton should be receiving \$30 million from that. They've seen nothing. So they asked you to pool social assistance costs. You said no to that. Then they said, "Look, \$20 million of this comes from the unfair down-loading of social assistance costs onto the people of Hamilton. Would you at least pick up the social assistance cost?" You said no to that as well.

Premier, what happened to your promises? What happened to the two cents a litre of the gas tax? What happened to your promise to invest in our cities? What are the people of Hamilton supposed to do? They haven't seen the gas tax, and they're \$83 million in deficit. What's your answer?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm pleased to say that one of the first meetings I had, subsequent to earning the privilege of serving Ontarians as the Premier, was with the mayor of Hamilton. I went and visited in his city hall. He told me—they told me—that they couldn't recall the last time an Ontario Premier went to their city hall to visit with the mayor. I was pleased to do that.

Notwithstanding the difficult financial circumstances in which we find ourselves as a result of the irresponsible approach by the previous government, we are determined to provide assistance and to provide a real partnership, to create a real partnership when it comes to our municipalities throughout the province. That includes delivering on two cents of the gas tax when it comes to helping municipalities invest in their public transit systems.

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APPOINTMENTS PROCESS

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): My question is for the Premier. It is really going back to a question that I posed last week and that he refused to answer surrounding the appointment of a new vice-chair of the Ontario Securities Commission. The Premier effectively pled the fifth and refused to answer the question with respect to Mr Sorbara's involvement surrounding that particular appointment.

I think that by refusing to answer whether or not the Minister of Finance or his staff participated in any way, shape or form in reaching the decision to appoint Ms Jenah, he is showing contempt for the members of this assembly and showing contempt for the people of Ontario. By refusing to answer, he is encouraging suspicion surrounding Ms Jenah's appointment. In effect, what we're talking about is the Minister of Finance participating in the appointment of a judge and jury that may sit in judgment of his activities with Royal Group Technologies. That is wrong. That is serious. The people of Ontario and the members of this assembly deserve an answer.

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

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I think the public expects that the government of Ontario does everything it possibly can to ensure that the securities commission is well managed. This particular individual we're talking about was among several, I gather, interviewed by a committee appointed by the securities commission. They interviewed several well-regarded individuals. In this particular case, this individual, I'm told, was selected unanimously by the securities commission's nominating committee as an individual of impeccable credentials and was referred to the government by the securities commission, strongly recommended as the vice-chair of the board. The government accepted that recommendation gladly, because this individual will serve and has served Ontario well in her role at the securities commission.

Mr Runciman: Mr Speaker, this is nothing short of contempt of the Legislature, in my view. This is a Premier's appointment.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The member is alleging contempt of the Legislature with no basis whatsoever. The minister responded to the ques-

tion. To suggest there is contempt, I would suggest, is out of order.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): It is not a point of order. I don't regard it as a point of contempt.

New question.

Mr Runciman: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Are you not allowing the government to respond?

The Speaker: I'm very sorry. You may complete your question.

Mr Runciman: Mr Speaker, this is a very serious matter. This is a Premier's appointment. The Premier, in my experience—having served, as I mentioned last week, in three cabinets—when you are talking about an appointment of this significance, would always consult with the minister responsible for that agency, board or commission.

By refusing to respond to this, the Premier is reinforcing the view that there was participation by the Minister of Finance. That is totally wrong; that is totally serious, Mr Speaker. We're talking about someone who ultimately could sit in judgment of the activities of the Minister of Finance with respect to his involvement with Royal Group Technologies. If the people of Ontario and the members of this assembly deserve the respect that the Premier suggests we should be receiving, he should stand on his feet here today and answer the question directly. Did the Minister of Finance and his staff participate in any way, shape or form with respect to the decision to appoint a new vice-chair to the securities commission?

Hon Mr Phillips: First, I would just repeat for the members of the Legislature, and indeed the public, that the individual we are talking about is beyond reproach, selected unanimously by the nominating committee, with 10 years of experience on the securities commission.

I remind the Legislature as well that the Integrity Commissioner examined this matter in some considerable detail, looked at the role the Minister of Finance played and concluded that the minister acted entirely properly. It would have been totally inappropriate of the minister to do anything that would in any way have disclosed that he had become inadvertently aware of an investigation in the company. It would have been a mistake of the first order, and that's what the Integrity Commissioner said.

Again I say that the individual who was appointed is an individual beyond reproach, and the Integrity Commissioner has looked at the role that the Minister of Finance played and concluded that he acted properly.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Would the minister come to order, please.

AUTISM SERVICES

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): This question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I have been meeting with a family who have a child with autism. They told me about their problems: sleepless nights and uncertainty for the future.

You announced a plan to solve that problem. Can you clarify for us how we can solve that problem? I know that you are one of the best professionals in this province and probably in the country who deal with these issues. Can you tell us about this problem?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I want to thank the member opposite, although in a moment of madness I left that profession five years ago. But thank you for the compliment.

I did consult with world-renowned experts, and the McGuinty government is supporting children with autism from their early years right through their school years. We're spending an additional \$40 million in new funding per year to assist these children. Our plan doubles our spending to serve the 8,000 children across the province diagnosed with autism. We will be supporting the approximately 1,500 autistic children under six with \$50 million every year—\$10 million in new funding—and we will be supporting the approximately 6,500 children over the age of six with ABA supports in the classroom.

Mr Ramal: Minister, another concern, as you know, is that after the age of six, the children will go to school. I know you're not seeking political gain but are looking to serve those children. What's your plan to look after the kids when they go to school after age six?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'm pleased to announce that the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education have a joint working group that will determine how ABA supports will be provided in the classroom.

Interjection: IBI.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: We will train teachers, we will train education assistants and we will train parents for children over six in the classroom at a cost of \$30 million per year. We will also train 200 new therapists per year at the college level, increasing not only the quantity of therapists but the quality of therapists.

At present, IBI training is two weeks. It's not a regulated profession in Canada yet. It doesn't even have the credentials that the American system has. Until they reach that level of accountability, we believe they need more education as well as more support. We will also evaluate our program to see if this type of therapy and this type of programming could be generalized to other special-needs children.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): My question to the Premier is in regard to the ongoing criminal investigation into Royal Group Technologies and the role of the finance minister.

I want to point out a few facts from the business newspapers. During the 66-day, self-imposed, self-determined blackout period, Royal Group Technologies shares continued to trade. At that time, their value increased substantially. When the information of the criminal

investigation became public, the share value plummeted immediately by at least 20%. During this blackout period, insiders knew the investigation was coming. New investors and outsiders did not know that was coming. Investors, whether they're seniors or working families, didn't know what was happening, and they have suffered losses in the markets as a result.

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The integrity of the role of the finance minister is paramount to maintaining the integrity of our financial markets—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question?

Mr Hudak: Will you do the right thing and ask the finance minister to step aside until we know the facts, until the full investigation is complete?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Nobody put it better than the Integrity Commissioner himself when he addressed the specific issue of the finance minister's unwillingness to disclose what could be claimed to be insider information. He said: "Put bluntly, it would have been manifestly wrong for you to involve yourself or your ministry in any aspect of the OSC's investigation of Royal, or in any OSC investigation. If particular it would have been wrong for you to have taken it upon yourself to disclose, or to cause the disclosure of the OSC/Royal investigation."

Mr Hudak: Further facts: On December 22, OSC ordered the Royal Group to disclose the investigation. It was forthcoming. Two days later, the TSX ordered the opposite. We don't know who said what to whom. We don't know why there was a conflict between those two agencies.

Premier, this is about leadership. It's about the standards you set for your cabinet ministers. In June 2003, you said to our then-Premier: "You cannot fob this matter over to the Integrity Commissioner. It's about you, your judgment and your standards." At what point in time are you, as Premier, going to exercise some leadership, at least some modicum of leadership, and tell your caucus and cabinet ministers that in your government there are some things that are right and some things that are wrong?

When are you going to walk the talk with the words you used on the opposition side? When are you going to set high standards and do the right thing for the markets, do the right thing for the Legislature and have this finance minister step aside until this matter is fully resolved?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Just to remind the member opposite of the order of these events, I first made the decision, after careful consideration, that Minister Sorbara had acted responsibly. Subsequent to that, as a result of a letter sent by the Minister of Finance to the Integrity Commissioner, the Integrity Commissioner ruled that the Minister of Finance—he also happened, coincidentally, to rule that he acted responsibly. I think that what has been done in all of the circumstances is the right thing, and I continue to believe that to this very day.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Culture. The Ottawa Citizen carried a story that caused me and many people very much troubling concern. It says that the Independent Filmmakers' Cooperative of Ottawa is considering funding a pedophilia movie. The film depicts a sexual relationship between an adult and a child. Minister, can you tell me specifically if this film will be receiving any money from the government of Ontario?

Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I thank the member from Brant for asking this very important question. I am uncomfortable with government funding for any film that depicts a sexual relationship between an adult and a child, and I am pleased to report to this House that this morning the board of the Independent Filmmakers Cooperative refused the filmmaker's request for a funding grant. Let me repeat: The filmmaker's request for funding was denied.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Levac: Speaker, I'm extremely satisfied with that answer, and I know that we all are, so there will be no supplementary question.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): My question is for the Premier. Before the election, you promised to protect forever green space that surrounds our cities, but some of that green space is already turning into brown space. You already broke your promise to stop development on the Oak Ridges moraine, and now, as I pointed out yesterday, your government is turning 620 hectares of land on the Niagara Escarpment near the town of Blue Mountain over to the Castle Glen development corporation. Instead of protecting green space, you are sanctioning the construction of 1,600 new residential units, 300 retail units and three golf courses. Why are you breaking this promise?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The Minister of Natural Resources would like to speak to this.

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): As the member knows, in 1975 it was the Bill Davis government that brought forward an agreement with all the stakeholders in Ontario that there should be a special management system for the Niagara Escarpment. At that time, there were certain projects that were grandfathered into the planning act of the Niagara Escarpment, and the one you mentioned today is one of those.

Ms Churley: No, it is not. This development, in fact—your big-picture mapping shows the Castle Glen property as a top priority of your government's environmental protection. This is a very serious matter. This development will be a year-round urban area built in a UNESCO world heritage site. Since coming under provincial protection in 1975, there has been no new year-

round urban development built on the escarpment under any government of any stripe.

There is a remedy. Don't throw it off to the Ontario Municipal Board. We know it's going there, but because the previous members of the commission approved it, they'll probably let it go ahead. You can bring in a minister's zoning order to stop it now, as the previous government did for Oak Ridges moraine areas in Richmond Hill. You can do that today to stop this development. Will you do that? It is a disgrace if you don't.

Hon Mr Ramsay: As the member probably knows, I do not have the power to bring in a zoning order. That is the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, under the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act. As the member stated, this particular project is before the Ontario Municipal Board at this moment. That is the process that should be followed.

TRANSIT SERVICES

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. Today, with great fanfare, you announced what will prove to be a \$475-million cut to the TTC. There is good reason that the mayor—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Klees: There is good reason that the mayor of Toronto referred to this announcement as a down payment. He referred to that quite sheepishly, because he knows your record of keeping promises, or breaking them.

Can you tell us how you convinced the mayor and Howard Moscoe to cut a cake in celebration of a \$475-million cut to the TTC?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I will tell you why the municipal council, the mayor and Howard Moscoe, are celebrating today: not only because of the 50th anniversary of the subway system, which is a remarkable achievement for the city and indeed our province, but because they have a government at Queen's Park which is determined to work hand in hand with them to increase the strength, the vitality of this city by beginning with its public transit system.

Mr Klees: The Premier should have checked with his Minister of Transportation, who I notice wasn't involved in the announcement, the numbers for last year: \$64 million for safety improvements; \$62.3 million for OTRP; \$20.4 million for the GTIP program; and \$19 million for the Union Station platform expansion. That amounts to \$165 million to the TTC last year.

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What was announced today is \$70 million. That is a significant cut—\$475 million over five years in cuts to funding for the TTC. The previous government had committed \$3.25 billion to transit funding, all of which was flowing according to schedule.

Can the minister tell us today how he can justify repackaging an announcement that effectively is in a

larger box but amounts to a \$475-million cut to the TTC in this city?

Hon Mr McGuinty: To suggest that the Mike Harris government was a friend of public transit in Ontario is like saying that Colonel Sanders only had the best interests of chickens at heart. We are pleased to be able to work with the TTC and other public transit services around the province as we try as hard as we can to make up for so many years that were lost during the previous government.

FOOD SAFETY

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Notwithstanding any references to chickens, I want to ask you a question. Last Saturday, I was pleased to meet with about 20 representatives of the Perth County Federation of Agriculture, who meet with me every year to brief me on issues of provincial concern. As you know, agriculture is the largest industry in my riding of Perth-Middlesex. Food safety is the pre-eminent priority for farmers and my constituents, not only for their families' sake but for the sake of our economy. As the second-largest industry in this province, we depend not only on the safety of food but on the perception of the safety of food. Given this, what action is your ministry taking to address the safety and quality of food in this province?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): Our goal is to ensure that we have the safest food in the province. We want to have a safe, seamless system that is going to ensure that food is safe from the farm gate to your plate. That is our goal. That's why we moved to hire full-time meat inspectors. We're in the process right now of completing that and doing away with contract meat inspection like the previous government put forward. That's why we've moved forward with increased water testing at abattoirs in this province, to ensure that we have up-to-date tests. That's why this government is committed to an independent review of the meat system, not only from the abattoir system but also for further food processing. We're looking very much forward to Justice Haines's report, and we are going to move forward.

In 2001, with a lot of fanfare, the previous government talked about the Food Safety and Quality Act but did nothing. They neglected food safety and quality in this province and sat on that report. We're moving forward, because we're going to ensure that we have the safest food in this province.

Mr Wilkinson: As the farmers in my riding know, food safety is imperative in every step of the process. I heard from the processors in my riding discussing the new hazard analysis critical control point system known as HACCP. It provides advantages for both small and medium-sized processors. Can you tell the farmers in my riding how this program will benefit the products that they are so proud to produce?

Hon Mr Peters: HACCP was designed in the 1960s by the space industry to ensure that we had the safest

food at the processing level. HACCP, though, has been very much based toward large processors. Our goal is to work with medium-sized and small processors—there are over 700 in Ontario—to bring that skill and technology right down to the ground level. We need to ensure consumer confidence, because consumer confidence benefits everybody. That way we know that the food we eat on a daily basis is safe. Consumer confidence benefits the farming community to a great degree. We need to ensure that we have the safest food, and that's why we've introduced the HACCP advantage. We had over 500 food processors attend the launch of the HACCP advantage conference. This is a program that is going to benefit the agricultural community for many years to come.

HIGHWAY 69

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. During the election campaign your government stated that there would be no tolls placed on highways that don't have alternate routes. Minister, what is the alternate route for people travelling from Parry Sound to Sudbury on Highway 69?

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): I want to reinforce that while the criteria are being developed for tolls on highways, I am very, very confident that the unique concerns of the north, the unique challenges of the north and the uniqueness of the northern Ontario highways is being considered.

Mr Miller: Minister, recently while in Sudbury, the Premier stated that he is considering tolls on Highway 69. Both of us know how devastating tolling Highway 69 would be to the northern economy. This highway is a vital link to the north that our businesses and communities rely on. You yourself have campaigned vigorously in the past when you were in the opposition for strengthening this link. However, now you seem not to be able to say whether Highway 69 is going to be a toll highway or is not going to be a toll highway. I therefore want to ask you, on behalf of all those in the north and in your riding, who promised a freeway—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Would you put your question again, please?

Mr Miller: I want to ask the minister: Can he guarantee, for those in the north, that Highway 69 will be a freeway, not a toll highway?

Hon Mr Bartolucci: I'm very concerned that too many people on the opposition side are watching Fear Factor on Monday evenings at 8 o'clock. I would suggest to you that the only thing I will commit to is that this government will be fair to northerners, that this government listens to and understands the concerns of northerners, that this government is committed to ensuring that northern Ontario prospers.

Unlike the previous government, this government will not make announcements that they will not live up to. For

example, in November 2002, the former Premier of the province committed to \$100 million in the 2003 budget. It wasn't there. In November 2002, the former Premier suggested—no, promised—that construction from Sudbary would begin in 2003. It never happened.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Finance.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Let's just settle down a bit, please.

Mr Fonseca: My office, as I'm sure is the case for many of the members here, has been receiving many calls, e-mails and letters with respect to auto insurance rates. Many of my constituents are facing increases in their rates. This has placed many people in the situation of having to leave their cars on the driveway, or worse, risk driving without insurance, simply because they cannot afford the premiums.

Minister, just recently the insurance companies posted record profits of \$2.6 billion, yet they still feel the need to raise premiums. How can insurance companies make these kinds of profits when rates are increasing for drivers?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): As Minister of Finance, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on profits of any company, public or private, but I want to say—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Sorbara: It's a cacophony over there.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Many members have expressed a concern that they won't be able to hear the answer or their questions put forward; question period will end. So if we allow the minister to respond, maybe you'll get your question on.

Minister?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I support that, sir. Let me just say, though, that those profits create the perfect economic environment for this government to realize the very first steps that it took as a government, bringing in regulation and then a piece of legislation to lower insurance rates in this province by an average of 10%. We took that action on the very first day.

1500

Ninety days later, all auto insurance companies were required to refile rates. By mid-April this year, consumers will begin to see their auto rates go down, after three years of unprecedented rate increases while that party was in government.

Mr Fonseca: I'm glad to hear that your ministry and this government are listening to the concerns of Ontarians, that steps are being taken to address this situation, which was created by the inaction of the previous government. Shame on you. In other provinces, auto insurance reforms meant that benefits and injured people

were greatly reduced. Will Ontario be stripping coverage from our drivers?

Hon Mr Sorbara: It's a good point. The problem of rising insurance rates has plagued every jurisdiction in Canada. Ontario was not prepared to tackle the problem by way of going after benefits that individual accident victims look to. We have brought forward a measured number of initiatives to ensure, on one hand, that accident insurance premiums will go down—as I said, by the middle of next month, individual drivers should see the impact of those initiatives—but not doing it on the backs of those who have suffered damage and physical damage as a result of automobile accidents. We're very proud of that.

AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): My suggestion to the Minister of Health: St Catharines Standard reporter Calvin Reid tells me that the thickest file on his desk is the clippings history around the Niagara ambulance dispatch centre. The last government, as you know, failed to deliver. Every Liberal candidate in the Niagara region during the course of the election campaign was promising prompt announcements of the Niagara regional ambulance dispatch centre. Well, it still hasn't been delivered.

Lives are at risk; you know that. This is a very dangerous scenario for Niagarans to have to live with. You haven't delivered either. This ain't rocket science. All the planning has been done. All the inquiries surely have been made. You sought a three-month extension. We're now two months into that three-month extension. When is the announcement going to come? The people of Niagara deserve to know.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I agree that this is an important issue to the people of Niagara, and if I didn't know that, I've got Jim Bradley and other aggressive members from Niagara who remind me of that every day, including the member—

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): And you hear from them so often.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Yes, I do hear from them so often, and not from you, Mr Hampton. I would say to my friend that the three-month extension ought to give you some guideline about the term we need to get this dealt with.

Mr Kormos: The problem is that folks in Niagara, the political leadership in Niagara, have endured postponement after postponement. You've got to understand that the confidence level, the trust level, has been significantly eroded. Will you please stand up here today and tell the folks in Niagara that you will, in fact, make an announcement about their Niagara regional ambulance dispatch centre, that it will be made before the timeline has expired—that is, before April 30—and that you will be announcing a fully funded, fully resourced Niagara ambulance dispatch service within that time frame?

Hon Mr Smitherman: It would with be appropriate for me to say, when talking about political leadership in Niagara on that issue, that no one provided more leadership on this file than Debbie Zimmerman, the former regional chair. I'm pleased to see that she's in the gallery today. I've given her an undertaking, as I have to the member from Erie-Lincoln when he asked, that we're working with this, alongside a number of other issues in the Niagara region. As I said in my earlier answer, the timeline we've established relates very closely to the extension we requested and received from Niagara region, and we should all have news shortly.

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Premier, and I don't think you need the Integrity Commissioner letter on this one. On page 23, section 2 of your election platform, Growing Strong Communities, it mentions, "We will put 1,000 more police officers on the street." How many additional police officers can we expect to be put on the streets in the spring budget?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I refer the question to the Minister of Community Safety.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): We made a commitment that we would put 1,000 new police officers on the streets of Ontario. We stand by that commitment, and during this mandate we will deliver those numbers.

Mr Dunlop: I'm not sure that answer is very satisfactory to the Police Association of Ontario, who will be in the building later on today. To the minister, when we were in office, we delivered on our promise to get 1,000 more police officers working in communities across the province. You remember the statement, "Promises made, promises kept." We kept our promise of 1,000 new police officers.

I just want to know, with all the turmoil we've seen and all the task forces we've seen taking place over the last few weeks, why are you being soft on crime on this particular issue? Why can't you give us or commit to deliver 1,000 new police officers—at least some of them—in the spring budget?

Hon Mr Kwinter: It's quite strange that we have a member of the previous government talking about broken promises. You gave a promise to the people of Ontario that you would deliver a balanced budget. You promised that you would deliver a balanced budget. Instead, we find that you delivered a deficit of \$5.6 billion-plus, and that is what is hindering our ability to deliver those police officers today. But we will correct your mismanagement, and we will deliver those officers during our mandate.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex): My question is for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. There has been recent media coverage in the province about

identity theft, and I know that many Ontarians would be concerned about that, should they realize how serious a problem it is. Can you advise me and my constituents what the government is doing with regard to identity theft?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I want to thank the honourable member for Essex, because certainly in the last Parliament he was a leader in terms of dealing with identity theft issues, and I very much commend the work he did.

As the honourable member knows, identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America. The McGuinty government, just a few months after taking office, indicated that it was going to deal with this in a very systematic fashion, and we launched a program entitled Keep Your Identity Safe. We've been working with the OPP, with Phonebusters, with credit card companies and other retail operations to ensure that information is available so that when someone's identity is stolen, they have a way to gain it back. I want to thank the member and all the voluntary groups that have been working with my ministry to ensure that we deal with this problem in a very thoughtful and systematic fashion.

Mr Crozier: When a consumer is a victim of identity theft, it is often an extremely difficult time, and it takes a lot of time to repair that damage. I've heard from some of my constituents that the process can take months to communicate with various agencies and businesses involved in reclaiming one's identity. What is the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services doing to ensure that Ontarians are not subjected to unnecessary hassles when they become victims of identity theft?

Hon Mr Watson: The honourable member from Essex is quite correct. When an individual's identity is stolen, time is of the essence. In many instances, we end up having to fill out many different forms to reach the various credit card companies, banks and other financial organizations.

I'm pleased to report that our ministry has developed what we call an identity theft statement, which in essence is one-stop shopping. An individual who has been a victim of identity theft can simply fill out the form and use one form that's available on the ministry Web site, which is www.cbs.gov.on.ca. By filling out that one form, individuals can use that form, which is accepted at a number of retail organizations, financial institutions and credit reporting organizations.

1510

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. As the minister well knows, there continues to be a tremendous amount of concern about the sweeping powers that are given to the minister under Bill 8. The question I have for the minister is very, very simple: If you indeed understand the Public Hospitals Act, why do you feel that you need the sweeping powers contained in Bill 8, which are

unprecedented, when you have the same power by using the Public Hospitals Act?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): When Roy Romanow did his work on behalf of Canadians, he said that the Canada Health Act and medicare needed to be transformed, with accountability added as a significant sixth principle. Bill 8 seeks to add accountability to our health care system. The former minister well knows that the powers under the Public Hospitals Act that she refers to give me, the Minister of Health, the power, if supported by cabinet, to remove a CEO from their position. The powers that are anticipated in Bill 8, and that I recommend to this House for consideration and support, simply provide an opportunity: If a hospital and a hospital CEO fail to live up to a negotiated accountability agreement, the Minister of Health reserves the right, in exceptional circumstances, to seek a minor adjustment in their salary. These are hospital administrators, whom we value deeply; they play a great role. But across the breadth of that former government's record, they removed a bunch of them. That's not what I'm seeking.

Mrs Witmer: The minister knows full well that he has similar powers under the Public Hospitals Act. This is simply a power grab on behalf of the minister. I would say to the minister, you talk about accountability. There is no mutual accountability in this act. There is no accountability on the part of the government. There is no commitment on the part of the government to publicly report on wait times. Why is there no public accountability on behalf of the government to the people in this province?

Hon Mr Smitherman: To the former minister, how is it possible that new powers can be sweeping if I already have them? Maybe you could take another question tomorrow and explain that to me, because that is exactly what you said.

On the matter of accountability, I'm enormously proud to say that for the first time, envisioned in Bill 8, is the opportunity for all Ontarians, through the mechanism of the Ontario Health Quality Council, to be provided, on an annual basis, with a report across a broad range of indicators that talk about how our health care system is performing and that goes one step further: It talks about how Ontarians are doing from the standpoint of their health, with measures such as obesity, rates of activity and rates of smoking.

Accountability is a two-way street, and as a government we're very pleased to say that once and for all Ontarians will have the opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

VISITORS

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: With your indulgence, I would like to draw your attention to the members' gallery and introduce Mayor Ed Jacyno and Councillor Shirley White from the great city at the centre of my riding, Pembroke.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Liberal government was elected after promising in their election platform that they were committed to improving the Ontario drug benefit program for seniors but are now considering delisting drugs and imposing user fees on seniors; and

“Whereas prescription drugs are not covered under the Canada Health Act unless dispensed in a hospital; and

“Whereas the federal Liberal government refuses to acknowledge this as a necessary health service despite the Romanow report's strong support for a national drug program;

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

“To immediately and unequivocally commit to end plans for the delisting of drugs for coverage under the Ontario drug benefit program;

“To immediately commit to ending plans to implement higher user fees for seniors and to improve the Ontario drug benefit plan so they can obtain necessary medications; and

“To instruct Premier Dalton McGuinty to demand more health care funding from Ottawa instead of demanding more” health care “funding from seniors.”

This petition has my support.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Could I have a little quiet, please, while the petitions are being read? Could all those who are having meetings or discussions have them outside?

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to present the following petition on behalf of my riding:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to submit that, and I have attached my signature to this petition.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): On behalf of the constituents of Durham—specifically, Shirley Cruickshank—I present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s seniors have worked long and hard to build the outstanding quality of life achieved in our province; and

“Whereas seniors’ drug benefits enable older persons to live healthier lives and avoid more extensive care in hospitals and nursing homes; and

“Whereas, in addition to their taxes, many seniors already contribute toward their prescription drugs through deductibles and dispensing fees; and

“Whereas many seniors on fixed pensions already face higher costs through property taxes and” the current “electricity charges;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario not eliminate or reduce the provincial drug benefits provided to seniors.”

I’m pleased to allow page Sarah, from Essex, to carry this to the table on my behalf.

SUDBURY REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I heard the Minister of Northern Development and Mines say his government is going to keep its promises, so I hope he’s going to keep this one, since he made it to our community. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly and reads as follows:

“I agree it’s time. Our community can’t afford to pay more for the construction at the Sudbury Regional Hospital. We have already done more than our fair share. The Liberal government should immediately pay 85% of the cost of construction at the Sudbury Regional Hospital,” just like the Minister of Northern Development and Mines promised. “The time for action is now.”

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

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned residents of Canada and Ontario, draw to the attention of this House the following:

“Whereas the Canadian beef, cattle, dairy, goat and sheep industries are in a state of crisis due to the BSE problem;

“Whereas the aid package to the industry is inadequate as it does not deal with the extremely low prices, nor the imminent collapse of key sectors of the rural economic community;

“We, the undersigned citizens of Canada and Ontario, urge the federal government” and provincial government “to work with their counterparts in the United States of America, to reopen the border to Canadian cattle now and to develop a long-term solution—an economic relief package—that is fair and recognizes the essential nature of these industries to Canada.

“Furthermore, we urge the provincial agriculture minister to call on the federal government to work with the province to enable this crisis to come to a timely conclusion.”

1520

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I’m pleased to present a petition from seniors from Beamsville that reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas during the election campaign the Dalton McGuinty Liberals said they would improve the Ontario drug benefit program, but now are considering delisting drugs and imposing higher user fees; and

“Whereas the Liberal government has increased costs to seniors by taking away the seniors’ property tax rebate and increased the price of hydro;

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

“The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should keep their campaign promise to improve the Ontario drug benefit program and abandon their plan to delist drugs or increase seniors’ drug fees.”

Beneath my friends Edith MacLean and Faye Applegarth, I am pleased to affix my signature in support.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I have a petition here that was forwarded to me by the folks from

Campellford-Brighton Community Living in the east end of my riding, which reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario introduced public policy in 1973, Community Living for the Mentally Retarded in Ontario: A New Policy Focus, that recommended that people with intellectual disability be socially integrated within their local communities and with other citizens; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario recommitted itself to that public policy in 1987 and stated that Ontario will phase out institutional placements for all people with intellectual disabilities; and

“Whereas all three political parties in the province have endorsed this public policy in support of community living for people with intellectual disabilities; and

“Whereas, between the years 1973 and 2000 there were ongoing initiatives to move people out of the province’s directly operated institutions, resulting in a number of these institutions being reduced from 18 to three, and the number of people who live in these from 6,675 to less than 1,100; and

“Whereas the government of Ontario has made no effort since March 31, 2000, to move any people out of these institutions, and moreover it has resisted any efforts on the part of the individuals and organizations to provide these opportunities,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario”—it includes about 110 signatures—

“By no later than March 31, 2004, the government of Ontario will introduce a plan to provide community living opportunities for the almost 1,100 people who continue to reside in the province’s institutions for people with intellectual disabilities, and close these three remaining institutions in Ontario—Huron Regional Centre, Rideau Regional Centre and Southwestern Regional Centre—and accomplish these goals within a three-year time frame, from April 1, 2004, to March 31, 2007.”

I am pleased to add my signature.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by a great number of people in the tobacco producing area of the province, of which I am proud to represent a large portion.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I will sign the petition on behalf of my constituents.

GOVERNMENT CONSULTANTS

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition that I agree with and have signed myself as well. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas former Premier Mike Harris received \$18,000 in consulting fees from Ontario Hydro;

“Whereas he did this consulting work less than a year after he resigned his position as Premier of Ontario;

“Whereas this contract is just another”—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Berardinetti: “Whereas this contract is just another example of the Conservative country club created by the previous government at Ontario Hydro and Ontario Power Generation;

“We, the undersigned, petition”—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I didn’t realize that petitions could cause all this problem. Let the member complete his petition, please.

Mr Berardinetti: Mr Speaker, should I start from the beginning, or just—

The Speaker: Please.

Mr Berardinetti: “We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to order former Premier Mike Harris to pay back the taxpayers of Ontario by returning the consulting fees he received from Ontario Hydro.”

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The previous speaker was giving the people of Ontario false information with respect to—

The Speaker: That’s not a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order, please.

The member from Simcoe-Grey.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): A petition regarding an LCBO agency store in the village of Baxter, in the township of Essa:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the LCBO agency store program is intended to revitalize our small towns and villages, and to provide rural consumers with responsible and convenient access to LCBO services,

“We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make available to the village of Baxter an LCBO agency store.”

It is signed by several hundred people in my riding, and I too affix my signature, as I agree with the petition.

LANDFILL

Mr Dunlop: “Whereas the county of Simcoe proposes to construct a landfill site at site 41 in the township of Tiny; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is implemented in Ontario. We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of site 41 and the nearby water sources.”

I’ll sign my name to that.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I also have a number of petitions against tobacco taxes and against a smoke-free Ontario, collected by downtown Toronto convenience stores at Bay and Wellesley and at Yonge and Wellesley.

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

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

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

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

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

I affix my signature to this petition.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have a very short petition. It was started by Joan Faria of Hamilton, Ontario, and she has gained about a couple thousand signatures so far.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“To immediately commit to action and funding to ensure the rights and protections for our senior citizens living in nursing homes and retirement homes in the province of Ontario.”

I have affixed my signature in support.

1530

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREENBELT PROTECTION ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA PROTECTION
DE LA CEINTURE DE VERDURE

Mr Gerretsen moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 27, An Act to establish a greenbelt study area and to amend the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001 / Projet de loi 27, Loi établissant une zone d’étude de la ceinture de verdure et modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur la conservation de la moraine d’Oak Ridges.

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): In my leadoff speech, I will be sharing my time with the members from Oakville and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

I’m very happy to be here today on the occasion of the second reading of this bill, which I think will change the whole way we look at the greenbelt around Toronto.

Perhaps before starting with some notes that I had prepared for this occasion, I might just read to you the preamble of the bill, which I think probably explains better than any other way why this bill is necessary.

When we look at preamble to Bill 27, it states that, “The government of Ontario recognizes that in order to protect environmentally sensitive land and farmland and contain urban sprawl, there is an immediate need to study an area in the part of Ontario known as the Golden Horseshoe.

“The government recognizes that clear limits must be set on development in order to protect this valuable resource as a greenbelt for the long term.

“The government recognizes that good planning for environmental and agricultural protection and sustainable development will result in economic benefits to the residents of the Golden Horseshoe area.

“The government recognizes the environmental and agricultural significance of this area and its importance as a source of food, water, natural heritage systems, green space and recreation, resulting in an enhanced quality of life.

“The government recognizes that it is important to continue to protect the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine and to protect a broader greenbelt area.

“Therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, enacts as follows,” and that contains the details of Bill 27.

That’s why it’s so important to deal with this legislation today, because the McGuinty government is interested in preserving much of the greenbelt area around the city of Toronto for future generations.

With the introduction of second reading of this bill today, we are one step closer to the realization of one of this government’s commitments to the people of Ontario. We are one step closer to the creation of a permanent greenbelt protection area in the Golden Horseshoe. This government recognized the importance of and made a commitment to protect green space and contain sprawl.

Ontarians need green space, because it improves their quality of life, and a high quality of life is what we were elected to deliver. We intend to do just that if this bill should pass.

After eight long years of runaway sprawl under the previous government, we are taking decisive steps toward smart growth by introducing legislation that will create a permanent Golden Horseshoe greenbelt. By containing sprawl and encouraging growth management, we will enhance our quality of life and that of our children and their children. Creating a permanent greenbelt is one of the ways we can manage growth responsibly. We are changing the direction of government, and that’s real, positive change.

Applause.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Thank you.

Creating this greenbelt will be a challenge, though; of this we should have absolutely no doubt. But there is a way to achieve our goal, and the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act now before this House is a prudent and crucial first step.

The lands on the outer edge of the Golden Horseshoe’s developed areas are the most threatened in Ontario today. Current population growth trends for the Golden Horseshoe point to a strong and consistent growth. The greenbelt study area outlined in this legislation encompasses all of the Golden Horseshoe. The communities in this area are currently experiencing the strong population growth that has been forecast. This strength is expected to continue well into the future. In 2001 the population of central Ontario, much of which is located within the Golden Horseshoe area, was 7.5 million. It is expected to

grow to over 11 million by year 2028. That means we can expect 3.5 million more people to be living in central Ontario in a little more than 25 years.

We could ask ourselves, “What’s the draw to this area? Why do people come here?” Population growth in central Ontario is a reflection of the high quality of life that most of us enjoy here. It is also due to economic opportunities available to our residents. The region is attractive to those in search of jobs, including international immigrants and those migrating from across the country. Ontario is a place where people simply want to be. We welcome them and the tremendous diversity they bring, from which we all benefit in this part of the province.

Population growth can be good when managed responsibly. Growth provides more choice about where to live and work. It also generates investment, income, innovation, tax revenue and higher property values. But when growth is not properly managed or supported, quality of life is adversely affected. Poorly planned development can result in increased air and water pollution, loss of green space and agricultural land. It encourages overreliance on the private automobile, traffic congestion and inefficient infrastructure investment.

Studies show disturbing results if current trends persist for central Ontario. If your commute takes an hour today, 30 years from now it could easily be an hour and a half to two hours. That’s another hour every day that a commuter won’t have to spend with family, or at work or play. That’s not what I and many others call a good quality of life. In another 30 years, unchecked development could consume another 1,000 added square kilometres of land. That’s an area nearly twice the size of the city of Toronto. This area is home to considerable areas of prime agricultural land, and we know that we have some of the best agricultural land in North America within this area. That sacrifices Ontario’s food, and that is not what we can call a high quality of life.

The population trend clearly will be a challenge to balance a wide variety of social needs. The government must guide the future development of the Golden Horseshoe to ensure it stays a healthy and prosperous region. This government will not ignore this challenge. Our government is taking critical steps to manage that growth and develop it in a responsible manner. It would be totally irresponsible for a government not to give careful consideration to the potential effects of sprawl without ensuring a plan is in place for careful, managed growth. There are many factors that need to be examined. These factors are all interrelated and will require careful consideration before we can establish a greenbelt in the Golden Horseshoe. When discussing greenbelt protection, we must talk about permanent environmental protection and our watershed, especially in protecting the watershed.

Ontarians understand, and we understand, that a clean environment and a strong economy go hand in hand. Together they mean a high quality of life. We must talk about the protection and sustainability of agricultural

lands. Protecting particularly sensitive areas such as the Niagara tender fruit and grape lands and making them viable over the long term must be an important consideration.

Just as an aside, today there was a news conference held here at Queen's Park, which I understand was attended by members of all three caucuses, both the government and the two opposition parties. It was held by the Grape Growers of Ontario. I will read the quote directly from their media release: "The Ontario government has committed to preserve the green spaces that enhance our quality of life and act as an antidote to urban sprawl. Ontario's growers of grapes have been practising environmental stewardship of their lands for decades. They are actively preserving these lands, but they are facing a crisis that is seriously threatening the sustainability of the entire industry, and therefore the viability of a permanent greenbelt."

1540

It is nice to get that kind of an endorsement from a group that also believes in the same goals that this government has set for itself in passing this bill.

Many of us have specific interests in the protection of culture, tourism and recreation opportunities in the region. These things must also be discussed. And last but certainly not least, providing for infrastructure, transportation and the future resource needs of this region must also be examined.

The greenbelt study area is a foundation for both our provincial and national economies.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): You have 50 minutes to go.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: My friend from Ottawa Centre just indicated that we have 50 minutes to go on this particular bill for now. I know that we could talk for hours and hours, because this is important, not just for the people who live in this area but for all the people of Ontario.

Our economy is vital not only to Ontarians but to Canada as a whole. We must be able to move through the Golden Horseshoe to ensure our economy stays healthy.

The proposed Greenbelt Protection Act will allow us the time we need to discuss all of these issues. It will allow us to seek out and find the balance we need. It will also clarify provisions in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001, that deal with lands already in different stages of development when the act was proclaimed. Once we have discussed and reviewed all of these factors and have worked out a coherent long-term strategy for balancing all these important interests, we have another task: We must discuss how to manage a greenbelt into the future for generations of Ontarians to come.

The proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003, provides for a time out for the Golden Horseshoe. Included in the bill is a study area to provide a framework for our discussion. The area includes Toronto; the regions of Durham, York, Peel and Halton; the city of Hamilton; the Oak Ridges moraine plan area; the Niagara tender

fruit and grape lands; and the Niagara Escarpment plan area.

The bill also includes a moratorium. The proposed moratorium would stop new urban development on key rural and agricultural lands within the greenbelt study area. This is the time out that we need to allow for that discussion and review to take place.

We need to take the time to talk. This moratorium would mean that for a year there would be no urban development on land outside urban settlement areas unless development has already been approved. Let me make it clear that this does not mean that building in the Golden Horseshoe area will stop. On the contrary, all land previously designated for urban development will remain available for urban development, subject to the normal municipal planning processes.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: I'm sure that the member from Beaches-Woodbine agrees with that concept as well. I'm sure that she would not want all of the development to stop at once in this area. We need development in the urban development areas.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): The member for Toronto-Danforth—

Ms Churley: I just wanted to reply to the member that I'm the member—

The Acting Speaker: The member for Toronto-Danforth, please take your seat. Can you take your seat for a second? OK. Are you ready to speak? Now I can hear you. Speak up. Stand and speak.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: I'm trying to hear you. You were talking while I was trying to direct you.

Ms Churley: I just wanted to make a point of order, Mr Speaker. I just wanted to point out to the member that I'm the member for Toronto-Danforth, not Beaches-East York.

The Acting Speaker: Noted. Minister?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: I do apologize to the member for giving her credit for the wrong riding, but if that's the most she can come up with against this particular bill, which all Ontarians are looking forward to, then I would say she's certainly got very slim pickings there.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): She got very excited with all the good news. Please forgive her.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: That's right. Maybe she got too excited with all the good news about the TTC, which is also going to help contain the urban sprawl that's been taking place.

Let me continue. Again, I want to repeat that this does not mean that building in the Golden Horseshoe area will stop. On the contrary, all land previously designated for urban development will remain available for urban development subject to the normal municipal planning processes. In the greater Toronto area, the supply of urban lands will already accommodate the demand for single

detached dwellings for the next 10 to 15 years. For more intensive developments, such as apartment buildings and condominiums, the land available will accommodate demand for the next 20 years. This information is based on forecasts prepared by the province and by the municipalities in which these developments will occur. These time frames could be extended if municipalities undertake work to encourage more compact types of urban development during this process.

The proposed Greenbelt Protection Act creates opportunities to do just that by giving municipalities the time to promote compact urban development in their communities. In doing this, communities will encourage the preservation of green space, and land in the agricultural and rural areas would still be able to be developed for rural and agricultural uses. Normal municipal planning processes will ensure appropriate development in these areas. During this time, while we are maintaining the status quo on new urban development, we will be working on a plan for the future, a plan for permanent greenbelt protection. The proposed moratorium will protect the status quo only until the consultation phase is complete and permanent greenbelt protection is in place.

The government is committed to consulting with stakeholders and the public in the establishment of a permanent greenbelt. We have recently appointed a greenbelt task force to help us define the scope, content and function of a greenbelt. As a matter of fact, this was done about six or seven weeks ago, and the task force has been meeting on at least a once-a-week basis since then to come up with the guiding principles that it will recommend to us with respect to the greenbelt. They will work together toward sustaining and improving the overall quality of life for present and future residents. The task force will oversee stakeholder and public consultations on the scope, content and implementation of the proposed greenbelt. It will gather the information it needs this spring to formulate recommendations for action. After receiving recommendations from the task force, the government will consider the most effective way to establish and permanently protect the proposed greenbelt in the Golden Horseshoe. The members of the greenbelt task force were chosen to represent a wide variety of interests and different viewpoints on greenbelt protection. Some of the interests represented are the development industry, municipal governments, environmental protection, agriculture and the aggregate industry.

The task force, as I indicated before, has been hard at work. They were asked to develop a clear and transparent process for dealing with requests relating to lands affected by the minister's zoning order that I made in December to preserve the status quo and lands that would be affected by the moratorium in the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003, if passed. We need the views of these experts to be sure all of the factors we know are important are considered as we plan for the greenbelt, because we are consulting on the best way to create a greenbelt that would ensure the long-term protection of a number of different resources within the area. Natural

heritage systems, water resources and agriculture simply must be protected, but we must also provide for resource management, recreation and tourism in the Golden Horseshoe.

1550

Municipal planning plays a large role in the successful protection of the greenbelt. Clear limits set on development can ensure the greenbelt is protected for a long time. Housing, for example, can be constructed in areas where services already exist and in the areas that do not put important natural resources at risk. Growth also provides the opportunity to revitalize underused lands and achieve objectives such as the redevelopment of brownfields.

In addition to maintaining green space, other benefits are also easily recognized. By focusing growth in existing built-up areas, the escalating public costs for roads, garbage pickup, policing, transit and other services in urban sprawl areas can be controlled. This can reduce pressures on the municipal tax base and the taxpayer. As I said before, through containing sprawl and encouraging growth management, we will enhance our quality of life. Creating a permanent greenbelt is one of the ways we can manage growth responsibly. We are building strong communities, and that's real, positive change.

I look forward to the debate on this particular bill. I look forward to the constructive points brought forward, particularly by the members of the opposition. We always look forward to hearing from the opposition, because any bill that comes before this House can always be improved with constructive criticism, and we look forward to that.

I now turn the floor over to the member from Oakville.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It certainly is a pleasure to follow my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs, especially on an issue that is of great importance to my own community in Oakville. My own community was starting to understand the impacts upon it of some of the growth that has taken place in the past, around the same time, I think, that other people around Ontario were starting to take a very serious look at the environment. So today I am speaking on the occasion of second reading of the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003. That will be a permanently protected greenbelt in the Golden Horseshoe that would provide real protection for the environment and is a key step in meeting the challenges of urban sprawl that face us today.

This is what we need for strong communities in the Golden Horseshoe. It is what we need to protect and improve the quality of life that the people of central Ontario enjoy today and would like to continue to enjoy. The proposed greenbelt would protect hundreds of thousands of acres of environmentally sensitive land and farmland in this region in which many of us reside.

I want to tell you a little story about how growth changed my own community. Some time ago—12 to 15 years ago, I think it was—we were a community of about 100,000 people. We looked forward as a province and we

said, "At some point in the future, we are going to grow," and we were going to grow by a projected population increase that we could actually put our minds around. The town of Oakville said, "We'll be responsible here. We'll take responsibility for another 50,000."

Interjection.

Mr Flynn: Ann Mulvale agreed with us. Council was unanimous on this, as I recall. They came forward and said, "We'll take another 50,000 people in the town of Oakville." But at the time, we didn't know we were doing things the wrong way. We picked the number of people who were going to live here and then we decided how we were going to adjust the land, how we were going to change things to squeeze these people in.

I think this legislation that is forthcoming and that I am speaking to today is an example of what people want us to do, and that is to put the environment first. Where in the past we put the population first and tried to figure a way we were going to jam them on to the land, this takes a look at the land first. This takes a look at the capability. This takes a look at what the limits to urban growth in this area should be and how they should be bounded by a protected green space linking the Niagara Escarpment to the Oak Ridges moraine and beyond.

Protecting the environment used to be an issue for extremists, and I often joke about this: You could spot the environmentalists in the crowd. They'd have the hemp shirts on, they'd have the sandals, they'd have the long hair—in fact, I used to look like that myself.

Interjection: Oh, no. Did you eat granola bars?

Mr Flynn: That's right: granola bars. What I noticed when I was on council and we were dealing with the growth issues, was that people started to come forward to express concerns about the environment, but they weren't typical of any one stratum of society. They were housewives, they were working men and women and they were youngsters and seniors and librarians and tradesmen. You could not pick them out. They were normal people who were coming forward to their level of government to express dissatisfaction with the way that growth was being handled in the area. The name they applied to it was urban sprawl. People have all sorts of names for it, but they name they used was urban sprawl.

Mainstream western thinking in the past was that the air we breathe and the water we drink and the land we live on were somehow indestructible, that they would just keep coming and we could do anything we wanted with them and everything would work out just fine. These resources were used—not used properly, but I think with the best of intent—to try to make our society progress, to try to move ahead as a society in the lifestyle we enjoy, and there is nothing wrong with that.

We know that sometimes, when humankind tampers with the environment without proper forethought, the results can be disastrous. We know that far more harm has been done in this regard than good. That harm has been done not only to the environment but also to ourselves. Think about the number of smog days we have. When you think about the rise in childhood asthma

and about the allergies your children have that were just unheard of before, it makes you wonder about the air shed, what we have done to the air shed in southern Ontario and why we need the legislation that is being proposed here to start to turn this around.

We need to be aware of the needs of our environment and realize that these are our needs as well. We need clean and abundant water, we need clean air and we need biodiversity, realizing that we are only part of an intrinsically connected natural world. A clean and healthy environment is not only essential for our collective physical health, it is good for our soul. It's good for the way you feel about yourself as a community. It's good for the way you feel about yourself as a family. We need places for ourselves and for our children to enjoy and learn about nature in the outdoors. We need them where we can feel a connection to the natural environment in and around the communities in which we live.

The greater Toronto bioregion provides an environmental context for the Golden Horseshoe. The bioregion I'm talking about is bounded by the Niagara Escarpment to the west, the Oak Ridges moraine to the north, the Ganaraska River to the east and Lake Ontario to the south. It is home to scores of significant natural heritage features, a multitude of wildlife, features such as wetlands and kettle lakes, and these features are all part of the habitats of rare, sensitive and threatened animals and plants.

The province has the means, and we have the means within our grasp: the Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan, for example, and the Niagara Escarpment plan. We can protect the environment in parts of the Golden Horseshoe. These plans are explicitly directed toward the protection and enhancement of these significant natural features.

The Oak Ridges moraine is an essential source of Ontario's drinking water. It needs to be protected. It provides a recharge zone for groundwater and its aquifers that provide clean drinking water for over a quarter of a million residents in central Ontario. Source protection is a critical element of our government's comprehensive strategy to protect Ontario's drinking water. Our government is moving forward quickly to protect our sources of drinking water.

The Niagara Escarpment is considered by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, as a world biosphere reserve. This designation recognizes the natural features and ecological importance of the escarpment. In addition, UNESCO has also endorsed the Niagara Escarpment plan.

I was talking about Oakville before and my own personal experience with growth in an urban area as an elected official. I think back to the way we used to plan communities: Communities were built with no idea of how schools would be built, where your kids would go to school or how such simple things as ice hockey rinks would be built.

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People in Oakville watched as highways and streets became clogged. Homes were still built, but the transit

didn't follow. Homes were still built, but the highways weren't enlarged. Green space was eaten up, trees were felled, environmentally sensitive land was cleared and wildlife was displaced. Viable and valuable green space and forests were replaced with postage-stamp parks and little lollipop trees.

People started to wake up to that. They started to realize, "We want a government at all levels that is going to protect our environment," because it's one of the most basic needs. If you don't have a clean and healthy environment, it doesn't matter how much money you make. If you don't have a clean and healthy environment, it doesn't matter how many jobs you have. You need clean air, and you need clean water. They are the basics of our life. If we don't protect them, we put everything else, including our economy, at risk. That would be foolhardy.

We held a public process on growth in Oakville, as municipalities are supposed to do. As I recall, the first meeting drew about 10 people. Those 10 people got talking to each other, and those 10 people eventually grew into a group, which some of you may have heard of, called Oakville Green.

These people were capable of drawing a crowd far larger than any government I know. When they held a meeting, it wasn't unusual for 700 to 1,000 people to come out. I don't know exactly what I would do as a politician to get a crowd of 700 people. Presumably, if I did something bad, I'd get a crowd of 700 angry people.

These people were angry to some extent. They came out and told their government, "We've seen what you've done so far. We can live off the experience, or we can learn from the experience of areas in the greater Toronto area that have grown so far. We don't like what's happening; in fact, it scares us. What these people were telling us was, "We don't want you to go any further until you've got this figured out. Once you figure it out, we're not opposed to growth. We're not opposed to expanding our communities for jobs. We know our kids have to have somewhere to live. We know the men and women who build our homes in the residential neighbourhoods. They're our fathers, our brothers, our sisters; they're people we know. They're not bad people because they build homes."

In fact, they're great people because they provide jobs and pay taxes. Nobody was trying to stop growth. Nobody was trying to bring our economic engine to a halt. What they were trying to do was make sure that it was properly managed and that it moved ahead in a responsible manner.

As I said, these people came out to the point that at one council meeting we couldn't have the meeting; there were too many people there. Those who were there refused to leave, and we exceeded the fire regulations. I've never been at any other political event where that has happened; perhaps it has, but I've been in politics for almost 20 years now, and that was a first for me. But it showed to me how important this issue was. It also showed that municipalities that wanted to do the right

thing had no clear direction from the province at that time. They were afraid of the OMB. Many of the decisions were made in fear that the developers would drag them through a court case. They would end up in court, and taxpayers' money would be used to pay lawyers instead of being used for things that we need in our community.

Interruption.

Mr Flynn: I'm pretty sure that wasn't for me, Mr Speaker, so I'll just keep going.

Interjection: That was Mayor Mulvale saying you're doing a great job.

Mr Flynn: Apparently that was Mayor Mulvale saying I'm doing good here.

I believe in growth, as most people do. But we need the type of growth that's going to provide us the sort of community that we want our children to grow up in.

The Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan and the Niagara Escarpment plan provide for the protection and enhancement of significant natural features. Both of these plans supersede other provincial legislation and policies, as well as municipal official plans and municipal zoning bylaws, in the event of a conflict. This is what provides true protection in these areas.

The concept of protecting the environment is nothing new in Ontario. But we realize that the scope must be widened to provide true protection, to provide quality of life in the Golden Horseshoe.

The proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003, seeks to clarify provisions in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001. This will make this act that much more effective. But this government also realizes that we can't stop there, that we need to go farther. The proposed act identifies a study area that includes the area known as the Golden Horseshoe. Similar protections for key green spaces throughout the Golden Horseshoe are the goals we hope to achieve. It could start, and it should start, today with the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003.

There are other mechanisms we have available to us that can aid us in protecting the environment. Legislation that governs conservation authorities and lands helps to prevent alteration or destruction of natural lands and habitats on lands in their jurisdictions.

If I go back to my previous example of how we started our own planning exercise, the use of a watershed was a new idea as an approach to planning. What had happened in other areas—if you talk to some of my colleagues in Mississauga who may have had conversations with the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, we have jeopardized that watershed to the point that some parts of the Credit Valley conservation area watershed simply do not do what they were ever intended to do by nature. They're prone to flooding. The expense that's involved in trying to remediate something like that is something you want to avoid if you can. We have the ability here to start to move forward in a progressive way and use legislation that governs conservation authorities and lands, that helps to prevent alteration or destruction of natural lands, as I said, and prevent what has happened in areas where

we've had experience from ever happening in other areas, such that, should we decide to expand urban boundaries or should we decide to live within the urban boundaries, we don't impact the watershed the same way.

The Environmental Assessment Act and the Environmental Protection Act also provide for processes to ensure the protection of land when development has been approved in principle and for prohibitions of activities that will undoubtedly cause adverse effects. The Ontario Heritage Act includes protection of natural heritage, and the Endangered Species Act prevents destruction of those identified species and their habitats. The Ontario Water Resources Act protects water and regulates the discharge of harmful materials into our water.

Key lands—I have some key lands in my community. We refer to them as the ORC lands. Some people call them the north Oakville assembly lands. These are lands that were assembled by the provincial government in days gone by. Quite often, what you will see when you try to decide something—those of you who have been in local government—is say, “Well, in order to protect those lands, you have to own them.” In order to bring those lands into protection, you have to go out and acquire them in some manner or you have to get them under the subdivision approval process. We have areas in this province where we own those lands. We are the owners already. We don't have to go and acquire them. I have very specific lands in Oakville that I am trying my hardest to make sure are preserved for generations to come. The key lands that we already own are the easiest to protect. We don't have to do anything. We don't have to spend money. We don't have to do improvements. What people are saying is, “Leave it as it is. I like it the way it is. Leave some areas the way they are. Leave some areas to nature.”

Land stewardship programs already in existence encourage individuals and organizations to help protect natural heritage. All of these items exist, but truly they exist today in isolation. Some of them overlap, some of them contrast and some of them even complement each other in some instances. But what we need in the Golden Horseshoe, in my opinion and in the opinion of this government, is a coordinated approach. As the land in the Golden Horseshoe is identified as a region, any plan to protect it should be regional in scope. That's what this pause gives us: the time and the ability to define what we need to look at to provide that protection and to define what we mean by “the region.”

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How do we achieve this? That's the question we're being asked. The proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003, as my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has pointed out, would provide a time out to study our options. We could use models provided by the Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan or the Niagara Escarpment plan as examples. These plans are based on natural heritage systems and compatible rural land uses. Core natural areas are identified, areas that contain the greatest number of significant natural features. Such

natural systems can provide the framework for developing legislation that protects and enhances the health, diversity, abundance and connectivity of natural heritage features and functions. A water resource system based framework could protect and, where necessary, improve or restore, as I was talking about in the Credit River example, a clean and abundant water supply and healthily functioning aquatic ecosystems.

We may also consider a system of existing public parks, open space trails and a host of amenities that are natural in their use across the greenbelt study area. These could meet a number of our greenbelt objectives. They could meet the demand that people have nowadays for environmental protection, outdoor education, recreational opportunities, tourism benefits, public access and natural heritage appreciation within the greenbelt study area. All could be achieved by taking a coordinated approach.

Why do we need the time out? I believe we need the time out because all these considerations deserve our time and the attention that previous governments simply have been unable or unwilling to give them. They deserve the time to be discussed by people who care, by people who know, by people who live in the communities that will be home to the greenbelt in whatever form it takes.

I have to tell you that I was very, very pleased to see a former colleague of mine, Mayor MacIsaac of Burlington, appointed as chair of the task force for this greenbelt, because that's somebody I respect. That's somebody who knows what we've had to face in the region of Halton, somebody who knows what it's like to be in local or regional government and have to deal with the province where the rules are not clear, where the OMB is held over your head like a hammer, and if you don't make the right decision, some big bogeyman at the OMB is going to come down there and make it for you. You simply can't do it in that manner.

In conclusion, the lands on the outer edge of the Golden Horseshoe's developed areas are the most threatened in Ontario today and yet, in my opinion, they've got the most potential. We need to protect our quality of life, and not only our quality of life; we need to protect the quality of life of our children and their children to come. We need real, positive change for green space in the Golden Horseshoe, and we need it to make our communities stronger.

I urge your support of this bill. I think it's wonderful. Communities need it and want it.

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I too stand on the occasion of the second reading of the Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003.

We have heard that the lands on the outer edge of the developed areas around the Golden Horseshoe are the most threatened in Ontario today. Our proposed greenbelt would protect hundreds and thousands of acres of environmentally sensitive land and farmland within the Golden Horseshoe. By containing sprawl, managing growth responsibly and creating a permanent greenbelt, we will enhance the quality of life for all Ontarians.

The proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003, is an important first step. It provides for a time out to discuss important issues and factors that must be taken into account when creating a greenbelt. This discussion will help to ensure that key rural and agricultural lands are protected. The identification of these rural and agricultural lands and the creation of a permanent greenbelt is what we look forward to with the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003. The greenbelt consultations will guide us in our growth, because once green space is lost in intent and purpose, it is lost forever.

The member for Oakville has outlined the importance of preserving environmentally sensitive lands, and I thank him for that. But green space also includes farmland—the farmland that feeds us and allows us to remain self-sufficient in food production.

From Niagara to Northumberland, north to Haliburton and over to Georgian Bay, farmland makes up almost 45% of the area's 9.2 million acres in the proposed greenbelt. Some of the best and most productive agricultural areas lie within the Golden Horseshoe, but these same prime agricultural areas are located where the pressures for development are the greatest. Urban boundary encroachments, non-farm uses, land speculation and new residential subdivisions have, over time, consumed prime agricultural land for what is really non-agricultural use.

Ontario enjoys many benefits from the agricultural sector. In the York, Peel, Halton and Durham regions, agriculture accounted for 15,000 direct jobs and 35,000 indirect jobs in 1996. In 2001, Ontario as a whole exported more than \$7 billion of agricultural food products as well as employing more than 600,000 people.

There are other social, economic and environmental benefits that can be achieved through agriculture. In one growing season, an average hectare of corn, acting as a carbon sink, can remove 22 tonnes of carbon dioxide from the air. As well, farmland provides the linkage that wildlife needs in order to survive in urbanizing areas. Urban residents benefit from living near the source of their fresh produce, not only in terms of availability, but also in having the security of knowing where their food is coming from. Farmland, and food land, also provides buffers between urban areas and significant natural areas by creating an open landscape. Prime farmland areas contribute to the rural, agricultural and natural heritage characteristics of the greenbelt study area. And the issue of food security and the benefits of supplying our own food to an increasing population should never be underestimated.

Some of the best agricultural land in the Golden Horseshoe is in the Niagara region. Half of the Niagara region's land base is farmed. The inclusion of the all-important tender fruit and grape lands in the proposed greenbelt could serve to protect these lands for agricultural use for years to come. The tender fruit and grape lands of the Niagara region have long been regarded nationally as significant agricultural resources. The silt and sand loam that overlays the clay of the Iroquois plain, combined with the moderating effects of Lake

Ontario, Lake Erie and the Niagara Escarpment, make this the ideal area for the production of fruit and grape wines—wine grapes, I should say; the other is good too. Temperatures rarely dip below minus 18 degrees Celsius, giving this area more frost-free days than most of Ontario. Crops such as peaches, apricots, cherries, grapes and other small and specialty fruits are grown with great success in this area.

The area is also a major tourist draw, and as such it is a local and regional source of economic development. Land use planning protection for agricultural lands in the Niagara region has been generally good, but as economic development activities have brought prosperity to the region, these activities have also brought non-farm development and urbanization pressures.

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This land and other key agricultural regions in the Golden Horseshoe must be protected. Only 5% of the total land base in Canada is classed as prime agricultural land, and half of that, 50%, is in Ontario. Of the total land base in Ontario, the prime agricultural land is only 12%. You can see that farmland is a finite resource. Once it's lost to conversion to non-farm uses, it can never be replaced. The long-term viability of agriculture requires careful management and protection from other inappropriate land uses.

The province has many options available to protect farmland. The provincial policy statement under the Planning Act provides policy direction for all planning authorities in Ontario on matters of provincial interest, including "the protection of the agricultural resources of the province." The provincial policy statement requires that prime agricultural land be protected for agriculture and agriculturally related uses, and it identifies those priorities. It provides direction regarding development on lands in prime agricultural areas and asks that there be careful thought given to the need for such conversions and that consideration be given to alternate locations if possible. The provincial policy statement also provides direction for the protection of natural features such as water sources that are an integral part of the agricultural region and are vital to the long-term health and sustainability of farming.

There are also other existing pieces of legislation that contribute to the protection of farmland and farm uses. The Farming and Food Production Protection Act, 1998, and the Nutrient Management Act, 2002, are just two examples, but as with much of the legislation designed to protect our environment, these acts exist in isolation. We need region-specific legislation developed in the context of the Golden Horseshoe. We must know where growth and development can occur, where it cannot and where it should not. Within the framework of where growth will be allowed, we must find where it can best be supported. The proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003, is part and parcel of the government's overall plan for responsible growth and management of the Golden Horseshoe.

Because the way we live tomorrow depends on how we plan and grow today, the government will consult

broadly on greenbelt protection to ensure that a fine balance is struck. The government's consultations will ensure that views from all regions within the Golden Horseshoe have a chance to be heard. Topics will be discussed and, within those topics, opinions from the spectrum will be examined.

As we gather this information, the government will be looking at the creation of a larger growth management plan for the Golden Horseshoe. It is an important component of our plan, and it is complementary to a greenbelt. A growth management plan for the Golden Horseshoe and the region that surrounds it will help to shape how and where growth will occur. Our plan will take into account existing population growth and infrastructure needs without jeopardizing areas that provide our food, water and recreation.

While the plan will incorporate the principles and framework of the greenbelt, its scope is much broader. It will address issues such as managing growth and identifying opportunities for growth and intensification, as well as infrastructure needs and implementation direction. This plan will include discussion of many of the issues that must be considered when developing a greenbelt plan. But how and where we grow will depend on having a greenbelt, which is why the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act, 2003, is so crucial. We need the time to discuss the many issues that we have only just touched on today, and this act gives us that time. It gives us the time to discuss the green space we need to protect in the context of the requirements of the population growth we expect over the next 30 years.

This is not new. In other jurisdictions in North America and the United Kingdom, there have been successful examples of greenbelt approaches and protection. This is appropriate management and responsible growth in terms of the management of our land use.

As the parliamentary assistant for rural affairs, rural affairs are of course very close to my heart, and I feel that the support of a government for the rural communities is very important. In *Time* magazine—although it is an old issue; it is the issue for October 13 of last year—there was an article entitled “Rural Development: An Oxymoron,” and it was written by Fred McMahon, who is the director of the Centre for Globalization Studies at the Fraser Institute. I want to quote from his article, in particular the last two statements:

“Heroic rural programs trap people in unsustainable jobs and typically damage even more vulnerable people elsewhere. In the end, the best rural program is no rural program.”

I couldn't disagree more. I think it's in the public interest to support rural communities. We provide stewardship for rural communities.

I'm going to speak to the fact that in rural communities we have an entire lifestyle. The member for Oakville spoke to it earlier: the benefits of the social life in rural communities that can't be found elsewhere. We have a lifestyle that brings us close to nature, we have a sense of community that allows us to endeavour to keep our

communities well, and we work together in a way that isn't seen in other areas. Volunteerism is the backbone of our communities. It allows us to do the stewardship work that we feel is important. This is going to allow us to create the greenbelt, and we're going to do this with the communities' help and support.

After eight long years of runaway sprawl, for which we have our Tory friends to thank, we are taking decisive steps toward growth management in the Golden Horseshoe. That will start with the proposed Greenbelt Protection Act of 2003. I firmly believe that this is a real and positive change for all Ontarians.

I will repeat for your benefit, in the event that you weren't here when the minister spoke to it, the preamble of the act, which defines the purpose of this act very clearly:

“The government of Ontario recognizes that in order to protect environmentally sensitive land and farmland and contain urban sprawl, there is an immediate need to study an area in the part of Ontario known as the Golden Horseshoe.

“The government recognizes that clear limits must be set on development in order to protect this valuable resource as a greenbelt for the long term.

“The government recognizes that good planning for environmental and agricultural protection and sustainable development will result in economic benefits to the residents of the Golden Horseshoe area.

“The government recognizes the environmental and agricultural significance of this area and its importance as a source of food, water, natural heritage systems, green space and recreation, resulting in an enhanced quality of life.

“The government recognizes that it is important to continue to protect the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges moraine and to protect a broader greenbelt area.

“Therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, enacts as follows.”

I hope that we are able to bring this to fruition.

1630

The Acting Speaker: There are still 30 seconds. We'll go to questions and comments.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I am happy to respond. I will participate at some length on Bill 27 later on. For those listening, what you've heard in the last half hour is the government's interpretation of what I call a ministerial bill. If you read the preamble, you will be familiar with the fact that this restricts many public rights, as it were, today.

If you were listening, it also implies that the lower-tier and upper-tier levels of government today were acting irresponsibly. I believe that they were all operating to an official plan. Those official plans are amended and approved by governments and, today, by the regional level of government in Durham region, which I can speak of: “Applications to amend or revoke such a zoning order may not be made, but the minister may....” In these cases it illustrates that the minister ultimately has irrevocable power.

The bill has some parts, but I can tell you, from participating in the pre-budget consultations, that the president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association said, and I know it's a fact, that in Durham region the land that has been held up for ransom—the land that was proposed for development under municipal and regional authority—has now been sort of neutralized. The cost of a lot, which for the first-time home buyer is really what this debate is about, has doubled. That's going on to the cost of a home, to families. If your policy here is to restrict home ownership, let's be clear about it.

What I see in this bill is more government interference. If you look at the whole section 8, it talks about retroactivity, it talks about limitations, it talks about no costs or remedies, no restitution. I think it's unfair expropriation of individuals' rights.

Ms Churley: I'm going to be supporting this bill.

I wanted to thank the task force members, many of whom I know. I think you made some good choices, Minister, in terms of the people on the task force. I know they had a lot to do with the recommendations before us today, and I know they would like to see this legislation move forward so we can move on and actually put it in place.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): But.

Ms Churley: Of course there are "buts." The government is asking for some constructive—when do I ever not give constructive support? It's always constructive, and I, of course, do have some constructive recommendations and changes to make, which you will hear about. Some of them are very serious. I am sure the minister will agree with me that he has heard from some of his task force members—I hope this is not considered a prop—that there are some problems that need to be fixed through amendment or whatever. But I am in perfect agreement that we need to move this bill forward. We need to have the opportunity to speak to it, of course, and to make those recommendations, those changes that are absolutely necessary to make it work.

But if the government should continue and proceed to go ahead with the Castle Glen development, which I mentioned yesterday and today in this House—today I asked a question and I don't know why the Minister of Municipal Affairs didn't answer it, because he's the one I want to put the ministerial zoning order on this. It's been done before. It was done by the Tories and was done by us and it can be done by you. It is absolutely critical, Minister, because if you don't, it will fly in the face of everything that you're saying here today about wanting to protect the greenbelt around the big city. So I hope you'll say that you will kill that development as of today.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to lend two minutes worth of comments to the debate on this bill. I compliment highly the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Honourable John Gerretsen, for presenting us with a view for the future.

One of the things that I think is important to point out, as the members from Oakville and Lambton-Kent-Middlesex did, was that they combined the knowledge

they had from both municipal governments and from their areas, pulled it together and explained why the bill is going to be so important for us in the future.

I think it's time for us to start putting petty politics aside and understand that for the first time in many, many years the Minister of Natural Resources, the Minister of the Environment, the minister of infrastructure renewal, the Environmental Commissioner, Justice O'Connor, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs will be working collectively to make sure we're planning for the future and ensure that our environment is safe for the people of Ontario.

The day has come and everyone has acknowledged that we must look at what we're doing to the planet. I'm going to be bold and simply say that this must be done in order for us to have proper drinking water. Why do I mention it? Because I'm talking about the conservation authorities in our province. They need to be supported, and they have for many years worked toward the improvement of our water resources in the province of Ontario.

I want to compliment my own in Brant, the Grand River Conservation Authority. They, as do all the other conservation authorities, have some of the highest expertise in terms of how to protect those lands and what's necessary, what should be done on those properties and what shouldn't be done on those properties. We will be seeking the best advice from across the province, from all those ministries, to plan for the future for our children and, as the First Nations teach us, the seven generations after us, to be prepared for the planet to make sure we have a sustainable environment to live in.

I want to suggest that we need to do more work on brownfields. Brownfields in municipalities are waiting for us to redevelop them, because they have infrastructure already in place and they're not being used. I compliment the minister, and I look forward to more progress in the future.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): After having listened to my colleagues from across the floor speak, I'm so happy to hear that if this bill passes, the birds are going to sing even more beautifully, the brooks will gurgle even louder, the grass is going to be greener, and apple pie is going to smell a whole lot nicer—only if this bill passes.

From the descriptions across the way, they should call this the spare-no-platitudes bill. I want some substance. I look forward to the critique of this bill from the member for York North, as our opposition critic, for some substance on what this bill is and the ramifications for communities and families across the province of Ontario.

Just by way of example, what's the housing policy to help start-ups, to help new families, young families trying to find new homes? They're seeing vacant lot prices spike exorbitantly. How much farther are they going to have to travel, and what are the transportation routes to support those families if this greenbelt strategy goes ahead as planned? That answer did not come in the discussions from across the way.

On the agricultural side, what is the agricultural framework? You can't just wave a magic wand and say they're going to stay in farm production. What is the agricultural framework to support our farmers? Specifically on the Niagara fruit belt, what is the plan to help our grape growers, our tender fruit producers, to make sure that as prices vary it stays viable for families to remain in farming in those industries?

One idea brought forward today that I was pleased to support was the concept of VQA-only stores. The government will continue to regulate who has a licence to sell alcohol in the province of Ontario—a wonderful idea: VQA winery stores. In fact, I have a private member's bill before the Legislature today to allow just that, to showcase our award-winning Ontario wines. This helps out the wineries, it helps out agriculture and it helps out tourism. These types of economic incentives can help keep the green area green.

Third, what about the municipalities that are trying to grow, that are trying to find ways of getting revenue to invest in services in their communities? That has not been answered. I look forward to the comments of our critics and substance from York North.

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Let me first of all thank the member from Oakville for giving a very good urban perspective as to why this legislation is needed, and second, the member from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, my parliamentary assistant, for giving the agricultural and rural reasons why this bill is necessary.

I'd like to compliment the member from Toronto-Danforth for supporting this bill, and I hope her entire caucus will support the bill. She knows quite well that we cannot comment about the situation she mentioned, as it is before the Ontario Municipal Board right now.

I would also like to compliment the member from Brant for talking about the importance of good drinking water and the importance of redeveloping the brownfields we have in many of our communities.

1640

With respect to the member from Durham, let me just repeat once again that he shouldn't be scaremongering. As I've indicated before, all lands previously designated for urban development will remain available for urban development. It's there. We're not doing anything that will stop that from happening, as we have made quite clear to the task force. They have been busily at work under the competent chairmanship of Mayor Rob MacIsaac from Burlington and will be making a report to the government within a year, and we hope to have the bill passed within a year so we can have the policies in place so developers know exactly what they can develop in this area and so environmentalists know exactly what is going to be protected within this area.

That's what this is all about: to bring certainty to this whole question as to what should and shouldn't be developed and what should and shouldn't be retained. That's what it is all about. I hope for some very constructive debate and criticism, as well as suggestions by

the members of the opposition and the government members as well so we can make a good bill even better. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I just want to indicate at this point that I will be sharing my time with the member from Oak Ridges.

It gives me great pleasure to stand today and make a few comments on Bill 27, the question of the greenbelt. I think all of us recognize that the notion of a greenbelt—the parks, the forest, the farmlands, all that kind of image for us—in an area surrounding one of the major metropolitan centres of the world sounds very, very enticing. I am always conscious of the way in which even tourism is projected; there is always the notion there of the countryside. And there is no question that we all understand the value of the countryside. But when we look at this particular piece of legislation, we have to look at some issues that come out of what I will later refer to as a somewhat simplistic picture of the fact that we can simply draw a bigger green line around the city.

I think it is a question that has probably haunted people for a long time: When is urban sprawl urban sprawl? I spoke to my mother, who can remember a time as a life-long Torontonians—she was born in Toronto, as was her mother before her. I asked her, "Where was the edge of Toronto, as you recall, as a young girl?" Of course, fields and farms were around Eglinton and Bayview. Obviously, one could then argue that was urban sprawl as it began to go forward. There could be those who would look back in the history books and say, "No, it was actually Bloor Street." But if we just want to look in the current generations, we are certainly faced with this issue.

I can remember that on the northwest corner of Finch and Bathurst, on the northwest corner there was a very large farmhouse and a working farm. As a young kid, I was quite intrigued by this and actually took pictures of that corner when there were fields on the other three corners, with this very large working farm at the corner. I asked my daughter, and she can remember the farms at the corner of Carville and Bathurst in Richmond Hill.

So the question of how we deal with growth is certainly not a new one. In the course of my comments, I'll try to present to you the importance of having a balance in looking at this. When I give you the descriptions I just have on what changes have come about in the course of my mother's lifetime, it's clear that at the same time we have created a Golden Horseshoe, an area that is vibrant, both socially and economically. You can look at those former fields and look at the communities and the neighbourhoods that have come to be. You can see the places where people go to school, where they work, the hospitals and businesses. People from all over Canada come to Toronto. People from all over the world come to Toronto. They have made a better life for themselves and their families in this area. So when we think of a *carte blanche* protected lands process, I think we have to

consider as very important where people are going to live and how we must balance the need for housing and businesses for the vibrancy of city life to be able to continue and respect the need for protected lands to ensure the best quality of life.

There are some things that we need to remember in terms of looking at one side of that equation, and that is that people need affordable places to live. Not everyone wants to live on the 20th, 40th or 50th floor of an apartment building. Families want to have a lawn for their kids to play on. Certainly home ownership has been a dream for many thousands—in fact, millions of people, and many of the people who have come to this general area of the Golden Horseshoe have been able to realize that dream.

The bill that we are looking at today proposes to have new growth and construction in Toronto concentrated on brownfield sites. Again, as a member of the former government that introduced the brownfields legislation and had it passed into law—it has generated a great deal of activity and urban renewal across this province—obviously I applaud that suggestion. But I think that one needs to look a little more closely at the numbers, the size and the number of brownfield sites and the kind of growth that this area sees.

While it may seem like a worthy aim, I'd suggest to you that when you look at the figures, it is unrealistic. From the Ministry of Municipal Affairs Web site there's a clear indication that by 2021 my home region of York will grow by more than 450,000 people. Today, we are looking at approximately 800,000 people in York region. This means that you're looking at growth by another half of the total there today. People in Peel will increase by 546,000, Durham by 254,000 and Halton by 196,000. You simply cannot expect all of these people to live on brownfield sites, particularly since the city of Toronto is expected to grow by 420,000. It is unlikely that there are enough brownfield sites in all of Canada to house the total GTA increase of 1.8 million people in 20 years.

The boundaries that have been set by this piece of legislation are very clear and arbitrary. As a member sitting right on the northern boundary of this, one naturally asks the question—if I cross the bridge, I'm into Simcoe—what kind of implications does this legislation have on places like Simcoe county? What kind of implications does it have on areas like Guelph and Barrie? The list goes on.

In its own official plan, the city of Toronto recognized the value of the brownfield site, but it also recognized that it cannot accommodate all future development.

1650

In its report *Flash Forward: Projecting Population and Employment to 2031 in a Mature Urban Area*, it says that the city could only accommodate 537,000 people by the year 2031 under its official plan. They also estimate that 55% of the city's share of the projected population will seek ground-related housing. The city's report indicates, "As the city becomes fully 'built out,' it will be increasingly difficult to add to its stock of single and semi-

detached housing, the housing that young family households are seeking."

The report also states, "As people age in place, and as others become less able to move due to gradually rising real estate prices throughout the GTA, the city will be increasingly unable to supply the ground-related housing that new households with children will be seeking. This will put upward pressure on the prices of existing ground-related housing in the city, until growth rates slow and some new equilibrium is reached."

The Urban Development Institute estimates that brownfields and intensification can accommodate only 30% of the projected population growth in the central Ontario region by 2030. They also point out that this assumes that local councils and ratepayers will accept intensification, something which is currently not the accepted norm in many municipalities. I've mentioned, obviously, the question of where this increased population is going to go and the problems that the brownfields represent. I think it's also important to note that while the minister has referred to this as a "time out," it's really important to understand that it's only a time out in perhaps his mind and a very few other people's.

There are realities that continue. We need to look at those in the context, for instance, of housing costs. What has happened when there has been that, frankly, tremor to the whole industry? What effects does that have on housing costs? According to the Urban Development Institute of Ontario, since the announcement of Bill 27, residential serviced lot prices in the GTA have soared, and this is just from the announcement of the bill. So that "time out" that the minister has referred to is something that has devastating repercussions in other parts of the community.

Housing demands don't take a time out. The cost of a serviced lot has risen from \$4,000 to over \$6,000 a front foot in the GTA. In Aurora, the price per front foot for a 20-foot freehold townhouse lot has increased from \$3,500 in October 2003 to \$5,500 in March 2004. This is a 57% increase. The average lot frontage for a single detached home is approximately 36 feet. Therefore, the cost of a serviced lot alone is \$216,000. This is even before your house is built.

So you may understand, then, why I suggest to you that affordable housing will be a thing of the past. Sources in the development industry are saying that the Liberal proposals are the worst signal that the industry could have received from the government, and that new home buyers may begin to see higher prices from the lot price increases by the end of the calendar year.

The Canadian Real Estate Association announced in February 2004 that the average resale home price in Toronto was \$310,000, which is about 10% higher than the October 1989 price spike of \$280,000. Overall, the percentage of serviced lots in the GTA, relative to Toronto's resale housing costs, is now 70%.

As yet, we haven't spoken about what happens elsewhere, recognizing the fact that, in theory, we would all like to see more trees, more parks, more forest area, more

agricultural land. Portland, Oregon, has had an urban growth boundary similar to a greenbelt in place for a number of years. According to the Urban Land Institute, this boundary has resulted in single-family lot prices increasing by 35% in just four years, from 1995 to 1999. Commercial prices in the same period increased from 25% to 39%. Industrial park costs went up a whopping 98%. So I think you can see here that the experience elsewhere certainly doesn't bode well for the area that we're speaking about today.

Potential homeowners and business investors simply cannot afford types of costs such as these. New housing will become less and less affordable for residents of the GTA. We could end up with a city where only the wealthy can afford a single-family home. Areas of middle- and lower-income single-family homes in Toronto would likely be demolished over time to make way for high-rise units and monster homes that we see already in some of our areas in Toronto.

I think there's no question, certainly speaking as a member from the northern part of York region, that none of us likes sprawl for its own sake. I think that there is common agreement on that. We're also very unhappy with the ancillary effects of that: the gridlock, pollution, rundown infrastructure and waste of land. I think there is a great deal of agreement on this.

But the problem, when we look at this particular piece of legislation, is that this is not the way to deal with this. The greenbelt legislation is not a restriction on sprawl; it is an end of development. It is an extreme device that will lead to a shortage of housing and drive up the price of housing that is built. The proposed greenbelt really doesn't answer the question of sprawl. In looking at Bill 27, the government, I believe, has failed to provide any kind of clear direction to the task force and the public about the extent and width of the greenbelt and what effects it will have on landowners and local governments.

The Liberal election plan said that they would protect a greenbelt of 600,000 acres around Toronto. As 470,000 acres of the Oak Ridges moraine have already been protected by the previous PC government and thousands more acres of the Niagara Escarpment by former PC governments, I have to ask, what areas will the Liberals be protecting? If in fact you add up the entire area of the Oak Ridges moraine, the Niagara Escarpment and Rouge Park, almost a million acres of land are already protected. Will the government add on thousands of acres outside the moraine and the escarpment, or will they just add up what has already been preserved and claim they are doing something new?

The Liberal election plan promised real protection for the moraine, promising to cancel 6,600 new-home development in Richmond Hill, and we all know what happened to that promise.

1700

Something else that I think is very significant about this bill is the fact that it supersedes what has historically been the power of municipalities. There has been reference made by members opposite to their experience on

local government, and there have also been expressions of support for the conservation authorities. But quite frankly, this particular bill takes away those powers. Both this and Bill 26 set the stage for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, or the cabinet, to seize control of all of the local decision-making from local municipalities.

Bill 26 provides one definition of an urban settlement area but provides that the minister can change it at any time. Bill 27, the bill we are debating today, has a different definition of an urban settlement area. What kind of message does this send to municipalities?

When the minister introduced Bill 26, he said, "We are moving quickly in our agenda for positive change by taking steps that would ensure that unwanted urban expansions couldn't be forced upon communities." Then he said, "The Strong Communities Act, if passed, would help to ensure that locally elected officials remained in control of land use planning in their municipality." However, the next day, Bill 27 was introduced and the government ended local control of planning for municipalities in the greenbelt study area. I want to just point out that as a result of this, in the areas that appear to be most affected by the greenbelt study area, the mayors have all come together and formed a group to look at, from their perspective, what kinds of things they might expect from this rather draconian, top-down legislation.

Municipalities already have a process in place when they undertake any kind of urban expansion, and they must undertake an exhaustive process of studies to justify any expansion. In 1989, the region of Halton started the Halton urban structure review, the purpose of which was to provide a comprehensive plan for the provincially mandated requirement for new urban designated lands in the region. With consultations and an OMB review, this process has taken 10 years to complete at the regional level, and the plan is still being delayed and challenged. Local governments have done a huge amount of work developing local plans.

Also, something that up to this point I don't feel has been given proper recognition is the question of individual property rights, private property rights. Obviously there's always a delicate balance to be maintained when we're talking about the public good and private property, but there is no recognition here, nor, as far as I can see from the makeup of the task force, any voice that speaks for the many hundreds of thousands of private property owners who woke up the morning after the announcement of the bill to discover that their lands were frozen. So I think we need to be looking at this particular area and what kind of balance is being sought. The bill obviously is silent on this. It talks about the creation of this extra-wide green line with no thought or understanding of the fact that people who have bought their dream property have just done that. What kind of insecurity, instability, is there for them in the light of this time out?

While the moratorium on urban uses outside of urban settlement areas is proposed to be confined to one year, the scale of restriction and its severity suggests a lengthier suspension of democratic and property rights.

The minister admitted in a National Post article on February 17 that some lands may be expropriated. He said specifically, "Is expropriation possible?" His answer, "Yes. Who knows?" Ontarians want to know. Landowners and farmers in the proposed greenbelt want to know. Taxpayers want to know how much expropriation will cost them.

The Ottawa greenbelt is almost 50,000 acres and the National Capital Commission owns about three quarters of its lands. Most of the land was purchased by the National Capital Commission between 1958 and 1966 at a cost of \$40 million in 1966 dollars. The equivalent around Toronto today would be hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars. There has to be some recognition here that property owners have rights. Property owners have the need for a voice in these discussions.

We also need to come back to the issue I raised at the very beginning about the minister's comments that the moratorium is to be seen as a time out. It's only a time out from his perspective. Forty thousand people move to York region every year. They don't have a time out. Municipalities that look at the balance of their assessment, whether it's residential, commercial or industrial, need to know. They don't have a time out. There are all kinds of people who have various interests who need to know. They're not having a time out. Those pressures continue to grow.

It is unfair that Bill 27 retroactively halts applications that could lead to urban expansions. This is a heavy-handed action by this government that has already interfered with many locally approved projects. The moratorium has already halted a number of large projects in rural areas in the GTA.

The Hamilton Spectator reported on February 19 that the Liberal moratorium has halted the construction of the Canadian Reformed Church in Flamborough. The Liberal plan has stopped the construction of a Tim Hortons on Highway 6 north in Hamilton, a campground in Flamborough and a house for farm help in Ancaster. Also stalled are efforts to recognize an illegal mobile home park and overnight accommodations at the Four Seasons Nature Resort and to finalize the site plan for the John Bayus mobile park, both in Flamborough.

In the St Catharines Standard of March 11, Bill Hodgson, the mayor of the town of Lincoln, says the greenbelt restrictions are so tight, they do not permit developments that would be considered ancillary uses to farms. I know in my own community this is an important issue as well. An old fruit processing facility on Jordan Road was recently purchased with the intention of converting it to a farm supply outlet, but it requires a zoning change—impossible under the development freeze. Mayor Hodgson said, "This is about support for agriculture. There is a need for some flexibility. Life, business and commerce do go on." They don't have a time out.

At the other end of the frozen zone, we have applications by both Loblaws and Tim Hortons in the township of Brock. You know what is lost in this is the fact that

there are about 200 part- and full-time jobs that then will move. You have to wonder if those investors make the decision to go up the road to Ramara township, to cross over the Talbot River. Is that really what we're asking for in this legislation? Is that really what the minister is looking for, that you create an area now where you go farther, where you create or attempt to create the same business climate, the same housing developments and so forth, but on area lands that are further away? I think that is one of the most perplexing leaps of logic in this whole discussion.

1710

The other thing that I think we have to look at is the fact that there are thousands of people who work in the construction industry, and many of them have their jobs threatened by this moratorium. Mark Parsons of the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association wrote an article in The Globe and Mail in which he said:

"The residential construction industry creates more than 125,000 direct and indirect jobs in the greater Toronto area each year and contributes almost \$3 billion a year to the provincial treasury. In recent years, we've been the only consistently bright light in the provincial economy.

"Because we've been able to sell more than 40,000 new homes in each of the past four years, we have kept prices low, kept tradesmen and construction workers fully employed and supported companies all over the province that produce the goods and services that go into new homes.

"If we end up with a government-induced housing shortage, prices will rise, rental rates will rise, jobs will be lost, and the government tax revenues will falter."

In the remarks made earlier by the government, there was some effort made to bring into this greenbelt the whole issue of agriculture. I would like to take a few moments to talk about that, because nowhere in the bill itself does it talk beyond greenbelt, so we're not really sure of the commitment with regard to agriculture. But I would like to speak for a moment about the kind of commitment that the GTA has toward agriculture.

Agriculture is still the second most important economic driver in the Golden Horseshoe, and local governments have acted on this fact. The four regions of Durham, Halton, Peel and York have set up a steering committee which has responded to the agricultural studies done in the late 1990s that recognized how important agriculture was to the GTA. This steering committee, representing both municipal and regional government, has completed focus groups and hosted a symposium, with ongoing work to bring people together representing the different levels of government and the federations of agriculture. I guess my concern is, with this time out, what happens to the kind of work that has already begun, that has been done from, literally, the grass roots?

At this level—that is, at the regional and the municipal level—there is a recognition of the importance of agriculture and the need to maintain and increase its viability.

Farmers, like any other business people, need the surety of a regulatory framework which allows capital expansion, not one that freezes decision-making for one year, not one that creates uncertainty, not one that extols green space and not agriculture. Too often, I think, urban dwellers think that greenspace and agriculture are interchangeable. Obviously, they are not.

If the government is embarking on a greenbelt plan, it must take into account the needs of farmers and it must also, I would argue, recognize the work that has been done. There is nothing in this legislation that gives us comfort in knowing the work that has been done, whether you're talking about the Niagara area and its very successful agricultural policy or the work that is being done at the level within the GTA, has been recognized.

What we're seeing here is that there is a need for balance, and I don't believe this piece of legislation represents that kind of balance. I don't think the government has taken into account the need to balance the needs of future homeowners, future Canadians to this area, with the need to preserve or to have preserved areas.

Bill 27 is a draconian, knee-jerk reaction to a problem that doesn't have a simple answer. The future development of Toronto and the area needs to be thought out and planned carefully, which the moratorium and the greenbelt plan do not do. The government's approach to sprawl is a top-down, authoritarian one. With both Bills 26 and 27, the government removes power from local government and citizens and centralizes power in the hands of the Premier's office and the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The government should have worked with local government, citizens and builders to design a healthy, balanced model of development. The Liberals have failed to do this. They should have followed what was done previously by the PC government, with Smart Growth as part of a bottom-up process that takes into account local needs, affordable housing and the need for an infrastructure commitment.

When we embarked on the Smart Growth process to promote and plan for future growth, it was to do so in ways that create strong economy, build vibrant communities and promote clean, healthy environments across the province. The Smart Growth approach was made up of three core values. Building consensus and creating partnerships was the first—growth issues across municipal boundaries and jurisdictions to encompass areas such as transportation, infrastructure and land use and how they affect people differently.

Our second principle was promoting growth, because it generates new businesses, jobs and the revenue necessary to support the services we value. This growth must be good growth to protect the environment and ensure residents a high quality of life.

The third principle was to look at the big picture. Smart Growth takes a longer-term view in planning for growth. It is a strategic process to ensure that the benefits of well-planned growth are shared across the province in ways that build strong rural and urban communities. It

helps government set priorities for public spending on infrastructure and to attract and accommodate desirable growth.

Our government established the Smart Growth panel for central Ontario in 2002, and it reported back a year later. The panel brought together community leaders, leaders representing local governments, businesses and environmental groups, educational institutions, transportation organizations and the development industry. The panel reported back to the government about a year ago with a plan to manage and attract growth in central Ontario. The report emphasized reshaping where and how people live by encouraging balanced growth so that people can live and work in close proximity; encouraging more compact development, protecting the natural heritage system and unique agricultural lands; and managing urban expansion to prevent leapfrog settlement. I think this is something that is really important to understand, because what the time-out freeze has done is obviously create the kind of climate where people will begin to look at the choices of leapfrogging.

The plan would also protect the environment, fight gridlock and take a more collaborative approach to waste management; upgrade infrastructure, both hard and soft, to accommodate expected growth; and build prosperous, liveable communities.

That is our approach to looking at this issue, which certainly is one that, as I say, has been with us for generations. We do have to look at the way in which we can look at balancing some of these things.

1720

I'd like to just draw my remarks to a close and look at some of the hallmark qualities here that I think we're facing in this piece of legislation today. I would suggest to you that the first one of these is simplistic. To be able to suggest that you can simply paint a big green line around Toronto is really overlooking many of the kinds of initiatives that have gone on within local governments. It overlooks the value of the work that has been done.

Since we don't know exactly where it is, is it simply redefining those areas, like the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges moraine and the protected lands in Rouge area? Is that what we're doing? Is that what we're creating all this angst about, simply to be able to draw a red line around the green line and say, "Well, this is what we've done," when of course it has been in existence for years. If it is just that, then it's kind of an exercise in public relations.

The other thing about the simplistic nature of this legislation is the moratorium itself. This is like taking a snapshot and freezing everything in time. But what it has actually done is leave everything else outside of that snapshot, the things that are in limbo: the question of the security around what local governments already have in mind.

I'd also suggest to you that another quality of this is that there's some inherent contradiction. The minister and his party have been very clear in the lead-up to these pieces of legislation, Bills 26 and 27, about empowering

municipalities. While most people would think empowering means allowing them to make decisions, that they would maintain their ability in local decision-making, what we find out is that this is rhetoric. This in fact is much more a top-down approach to the Liberal solution of a problem.

The other thing that's contradictory about this is the fact that much has been made of the need to have transparency. I would suggest to you that what we really have seen here is a new meaning to transparency. It's transparent, all right. What it really means is that the real decision-making is at the cabinet table. That, of course, is not what most of us think of as a transparent decision-making process.

The last characteristic I would comment on is that it is short-sighted. It doesn't have a vision. It draws no line. People who are sitting in these lands have no information, no idea, for instance, where people are going to go as time passes, how municipalities are going to develop, what power they will have over their own local decision-making. There is a lack of balance.

We've heard a great deal from the government about the need to protect flora and fauna. I don't think there's anyone who doesn't understand the value of that. We understand that through the watershed system of our conservation authorities, new science has been able to bring to us a great deal of information in terms of water resources, as well as understanding the needs that housing development places on our environment. Those things, then, are not there for us in this time out.

Finally, I think that it's short-sighted because it doesn't provide a vision that would provide a goal: This is what it's going to look like, but also, piece of mind. I think that knowing where we are going as a province, where this green line is going and what it's going to look like, is extremely important to those people who live and work in these areas and those people who want to come and join us.

Thank you. I'll pass it over to my colleague.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in this debate. Let me say, first of all, how much I appreciate the work of my colleague the member from York North on this file. She has researched it well, she has provided very important insight to our caucus as we've deliberated on this legislation and she has had extensive meetings with stakeholders. I know that because I've been advised by various groups, whether that be municipalities or representatives from the development or building industry planners. They have been particularly impressed with the kind of knowledge that the member brings to the task of critic for this portfolio.

I want to say as well how absolutely disappointed I am in the Minister of Municipal Affairs for having brought this bill forward. For someone who has a very stalwart background at the municipal level—he was a mayor of a very, I should say, historic municipality in this province. I had, prior to seeing this legislation, always considered that he was certainly very knowledgeable on municipal issues. This has changed my mind about that. I have to say that—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Can I have order? I want to hear the debate.

Mr Klees: I don't mean this as a personal affront to the minister, because I know that he was probably cringing when he was asked to table this legislation. He did his job. He did it well. He looked confident. But the minute we asked the first question his confidence crumbled, because he knew that he could not defend legislation as flawed as Bill 27.

Let me share with you, Speaker—because I know you're particularly interested in this, representing an area just outside of Toronto—that the pressure this legislation will put on communities such as you represent, and many of us do, will be far-reaching. The minister, through this bill, takes upon himself the powers to overrule the good work that has been done by municipalities for many years. I find that particularly contradictory, because I recall that when the minister was in opposition, he would advocate at great length, and rightfully so, for the role of municipalities. I heard him say on many occasions that if in fact the municipality believes that a particular policy initiative is appropriate for the local community, the provincial government should in fact be supportive of that. After all, who knows best? It's the people who live in the community. It's the local council that's been elected to represent the members of that community, particularly in the area of community planning.

Now, with Bill 27, for some reason the minister felt it necessary to give himself the power to overrule, to effectively throw out years of planning that was done by the local municipality and impose what he in his wisdom—or perhaps better yet, and worse still, the civil service around him and people who are absolutely disconnected from the local municipality—feels is appropriate. We can't allow this to happen. We have had representatives from communities, municipalities, the planning industry, builders, developers—anyone who has any relationship at all with practical community building—appeal to us to do what we can to hold back the implementation of this legislation.

1730

With regard to the imposition of this moratorium, one of the issues that I'm going to be very interested to see how the minister handles over time is, first of all, the immediate financial harm that already has been brought on many Ontarians, many landowners, whose properties are caught in this moratorium. What is the minister going to do with an individual who has been holding a property, perhaps the second generation, and has been looking at that property with the rights to develop that property based on existing official plans? And now with this legislation, the minister is effectively saying to that family, "No more." In fact, the minister has said very clearly that if it so pleases him, he may well expropriate that land, and with regard to—

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): Where?

Mr Klees: Well, he did say it. In fact, the minister was quoted in a number of newspapers. He himself just

admitted it. He was quoted in the *National Post* as saying, "Yes, yes, absolutely. That is a very definite possibility." And so you have people in the province of Ontario whose property rights have been taken away through this legislation. I suggest to the minister that he will probably end up with a number of lawsuits, and rightfully so, challenging what has taken place here.

On the issue of property rights, Speaker, I might say to you, isn't it interesting that we are one of the few jurisdictions internationally that does not have property rights entrenched in the Constitution of our country? Would it not be appropriate, instead of for the minister to come forward with this legislation—if he truly wanted to do something as Minister of Municipal Affairs for people in the province, what he should have brought forward is, first of all, legislation that entrenches property rights for people in Ontario. So then, if the minister decides that he wants to sweep in and take property that's been in a family for generations for his own purpose, he would at least have to compensate them for fair market value. That would be reasonable. But no, that's not what the minister has done. He has simply done the top-heavy, heavy-handed thing, and that is to say, "We're going to cater to certain lobby groups and provide a facade of appearing to do what is in the best interests of the environment."

I don't have to tell you, Speaker, that this is the same group who, during the election campaign, spoke about their commitment to the environment. The issue in that election campaign was that they were going to save the Oak Ridges moraine and disallow some 6,600 units to be constructed on the Oak Ridges moraine, even though that 6,600 units had been negotiated and approved by environmental groups who were involved over a period of months and years, really, to develop what turned out to be one of the most historic pieces of legislation and agreements ever arrived at between property owners and environmental groups in the province of Ontario. Some 460,000 acres of property had been put into permanent protection throughout the Oak Ridges moraine. And the 6,600 units that had been approved, had been approved on areas in the moraine that were not environmentally sensitive, that in fact would not do any damage to the environment. Yet this government, because it appeared to be the popular thing to do—and it was just one more of the 230 promises that the Liberals made on the election campaign. They knew full well that they weren't going to keep that one, along with the other 230. So their strong action for the environment was to make a promise, and then after they were elected it was to break it.

What they have done here in follow-up to that broken promise is to introduce an absolutely worthless piece of legislation that will neither protect the environment nor do anything for the future planning of property use, of land use, in the greater Toronto area. What the minister has done with this legislation is to effectively throw out years of planning in municipalities across the GTA, planning that was done with a great deal of sensitivity to the environment, planning that was done with a great deal of sensitivity to planning principles that had been signed on

to by municipal councillors, by planners, by people who understand the importance of maintaining a balance.

Balance is something, obviously, that this government knows nothing about; if they know something about it, they certainly aren't conducting themselves in a way that would respect balance. The Minister of the Environment appears puzzled by that. By balance, I'd explain to her, we mean that when we live in a province that in fact is one of the places in the world that people look to come to because of the quality of life that is here, unless the minister is prepared to put up a wall around the province and say, "No more growth in the province of Ontario," we're going to have to find a way to balance that growth with protection of the environment.

For the minister to simply come forward and say, "Here's the way we'll solve it. We'll just call a moratorium and there'll be no more building anywhere in this area that I deem to be a greenbelt," that won't work. You'll find it won't work. You just bought yourself a year, but in that year you've also eroded your credibility as a Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. You'll have eroded the credibility of your party one further step. You'll have sent a signal to the people of this province that you do not care for the good work of local municipalities and their responsibility to plan their local communities, you will have created financial hardship for many people who are caught by this legislation, and at the end of the day you'll have to answer to them.

I'm going to make a prediction that the minister, after he's had an opportunity to see the negative effects that this legislation has—and in York region alone, I can tell him, he has added about \$50,000 to the cost of the average home overnight by introducing this legislation. If he doesn't understand that, it is basically a principle of supply and demand. You, sir, through this legislation have dried up a supply of much-needed housing throughout the GTA. You yourself will be responsible for ensuring that hundreds of thousands of people—young people, young families—will not be able to own their own home, and there is no need for it. What there is need for is a balanced approach to urban planning. We called it Smart Growth. I implore the minister to go back to the Smart Growth principles that were signed off on by municipalities across the province and to take a second look here. It's not too late. You can still withdraw this legislation. I urge you to do so. Take into consideration the Smart Growth principles that will serve this province well and, at the end of the day, would serve you well as minister, because you will be seen to have done the right thing.

We should allow the minister now to stand in his place and we should ask for unanimous consent to have the minister withdraw this legislation now, undertake to go back to the drawing board and do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. Will the minister do that?

1740

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms Churley: Far be it from me to take on the role of defending the Liberal government, but come on, guys.

You've got to be kidding over there. The members for Oak Ridges and York North, I know you're representing a particular type of view, but come on. That's nuts. You can't take that position in this day and age. You were in government and saw all the problems that were created, which led you to bring in legislation—you were dragged kicking and screaming—to protect the Oak Ridges moraine.

I have some problems with this legislation which I will be pointing out later, but we have to move forward. There were some very good people involved in, I know, influencing the minister here and trying to get this. This is just setting the table. There's a whole lot of work to be done, but come into the latest century. Where are you over there? I can't believe what you just said.

Look, on top of that, it was the Tory government that threw out the NDP—some of you were here and most of you weren't, but we brought in very strong green planning legislation. I think the Liberals said it went too far at the time and didn't support it because it was very green. But one of the first things the Tories did when they came into office was gut the environmental ministry and get rid of the new Green Planning Act, which was two years on the road getting consensus. People agreed overall on all sides. They threw it out. But not only did they throw it out; they went back to the old Planning Act, but even, significantly, made some wording changes in that to reduce its strength. That's what happened under that government.

So this is a rare occasion. I'm actually here helping defend this piece of legislation today. I think that we need to go forward with it, and quickly.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: First of all I want to thank the members for York North and Oak Ridges for their comments. It's unfortunate that it wasn't very constructive criticism. They really didn't add anything to the debate because, as the member for Oak Ridges knows quite well, all lands that are currently designated for urban development can be developed regardless of this particular legislation. There is a supply for residential development in this area of at least 10 to 15 years. He knows that. He knows that as well.

Let us, please, no longer talk about the so-called Oak Ridges moraine deal. We made your deal a lot better by at least securing that approximately 900 to 1,000 units of housing that you would have allowed to be built there will not be built. That's sort of the bottom line on that one.

We are very proud of the work that the task force is doing on the Oak Ridges moraine to give us advice as to how the policy should be developed if and when this legislation is passed. May I say that on this task force we have people from the home-building community, we have people from the development community, we have people from agriculture, from the aggregates. It's led by a municipal leader in this immediate area: the mayor of Burlington. We are very proud of the work that they're doing. It is our intention to have not only this legislation passed but also to have to the principles that will guide future development of this area clearly set out within a

year, so that the developers know what they can develop and the environmental community will know what is going to be protected for the generations to come. That's what this legislation is all about.

I say again that we're looking for constructive criticism of ways in which this good bill can be improved on for the benefit of all Ontarians.

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased to make a few comments on Bill 27 as well as the comments made by my two colleagues.

It is interesting listening to the minister's two-minute comments here when he talks about all the different people who took part in his panel. Of course, those are exactly the same types of people in the same area who took part in the Smart Growth panel. You know that, and I hope you wouldn't deny that.

There are a couple of things we have to look at here. One of course is the compensation to landowners, people who have invested in thinking they are actually going to have some investment in the future. They will be expecting compensation. I expect, quite frankly, that we will see a number of lawsuits as a result of this, when the final tally comes out, because obviously they do want to protect green space, and who is really going to argue with that except people who have invested in that region under speculation?

Another thing is the moratorium. I was at the announcement the day the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing made the announcement, and I was kind of astounded at some of the comments. I think of the moratorium that the Minister of the Environment put on water-taking permits. It affected bottled water plants, it affected the aggregate industry etc, but it didn't affect landfills—nothing around the landfill. I've been writing letters to her and I've been trying to get some reaction from the ministry on why we are penalizing people with a moratorium on a water bottling plant, and yet—

Hon Mr Gerretsen: What did you do about it when you were in government?

Mr Dunlop: The fact of the matter is, you know it's around the source protection legislation. That's the new term we're going by here.

In my riding, we have a landfill that's going to be dramatically affected by the amount of water that's being pumped out of the ground, and she won't put a moratorium on that.

The Acting Speaker: Response from the member from Oak Ridges.

Mr Klees: I thank the members for their comments.

I want to remind the Minister of Municipal Affairs that it was our government, the previous government, that passed the historic Oak Ridges moraine legislation. Successive governments prior to that had done study after study. Not one government took the initiative to actually put in place legislation that protects the Oak Ridges moraine. We did.

The minister is absolutely right when he says that he is looking for constructive criticism. The reason that I asked him to withdraw this legislation is because that is as

constructive as I could get. The truth is that this legislation is so flawed—we looked for ways to improve it. There is no way to improve it, because it's unnecessary. We have in place strong legislation to support environmental lands surrounding the GTA. We have in place smart growth principles that everyone has signed on to. All that the minister has to do, rather than create additional red tape, which is all this bill is, is simply to implement smart growth principles. That's what he should do. That's what his stakeholders have told him and will continue to tell him. Yes, they'll participate in your advisory council because they have to. It's the only chance they have of bringing some sense to what is about to be implemented as legislation through this bill.

I urge him one more time: The best constructive criticism or advice that I can offer is to do away with this legislation, rely on the good advice that you can get from your local municipalities, from the stakeholders, from the environmental groups, and let's get on and let the minister get on with simply showing good, solid leadership as the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

1750

Ms Churley: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. What have I got, about 10 minutes to begin my hour?

All I can say to the Tories on this is, get out of town. I mean, this is crazy stuff.

I'll be going into more detail about some of the issues of concern about this bill when we next take it up here in the House. But I say today to people that there is a bit of a silver lining, in my view and in the view of some other people that I have been talking to about the new Liberal government getting off to a very bad start as a new government and having to break its promise to the—I don't get an hour; I only get 30 minutes? I'm sure you'd love to hear what I have to say more than the Tories who just spoke. But I believe that there is one silver lining to the broken promises on the Oak Ridges moraine.

You will recall that the Liberals made a promise to kill these 6,000 housing units, but when the developers yelled and screamed and wouldn't play ball, they flip-flopped like crazy and it was a big embarrassment for the government. Let's face it: Mike Colle in particular was a champion of the Oak Ridges moraine and played a huge part in pushing the previous government into moving forward on that. But of course when the government found out that they made a promise—I have pages of broken promises that I could read off today, but I want to focus on this particular one. It occurs to me that the silver lining is that the promise to be green was a great embarrassment for the government, and suddenly the impression was given that they weren't going to live up to that promise. As a result of that—I believe as a direct result of that—they are now trying to show the environmental community and the conservation community and local residents who were very concerned and upset about what happened in the Oak Ridges moraine that they really are green and are going to be moving—I think it's great if you do—on a number of green fronts.

I guess my concern is that in a bill like this—and the Tories pointed out some of the issues, some of the things that the municipalities—issues that, as local members, you are going to hear about and that developers and municipalities in some cases will not be happy about. My concern is that the Liberal government will end up caving on some of these things, as they had to, or felt they had to, on the Oak Ridges moraine. We're going to watch very, very closely to make sure that doesn't happen.

The bill is, as I said, very welcome. We need to move forward. We have to go into the future. When people get up and talk about this just in terms of the environment—and for me, it is the most important part of the bill—this is also about our economy. The minister and some others talked today about gridlock. We talked about transportation and the need to build in existing urban areas, existing built-up areas. All of those kinds of things, if we don't do them—just leave aside the environment for the moment, which I will dwell on when we come back to later. But just as a backdrop, think about the hours that are being lost by people sitting in cars, commuting and commuting, and that is going to increase more and more. It is just straight productivity lost, but there is also the impact on the environment as more and more cars and trucks and all these vehicles are stuck on these highways creating even more bad air.

So there are a whole lot of reasons why we need to go into the future and bring in strong legislation that will not only protect our environment but also bring in some sane planning in the whole belt around the Toronto-Hamilton area.

I said earlier that I do have some pretty big concerns with the bill, and I'm hoping that the minister is correct when he says he's willing to listen to constructive criticism and will be willing to make some amendments. I think one of the ironies—I suppose it's not surprising—is that some of the very things some of the Conservative members mentioned that they are worried about and want the bill withdrawn over because they think they're too draconian are things that I have the opposite concerns about. For instance, when the Conservatives say there are going to be all kinds of legal challenges, from my reading of the bill—and at this point it's a pretty short bill. It's just setting the table for the real regulations, the real work that'll come later. But it seems to be going to great lengths to ensure that the government cannot be sued for infringing on property rights. That's a double-edged sword. It makes me worry, when I see a bill that is going out of its way to give a government that kind of protection, that there may be cases where people have legitimate concerns and legitimate reasons, and they should have the right, in that case, if they're not being treated fairly.

The other thing is—again it's the opposite concern the Tories have about the bill, and I mentioned it when the minister introduced it—some significant loopholes. Those are that the Minister of Municipal Affairs can create a rezoning that would otherwise contravene the act. That's in subsection 7(1). The minister can also modify or replace definitions of urban settlement areas

and exempt any land or land uses. The minister also retains the ability to amend or issue zoning orders within the study areas.

There are a lot of pieces to this bill that I think we have to tighten up. I will be talking later as well about what we call leapfrog development and some of the areas like, I think, Simcoe North—you would know that, Mr Speaker—that have been left out, and some other areas which can create some leapfrog development, which in fact would make things worse. You'd be building up in areas that were left out of the belt, creating new communities or whatever in those areas which have no infrastructure around them whatsoever and would just create more environmental problems and other problems within those areas.

The last thing I want to say on this today—I've said it before and I'll say it again, and you'll keep hearing from

me about this—is that the minister mentioned earlier, when I brought it up for the third time in two days in this chamber, the development of a year-round town on the Niagara Escarpment. The minister says he can't discuss it because it's the OMB. I remember Liberals, when they were sitting over here and the Tories would say that in response to questions from the Liberals about the Oak Ridges moraine. That is not going to wash, and it will belie this legislation if they go ahead and let that town be built on the Oak Ridges moraine.

With that, Mr Speaker, it being 6 of the clock—

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until 6:45 this evening.

The House adjourned at 1759.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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