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des débats
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Thursday 1 April 2004

Jeudi 1^{er} avril 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 1 April 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

**PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS**

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): I want to advise the members today, particularly those who have bills to present, that you will be expected to speak for an hour and then there will be debate for the rest of the day.

Oh, excuse me; it's April 1. I'm sorry. Orders of the day.

EMERGENCY SERVICE PROVIDER'S
INSURANCE PROTECTION ACT
(INSURANCE AMENDMENT), 2004
LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES FOURNISSEURS DE SERVICES
D'URGENCE (MODIFICATION DE LA LOI
SUR LES ASSURANCES)

Mr Wilkinson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Insurance Act to protect emergency service providers from rate increases to their personal contracts of automobile insurance / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les assurances visant à protéger les fournisseurs de services d'urgence contre l'augmentation des taux dans leurs contrats d'assurance-automobile personnels.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Wilkinson has moved ballot item number 7, second reading of Bill 40. Mr Wilkinson.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Of course, Mr Speaker, you know me. I'm always good for an hour.

I wish to begin by recounting a true story, colleagues. It was a beautiful late summer day last year and I was spending an enjoyable afternoon with my two sons, Liam, age 10, and Breen, age 8. We were in the playground at Upper Queen's Park near the Stratford Festival. We had walked the 10 or so blocks from our family home. I was on the swings with my boy Breen, and Liam was about 20 yards away swinging on a set of undulating monkey bars about six feet high. I didn't see what happened to Liam; instead, I heard him cry out. It wasn't the normal call of a playful son to his father; rather, it was a cry of fear. I'll never forget that cry, "Daddy!" I instantly knew from the tone of his voice that something

was wrong, for a parent instinctively knows his own. My head snapped around and I saw my son lying underneath those monkey bars. He actually cried out my name twice more, each time with less strength, and then, silence.

Of course, I rushed to his side. He was lying face up, pain across his face and fear in his eyes as he gasped for breath. I assumed he had fallen and knocked the wind out of himself. I knelt beside him and reassured him that he would be all right and waited for his wind to come back, but it did not. Rather, he breathed in an eerie way, short little gasps. His face still contorted in pain, I asked where it hurt. I leaned my ear to his lips and heard something that chilled me. He said, "My back. My back. It hurts." Then I saw something that shook me to the core. As I leaned back and looked down at my son, I saw his lips, and they had a bluish tinge to them.

Mr Speaker, I'm not proud of what happened next, but I want to share with you my reaction. Frankly, sir, I froze. I'm sure it was only seconds, but those next few seconds became like an eternity. The world slowed down and I felt a fear well up inside of me that was terrible. I remember looking around at the other parents and children playing nearby. Since I was with my son and he was not crying, the other parents assumed I had the situation well in hand. I wanted to yell out, "Help!" but I could not. I was frozen by the fear that my son was dying right before me, his blue lips etched in my mind. I was frozen simply because I was a man who was unaccustomed to being helpless.

I looked at my other son, he too visibly upset that his brother was hurt. I did not want to reveal to him that our orderly little world was now completely upside down.

The good Lord was looking down on my sons and me that day. A young lady, a nursing student from Conestoga College, a good Samaritan, came over and asked if everything was all right. She agreed to stay with Liam and Breen while I called 911. I ran another 20 yards over to a nearby pay phone. I remember frantically searching for a quarter to call 911. Of course, you do not need a quarter to call 911, but I was that rattled. I dialled 911 and they picked up almost instantly: "Fire, ambulance, police?" I said, "Ambulance." I then described the situation. I said that my son's lips had turned blue, and I pleaded with them to come quickly. I described where I was, and they said I was to stay on the line while an ambulance was dispatched.

I tell this story for one simple reason. I knew that help was on the way, but I also knew that one thought, and only one thought, possessed my mind. It was my prayer that the ambulance would come quickly. I begged God

that absolutely nothing would impede that ambulance, that cars would get out of the way, that nothing bad like an accident would befall that ambulance.

Stratford is not a big city. Within seconds, I could hear the distant wail of sirens. In our community, when a call is received that someone is having trouble breathing, not only is an ambulance dispatched, but a fire truck as well. Within minutes, the fire truck wended its way among the winding roads of Upper Queen's Park, followed shortly thereafter by the ambulance.

Fortunately for my family, this true tale has a happy ending. The firefighters and paramedics quickly administered oxygen to my still-gasping son and his colour almost instantly improved. They immobilized Liam, still clearly in pain, by strapping him down to a backboard, and lifted him into the ambulance. A quick trip to the wonderful emergency department at Stratford General Hospital revealed that while severely bruised, he did not suffer any permanent damage.

When a citizen calls 911 because a person is injured or their house is on fire or they are being victimized by a criminal, they all want the same thing I did. They want those most brave of public servants, the firefighters, paramedics and police officers, to come right away, without delay. They want nothing to slow them down, just as I prayed that late summer day for my son.

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Insurance Act to protect emergency service providers from rate increases to their personal contracts of automobile insurance, is the result of a meeting I had here at Queen's Park last December with Stratford firefighters Jim Byatt and Randy Petrie. They shared with me that some of their members across the province, while on duty and responding to an emergency with their lights flashing and their sirens wailing, had unfortunately been in automobile accidents. Incredibly, when these professionals had renewed their private automobile insurance, they had seen their personal premiums increase as a result of accidents they had while on duty. Later that week, I heard a similar story from the Ontario Paramedic Association. I offered to look into this disturbing matter.

1010

As a member of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, I had an opportunity to meet with Bryan Davies, the superintendent of the Financial Services Commission of Ontario. I recounted to him the problem I had heard of. His initial reaction was that this did not happen, and he quickly added that if it did happen, it should not be happening. Mr Davies was kind enough to provide me with a brief confirming that it is not in the public interest for emergency service providers to have their public duties result in an increase in their private insurance. He advised that if I brought such cases to his attention, he would intervene.

Though I was pleased with the response from our provincial regulator, nonetheless, we here are legislators. To me, it is completely unacceptable that firefighters, paramedics and police officers should have to know that they need to contact their MPP, who in turn is supposed

to know that he or she should contact the superintendent of the Financial Services Commission of Ontario and that this will lead to an eventual reduction and repayment of premiums charged that should never have been charged in the first place.

We here in this place have the ability to ensure that this practice does not happen. That is the intent of my bill.

I'm pleased to acknowledge that in the gallery we have supportive representatives from the beneficiaries of this proposed bill: from the Police Association of Ontario, Bruce Miller; from the Ontario Paramedic Association, Rick Trombley; and from the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, Ed Kennedy and Hugh Doherty. They are joined by Wally Thomasik, from the Ontario Police Association. I can assure this House that they are in support of the bill.

Moreover, I believe that this bill has the support of members from all three parties. It is a testament to the overwhelming support that firefighters, police officers and paramedics have from members of this Legislature that we join this morning in common cause to debate this bill.

It is my hope that at noon, the second reading of this bill will receive the unanimous support of this assembly and be referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs. At that stage, it is my hope that the bill will be subjected to public hearings so that those affected can share with us any amendments that they feel could strengthen the bill. Moreover, I pledge today, as the sponsor of the bill, that I will work with all three parties to ensure that any amendments also receive their complete support.

I trust that my colleagues and I can rise above partisanship in regard to this important issue. Why? Because when any of us, God forbid, calls 911, we all want but one thing: that our bravest of public servants come just as quickly and safely as possible. That can be our common legacy today.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: The bells ring before we enter the session for private members, at the beginning of the day and for the evening session. My office is in room 434. I cannot hear the bells. The bells are not working down the corridor where all our offices are because of the construction going on there. I think they may have disconnected whatever linkage there is with respect to the bell. I would appreciate it if you could look into that, so that we on the fourth floor have the same service that every other member in the House has.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll certainly have the Sergeant look at that.

Debate?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's a pleasure to rise this morning. A few of our caucus members here would like to make a few comments on this particular bill. To begin with, right up front, I'll tell Mr Wilkinson that we'll be very supportive of this bill. These are the types of things when we do deserve to have a free vote in

the House and people can support the whole process of democratic renewal, but we can also support things that are—

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): All our votes are free.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, I understand you have free votes. We saw that yesterday in general government.

Quite frankly, this is a good piece of legislation. It helps our emergency service workers. I'm pleased as well to see so many of the folks here today from the different organizations that I know support this as well. I had a chance to talk to Bruce Miller and to Wally the other night at the reception downstairs and they indicated they would be here today supporting this. I think it's important, and we thank them for being here.

It's amazing in this 911 scenario, the emergency program we have here in the province of Ontario—in fact it's right across the continent—how it's evolved to that. I think back to when I was a kid and what it used to be to get an ambulance or a fire truck and how we as a society have progressed in that area. All our local municipalities now have fantastic fire equipment. The response time is very quick. My office in Orillia is near the fire hall, and I cannot believe how many times a day that truck is dispatched to the different areas within the city. You can sit there throughout the day and probably, in a city the size of Orillia, with 30,000 people, you can count on those trucks going out 35 or 40 times a day, and that's just during the working part of the day, the 8-to-5 times.

It's important that people recognize not only how important the bill is but the fact of how many of our emergency service workers are dispatched on a continual basis. People would think there are not a lot of fires or accidents, but the fact is that every time someone dials 911, a number of individuals are dispatched to the site. In many cases, there are happy endings, as was the case with Mr Wilkinson's son. That was a nice story to hear.

As the critic for corrections, I have a lot of concerns with some of the things Dalton McGuinty is doing, some of his election promises. We won't deal with that today. But certainly on this bill, I hope all three parties will support it. I'm sure the NDP will support it and I hope your own caucus members will, and you can count on our government—we still think we're the government. We are the opposition. The Conservative Party of Ontario will support it as well.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm very pleased to speak to this bill this morning. We need to recognize that our firefighters, our paramedics and our police are the people responsible for community safety. They're the people who keep our families safe, who keep our businesses safe, who keep our homes safe, and it's very important that they be allowed to do their work without any other extraneous concerns.

Certainly if my parents had a health problem, I would want the paramedics there quickly. If I had a fire at my house, I would want the firefighters there quickly. If there is a problem at my constituency office with somebody who is mentally unstable and threatening my

staff, I want the police there quickly. In all these cases, we have people who, to keep our community safe, have to respond quickly.

Now, if they should, unfortunately, while responding quickly, get into an accident, of course the insurance costs of that accident are covered by the employer: by the police force, by the ambulance service, by the fire department. So this isn't an issue about, are the insurance costs covered? The issue is, what happens to those people who keep our communities safe? What happens to their individual insurance? Unfortunately, we have found that the practice among a number of insurance companies has become that if one of those emergency response workers gets into an accident in the course of responding to an emergency, when they report this to their personal insurance company, their personal insurance rates are being driven up. I want to assure you that this is not simply a hypothetical problem. This is a real problem.

1020

As we talk to firefighters, we find that in a number of cases where firefighters have been involved in an accident on the way to an emergency their personal insurance has gone up. When we talk to paramedics who were responding to a health emergency, we find that what has happened is that their personal insurance has been driven up. Again, when we talk to police services about what happens when their members get into an accident, unfortunately in a number of instances their personal insurance has been driven up. In fact, we talked to one police service where the problem has gotten so serious in terms of their members' individual personal auto insurance going up that the police union has actually started to go out and get personal auto insurance for their members in an effort to strike a deal with one company that agrees it's not going to carry out this practice. But this seems to have become a more and more widespread practice.

It doesn't appear that it's the intent of the regulator that this should be happening, but it doesn't seem to be specifically forbidden. This is what this legislation addresses. This legislation addresses the very specific instance in which an emergency worker, while responding to an emergency call in the line of duty, protecting us and protecting our families and protecting our communities, unfortunately gets into an accident. What happens is that they're being charged on their personal insurance. We don't believe that should happen. This bill will specifically address that situation.

I'm very pleased to rise in the House today to support this bill, because I believe that we rely on these people to protect us and it is very important that we show our emergency workers our support and protect them from having it come out of their personal pocketbook when they get into an accident when they are simply serving their community. People who are protecting their communities should not have to pay for the privilege of doing that with increased insurance rates.

I am very pleased that my colleague from Perth-Middlesex has put this forward. Certainly, as the parliamentary assistant in the Ministry of Community Safety

and Correctional Services—the folks we will be helping here are the good folks we deal with in our ministry who contribute to our community safety—I'm very pleased to support this bill today.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It is indeed a pleasure today to join my colleagues the members for Perth-Middlesex, for Guelph-Wellington and for Simcoe to support this private member's legislation, Bill 40.

One of the interesting books written as a result of 9/11 was by the former mayor of New York City, Rudolph Giuliani, called *Leadership*. In several of the chapters in that book he talked in detail about the heroic efforts of the police officers, the firefighters and the paramedics in the city of New York surrounding the tragic circumstances of 9/11. The pictures of firefighters, police officers and paramedics clawing the ground looking for signs of life after that very tragic situation will be forever etched in our memories. Indeed, firefighters, police officers and paramedics internationally shared that common bond, and that's what they do every day of their working lives.

I recall that two years ago, in June 2002, we had a hundred-year storm in the city of Peterborough. It resulted in extensive flooding of our streets. Sewers were backing up. Some seniors in very fragile health were stuck in their homes. The emergency command centre in the city of Peterborough was pressed into action. Every off-duty police officer, firefighter and paramedic was pressed into action. These groups rushed to their respective centres, ready for action.

During the critical 48 hours when the flood waters were still spilling all over the place, firefighters, police and paramedics, by their actions, reassured the nervous public and prevented many situations; they were there to reassure many members of the public who were going through a serious flood, as I said, the first time in a hundred years.

I recall that just last week in the city of Peterborough, a life ring was found floating in the Otonabee River. A neighbour along the Otonabee River immediately called the Peterborough fire department, who deployed the search-and-rescue unit to scour that river for hours and hours and hours, because potentially that could have been a very tragic situation. Fortunately, after several hours of searching the river, the Peterborough fire department found out that the life ring was simply a piece of debris that had floated into the river last fall. But it was their quick action, with off-duty people coming in to respond to the need.

Also in the city of Peterborough, through a suggestion made by the Peterborough professional firefighters, our fire trucks in the city of Peterborough are equipped with defibrillators. Now, in conjunction with the paramedics, if an individual has a cardiac arrest or other serious medical problems, we have a two-tiered response: The fire department arrives on the scene, followed up by the paramedics and ambulance service to bring quick care immediately to a person who may indeed be suffering a stroke or cardiac arrest.

Day in and day out, these individuals put their lives on the line to provide wonderful service to the citizens certainly in my community and all communities right across Ontario.

Last Tuesday evening I had the opportunity to chat with Bob Campbell, the president of the Peterborough Police Association, and David McFadden, the vice-president of the association. I indicated to those two gentlemen that my colleague from Perth-Middlesex was bringing this private member's bill forward on Thursday and that it would receive my full support.

It's an important thing to do. Often, we take for granted in our communities the great service provided by firefighters, police and paramedics. The challenges that those three groups face today are evolving; they are continuous and ever-changing. So if this bill moves forward—and I believe it should, with all-party support—it will be a real opportunity to correct a situation that I believe needs to be corrected. I'm surprised that it hasn't been corrected before now, because it's something we can do to show our great support for these people in our communities day in and day out.

I appreciate having the opportunity to reflect on this, and I press all members of this House to support this bill and move it forward in the next little while.

Mr Tascona: I'm pleased to join the debate with respect to the private member's bill brought forth by the member for Perth-Middlesex. It is a bill brought not only from personal experience in his family, which we've heard here today—and thank God it was a favourable outcome—but it's also brought in good faith, trying to protect a public service and making sure it is not unduly restricted by the costs that go along with providing public protection by an emergency service.

1030

Our party supports this particular bill in principle. We understand that the idea is to not overcharge or surcharge or raise rates for emergency service personnel. For example, a volunteer firefighter's personal insurance could be higher because of the risk with respect to driving a vehicle, a fire truck, to a scene where there's an emergency. This discourages people from volunteering. It discourages people from doing their job, let alone people who do volunteer work. That's a very important service, certainly for communities that do not have the resources to have full-time firefighters and the services they provide.

Certainly the bill, in its principle, is understandable. The member has put an amendment in here, "Risk classification systems, emergency vehicles." Under subsection (2) of 417.0.1, we have "Operation of emergency vehicle during an emergency." He goes on to state, "An emergency vehicle is being operated during an emergency if the vehicle is,..." I would only suggest that that's fairly exact language, and I think he'll understand when he has been here a little bit longer that he may want the flexibility to have a situation such as that covered in more circumstances.

I think what I would offer in terms of amending language would be that that particular piece of language,

“An emergency vehicle is being operated during an emergency,” include “but is not restricted to,” where the vehicle is. What you want is language in there that is going to include those four situations, but there may be situations other than those set out in (a), (b), (c) and (d) of this particular piece of legislation, so you do not want to restrict it to four situations which may not cover the entire area at a future time.

I offer that as a constructive amendment, because I think the member's intent is to ensure that there are no loopholes. If he doesn't want any loopholes, then he will take that constructive amendment seriously. The fact of the matter is that when you're dealing with this, he has brought it forth as an amendment in statute, and there may be regulatory power to add to that, but I think it's probably best to deal with the issue right now.

The bill is entitled An Act to amend the Insurance Act to protect emergency service providers from rate increases to their personal contracts of automobile insurance. Certainly no one disagrees with what this bill is trying to accomplish. We want to make sure also on our side that insurance companies respect and don't take advantage of not only the provider. I think it may also have to be looked at from the point of view—he wants to protect the individual, and that's why, I think, he has drafted this bill in a way that may be a little confusing. It reads, “No insurer shall use a risk classification system in classifying risks for a coverage or category of automobile insurance that permits an insurer to consider for purposes of a contract of automobile insurance, other than a contract covering the emergency vehicle....”

That may be something that you have to look at also. If they say, “OK, we're not going to deal with the cost for that particular individual in our risk classification; we'll just add it on to the vehicle,” that puts pressure obviously on the budget, whether it's a fire department, a paramedical department or a police department, where the insurance company is going to make sure they get their pound of flesh out of the vehicle, as opposed to going after the individual. That also impacts public safety.

The way the law is set up with respect to emergency vehicles, and we had a situation like that last week in my riding, when you have an emergency vehicle out there, certainly the law is pretty clear in terms of how an operator has to respect red lights and respect and give notice to the public. Just because they use a vehicle, I don't know why that vehicle, whether it's a fire truck or a police car or another type of vehicle, brings it up to a risk factor. It's still a vehicle being driven.

As for the fact that it's going to an emergency, you don't see these individuals going into an area that puts the vehicle or themselves at risk. It's an emergency for the individual who is impacted. They use specific vehicles because those vehicles have the equipment necessary to deal with that emergency. They have individuals who drive that vehicle because they are experienced and have the expertise to deal with the situation.

I would suggest to the member that we focus not only on the individual who is driving the vehicle, but if we're

really in favour of public safety, I don't know why or how an insurance company can justify a vehicle as a risk classification just because that vehicle is targeted to go to an emergency scene. To me, there's going to have to be an awful lot of evidence. I don't think they would have a shred of evidence to prove that because a fire truck has to go to a fire, that vehicle is put at risk. The bottom line is that it's a specific vehicle to go to a fire. It's not put in the fire in terms of that particular situation. It's the same thing with a police car in terms of what work they're doing.

Obviously you get into situations where you have to look at how the driver has used the vehicle, but that's a matter that has always been dealt with in a civil court in terms of whether someone feels they've have been put at risk by the driver and the vehicle in question when they were crossing the street or whatever. We've had police car chases where innocent individuals have been injured. Certainly the officers are using their best judgment in terms of how to deal with that. The only thing they're trying to do is enforce the law and put public safety first. They're going after the perpetrator who has broken the law and has decided to flee the police. There's a judgment there that has to be dealt with. How insurers deal with emergency vehicles to me is just an arbitrary exercise in terms of trying to extract extra insurance fees in this situation.

I would suggest to the member that he not only focus on the individual but on the vehicle in question. I don't know how an insurance company can justify having increased insurance rates for an emergency vehicle just because it's targeted to be used in a specific situation. That might be something he may want to consider because that obviously impacts the budget situation for police, fire and paramedics. It should say in the legislation that you're not going to transfer the costs of the risk that you can't extract from the individual on to the police budget because they're driving the vehicle, so you basically top up and make sure you've got the fees you feel are necessary to protect the bottom line, because that's what it comes down to. I think that's something the member has to look at.

Other than that, I'm going to be sharing my time with other members. Those are the comments I have. The member for Perth-Middlesex has a bill that is worthy of further discussion.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I want to make it clear at the onset that New Democrats are going to be supporting this legislation.

Let's put this in perspective, please. First of all, we're talking about a private, for-profit auto insurance industry. Everybody's been skirting around the issue but the fact is they're greedy, porcine, incorrigible, beyond regulation. They just demonstrated \$2.6 billion in profits, a 600%-plus increase in profits after crying poverty to the former government and then to this one. And in the course of crying poverty, they persuaded two successive governments, first the Conservatives and then the Liberals, to reduce benefits and increase premiums, yet another

illustration of overt gouging by a greedy, overweight, bullying industry, an industry that, quite frankly, is nothing but the ragged cousin of the legitimate financial industry in this country, in North America. I'm going to speak about that a little more in a few minutes.

1040

Let's understand what the intent of the legislation is. It's clear that we do not want to reinforce any disincentives for emergency personnel in the course of their response or in the course of taking an injured person to medical treatment. We do not want to reinforce or encourage any disincentives to their performing their duties in as effective a way as they believe they can.

The issue then becomes much broader than this. I, for instance, was here and I supported the legislation that permitted volunteer firefighters to use green lights in their vehicles. In fact, a whole lot of Ontario is served by volunteer firefighters who use their own vehicles en route to an emergency. Some municipalities still aren't letting their volunteers use the green emergency lights. That's nuts. It's irresponsible and it's not fair to those women and men who are volunteer firefighters. Again, I'm not going to get into the minutiae to any great extent, because that's why we're going to go to committee. That's why I want the bill to pass on second reading so it can go to committee where I can rail against the private, for-profit, greedy, highway-robbing auto insurance industry at length. I will then deal with some of the minutiae in the bill, for instance, about the need for it to include volunteer firefighters who, out of necessity, are inevitably going to be using their own vehicles.

I'm concerned about the fact that it appears only to prohibit the consideration of an accident for the purpose of increasing rates—Mr. Wilkinson, please—rather than necessarily the consideration of a conviction. As everybody knows, and as police officers and firefighters and paramedics know, there are no exemptions in the Highway Traffic Act or the Criminal Code for police officers. There's all sorts of mythology about it, but there are no exemptions from the Highway Traffic Act or the Criminal Code. At the end of the day, when it's your kid or your spouse or your family member in that ambulance, you want that ambulance to go through as many red lights as it possibly can. It is the incredible dilemma that firefighters and cops and paramedics are inevitably put in. They're told, "Here is the law," and they know the law to the final person, yet they are similarly under incredible pressure to circumvent the law as much as they possibly can or else they become subjects of criticism then: "You didn't get there fast enough."

We also have to talk about creating some clear standards about the utilization of, for instance, lights and sirens, and some public education. I also supported the recent legislation that was passed here that required motorists effectively to yield to police vehicles, to fire vehicles, to vehicles displaying red lights, when they are pulled over on the shoulder of the road, because we've lost as many police officers on the side of the road doing investigations and issuing tickets, it seems to me, as we

have in other circumstances. It's an incredibly dangerous thing for a cop to pull somebody over, especially on a busy highway, and even more so at night, when you've got two or three lanes of traffic zooming by that police officer and the car being investigated that has been stopped.

I supported that legislation. I wished also that it had included a complete range of vehicles displaying warning lights when pulled over to the side of the road. Quite frankly, I think snowplow operators who have occasion to pull over to the side of the road on a 400 series highway, for instance, with their blue lights flashing, to get out to do some mechanical adjustments or unclog a piece of equipment deserve the same protection. Unfortunately, the rest of the chamber didn't agree with me in sufficient numbers.

I think we have to establish some pretty clear standards about the need to use emergency signals, and then public education. I am just amazed—amazed; it rots my socks—to drive on urban streets and on highways and see the incredible disdain the general public seems to have for emergency vehicles. Police cruisers, fire vehicles, are fighting with dough-heads who are either oblivious to the flashing red lights and the sirens or seem simply not to give a damn. I find it incredible. I put to you that we need an intensive program of public education, and if we have to implement legislative tools—there are some modest ones. But you see, the problem is enforcement, because having said all of this, as long as our police forces, fire-fighting services and paramedic services are understaffed and underresourced in community after community after community, the dangers for those firefighters, police officers and paramedics are increased and compounded.

So I say to you, as the author of this piece of legislation, that in the course of discussing this, we also have to talk about—because we're talking about making it as safe as possible for emergency personnel to respond as quickly as possible without necessarily abiding by the absolute liability required, at the very least under the Highway Traffic Act, so as to perform their duties and save lives. Well, then we also have to talk about the adequacy of staffing for firefighters, cops and paramedics, and enforceability.

I've got no qualms about putting the blocks to the insurance industry. They've put the blocks and put the boots to drivers and innocent victims in this province long enough. You know that I'm going to say to you that this is so piecemeal as to cause one some concern to the point of skepticism about its ability to address the issue. Because that private sector insurance industry is sleazy, they're snaky, they're slimy. They will weave and bob their way around this bill, as they have so many others in efforts to control premiums. Make no mistake about it.

So at the end of the day, the problem isn't cops who do their best, the problem isn't firefighters who do their best, the problem isn't paramedics who do their best; the problem is an insurance industry that is greedy, that is voracious, that has this insatiable appetite for profits and will continue to earn them on the backs not just of

premium payers but of innocent victims. At the end of the day, I invite the author of this bill to join with me in my decade-and-a-half-long campaign to build a public auto insurance system here in the province of Ontario like the folks in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and British Columbia have enjoyed for so many years, so we have real accountability, real fairness for innocent victims and fairness and affordability for premium payers, and that we have a rate-setting system that is based on true risk and not on arbitrary and capricious choice by the insurance industry.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to talk about Bill 40, the Emergency Service Provider's Insurance Protection Act, and it also amends the Insurance Act, just so people are aware that what we're talking about here is a very simple issue: insurance costs for our emergency workers that are being applied to their own personal insurance if they're in an accident doing their job.

I just want to stop for a minute and ask a simple question. If I were a construction worker and got hurt on the job, do I then not get house insurance for my own personal house? I mean, this is just ridiculous. It's silly to think we have to talk about this today. I commend the member for Perth-Middlesex for bringing this forward. It's a problem that has been identified and now we're going to correct it. It's very simple. We've got support from all sides. They're talking about collectively saying, "You know what? We've found a problem. Let's fix it. Let's get on with it."

I want to compliment and thank the members in the gallery who have come to join us, to hear the concerns being raised and to bring them forward. They've offered some ideas and some suggestions, and I suggest to you that when we get this bill to committee, we're going to iron those out. When this problem gets dealt with in an appropriate manner, we're going to be sending a signal that we care and that we're going to take care of our emergency response personnel. They already put their lives on the line, and now, to add insult to injury or to take that wound and throw salt in it, if they end up in an accident they're going to be attacked personally. "We're going to go after you personally and say that because you were doing your job in a very special, professional and trained way, and in most cases if not all, if through no fault of your own you get into an accident, we're going to punish you again for doing your job."

Think about my analogy regarding a construction worker who gets hurt on the site, and then an insurance company comes along and says, "You know what? You got hurt on the site building a house, so we're going to jack up the house insurance on your own home." It doesn't make sense at all. We've identified a problem and we're going to fix that problem.

1050

I want to talk to you about other things we've done. We've done special things. The member for Niagara Centre made the comment about a bill that was brought forward to protect our emergency response workers on

the road. I would echo his remarks, and I think he remembers that I brought that to the House's attention as well and I supported him. We both mentioned that green lights, blue lights, red lights, yellow lights, white lights—we had charts, and I shared my chart with him about the United States. Various states have varying degrees of protection for those people on the highways. Those are the types of things we look at.

When we see a problem as legislators, it is our responsibility—private members' hour is particularly the time, as it is very heart-wrenching to know, when if something has been brought to our attention by somebody, we can bring it to this place and everybody's got to pay attention to it. It's not the party's decision. It's an individual member's decision to bring it forward and say, "We want to solve this problem. I'm putting it before you. Will you help me?" That's what we're doing today.

I'd like to remind us that that's the important part about this place at this time. That is, when we bring private member's business forward, it deserves our attention. The good thing about it is that we can bring it to committee. Then we analyze it one more time and bring in the experts who can say, "We need to tweak this a little bit, because you forgot about something." I'll bring one of those points up, and that is defining "emergency."

I happen to know that when a fire truck is going from point A to point B, it might not be going to a certain type of call. There are levels of emergencies. It's the same thing with police officers. They now have, basically, an office on wheels. They're performing their tasks and duties in that office and they're moving from place to place. An accident doesn't necessarily mean they're going to a bank robbery. It could mean they're just going from point A to point B to continue doing their job. That might be another thing that needs to be reviewed and analyzed, the definition of an emergency.

I'm very proud to say that there were various times during my time in the opposition, as critic for public safety and security and the solicitor general and corrections and all the different names it was named over the last few years—Mr Hardeman's there telling me that he understands and agrees. Now it's community safety and corrections. I introduced a bill called An Act to amend the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act to require a minimum level of training for licensees and to require that uniforms and vehicles of security guards be readily distinguishable from those of the police.

There are some issues that we need to make sure people understand, that we hold higher, in terms of esteem and understanding and respect, our paramedics, our firefighters and our police officers. There's a special job they have that we've identified, and it is important for us to do whatever we can to let them do their jobs. It's hard enough to respond to an emergency, period, without having to be burdened and saddled with the other things we are talking about today. I'm proud to say that we've got our associations here supporting and representing and suggesting things that can happen to improve the legislation—not to scrap it, but to improve it to make it even better and speak to the real issue.

Today, we're speaking about this specific problem, of our emergency response people being tagged with insurance personally because of the job they do. It's not right, it's simply not right. I'm glad to say that it's not universally applied and that some insurance companies have not been doing that, but unfortunately, some have. Do they need a wake-up call? The commissioner didn't think it was happening—the superintendent. "You mean they're doing that? They're really doing that?" He didn't know. Now he knows and now the industry knows, and now we're going to legislate and are going to make sure that this problem doesn't haunt our emergency workers.

I want to make it quite clear that we need to work toward these types of solutions in this House the way we're doing it today. It is much more enjoyable, I can tell you, that when we bring private members' business forward, it can be discussed in a very logical, sequential way. There are going to be private members' hours where we don't agree. I hope we understand that in circumstances like this, we are the example of what we can accomplish when we all work together.

Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for bringing it forward.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the private member's bill brought by my colleague from Perth-Middlesex, the Emergency Service Provider's Insurance Protection Act. I was not aware of this problem before, so I thank you for doing that. We certainly do need to protect our emergency service workers.

My riding is predominantly rural. Being a nurse, I've had many an ambulance ride with paramedics in quite life-threatening situations, so I appreciate their devotion and the need to protect all of our emergency workers.

Personally, I recently had a fire at my house. I live in a community that has many municipal boundaries, and I want to commend the fire departments that border the boundaries. They all work together to have the first and the fastest response to emergencies. It was the middle of the night. I want to thank the Galway-Cavendish-Harvey fire department for their quick response in that situation, for their professional manner and their follow-up at the scene for prevention and education, which, as another member has mentioned, we need to encourage more.

Being on rural roads, especially in the summertime when we have lots of extra tourists and people in our riding, we have many roads that are difficult to access. We are long distances from hospitals. I want to say that it's a challenge a lot of times. I want to appreciate the people in the area who do respond to emergency vehicles on the road and pull over. They're certainly working as communities together. We have emergency workers, firemen, the police associations, the firefighters' association and the volunteer fire departments all working together for a good common cause, and we should support this. We need to protect our volunteers and our emergency workers.

I want to thank the members of the association for their support for the member from Perth-Middlesex on

the private member's bill and for coming here today. I want to let you know you have my full support of this bill. It's much needed.

I will be sharing my time with my other colleagues.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I rise in support of this bill from the member from Perth-Middlesex and congratulate him on bringing it forward. Having spent 25 years driving one of those fire trucks, it's good to see the challenge now coming out.

It's not so much to do with the drivers of these trucks, but I see it as a way for insurance companies to get premiums they're not entitled to. They're suggesting all premiums are based on risk, and they're suggesting that the more these emergency drivers drive emergency vehicles, the more riskily they will be driving their own cars, which in my mind doesn't make sense. It would seem to me that driving under emergency conditions would make you a better driver and less apt to get into an accident with your own vehicle. But in fact, they're suggesting that they can increase premiums in order to get paid for something that happened on the job. I think that's totally wrong, and that's why it's very important that the bill is brought forward.

But I would like to go one step further and recommend to the honourable member that we also have a problem with our volunteers as they drive their vehicles to the scene of a fire or to the fire hall to get the fire truck because they're not on duty all the time. We have insurance companies that are raising premiums on cars because, in theory, there is a greater risk because on an emergency call, they may be driving differently than they would if they were going to a family function on a Sunday afternoon, so the insurance companies are raising rates to do that. They have absolutely no information that would suggest there are more accidents happening while these firefighters are doing that, but they've found an opportunity to increase premiums and to increase their revenues as this is happening.

I would ask the member, as the bill goes to committee, to consider including that part of the insurance regulation to eliminate the possibility that insurers cannot increase premiums to people based solely on the fact that they are a member of a volunteer fire brigade and may be driving their personal car to a fire. Obviously, they have insurance to cover accidents. A lot of people in our community are going to that fire, and they're not firefighters and they are likely as great a risk on the insurance company's road as our firefighters. I think I would ask him to consider that in his legislation.

1100

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Perth-Middlesex has two minutes to reply.

Mr Wilkinson: I want to start by thanking the member for Simcoe North and the member for Guelph-Wellington, who is the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, as well as my colleagues the member for Peterborough, the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, the member for

Niagara Centre, the member for Brant, the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock and the member for Oxford.

As I said in my initial speech, I believe there are public policy issues that will be raised if this bill sees the light of day and goes to committee. I want to say that I appreciate the suggestions by Mr Tascona that we may be able to make an amendment to broaden the scope of the bill and make it clear.

I also hear the suggestion made by the member from Niagara Centre. We had an opportunity in this province to have public auto insurance and a previous administration on that never happened. My bill does not wish to reopen that debate. My bill is focused on the police officers, the paramedics and the firefighters who are doing such a remarkable job. As the member from Peterborough said, "They are the people who go to the emergency," when all of us are running away from the accident; when we can't look; when they're like me, a father who freezes in an emergency situation. Who are the people that we count on to rise above that, above that human urge to run away and actually go to the emergency? It is, as I said, our most brave of public servants, and we need to support them at every opportunity.

We need to send a clear signal to the insurance industry that this practice, though it is rare, is completely unacceptable. That's why I want to again pledge that I look forward to having an all or non-partisan debate about this and to look at amendments in committee. Again, I'd like to thank all those who spoke to the bill. I ask for your support when we vote on second reading later this morning.

KEEP YOUR PROMISES ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'OBLIGATION DE TENIR LES PROMESSES ÉLECTORALES

Mr Wilson moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 41, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act and the Members' Integrity Act, 1994 with respect to the election platforms of registered political parties / Projet de loi 41, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le financement des élections et la Loi de 1994 sur l'intégrité des députés à l'égard des programmes électoraux des partis politiques inscrits.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Wilson has 10 minutes.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): The idea for this piece of legislation that I put before the House today came to me during the all-candidates meetings; we had seven in the riding of Simcoe-Grey. I frankly felt sorry for some of my opponents who were espousing promises that were contained in their parties' election platform booklets, promises that I was pretty sure the Liberal government couldn't keep if they got elected into office.

In fact, the Liberal government, during the election period, set a new record by making some 231 promises that we have kept track of to date. They've broken 19 of

those promises in the first seven months of coming to office. This bill is an attempt to make it illegal for campaigns, for parties, to break the promises they make during election campaigns.

The lawyers wouldn't let me go as far as I wanted to go. I wanted to do the same thing that we did in the Taxpayer Protection Act and the balanced budget legislation passed under the Harris government. That is, if we ever ran a deficit, including this year, we would have to take a 25% cut in pay in the first year of running a deficit; cabinet ministers would have to take a 50% cut in pay the second year of running a deficit; and in the third year, we'd actually have to call an election should we have run a deficit. So there was a real penalty for breaking your promise to balance the books of the province of Ontario and to not to add to the debt of the province.

I think the summary of what this bill does was ably presented in a newspaper article in the Collingwood Enterprise-Bulletin dated March 30 of this year. It says, "Wilson ready to make Liberals keep their promises," and it's by Brad Holden. It says in part:

"The bill Wilson is proposing would require the leader of a recognized party to file a written statement with the Chief Election Officer prior to a general election, outlining what the party intends to do upon forming government.

"It would also require the provincial Integrity Commissioner to include in his annual report a tally of which promises contained in that leader's statement the government has actually introduced."

So it would require every party to give their election platforms to, first, the Chief Election Officer, and later, the party forming the government after the election would be required to give a written statement of the promises, the bills and legislation that they intend to bring forward during their time as government. Basically, the Integrity Commissioner would have their platform, and in his annual report he then would include a section on his opinion on which promises have been kept to date and which promises hadn't been kept. It's a way to try to hold the government of the day accountable for their election promises.

In the short time I have, I want to read a wonderful letter from Mr Ron Harding of Collingwood that appeared in the March 10 editions of the Stayner Sun and the Wasaga Sun this year. Two promises that the Liberals made during the campaign were as follows: "We will build a seniors strategy that guarantees our seniors are treated with respect and dignity." That was promise 129. Promise 142: "Our senior strategy will focus on keeping seniors active and well." As Mr Harding points out in his letter, the government is poised to raise prices or raise the cost of prescription drugs under the Ontario drug benefit program for all Ontario seniors. It says:

"Dear Editor:

"Seniors beware the Liberal claw. Dalton McGuinty's Ontario Liberal government is getting set to claw back one of our major seniors' benefits—trying to force seniors to start paying half the cost of our prescription drugs.

“This is part of the Liberals’ pathetic effort to fight the deficit. The problem is that Dalton conveniently neglected to tell us about it before the election.

“It was referred to as ‘tentative changes affecting Ontario drug benefit program’ outlined in a booklet they recently released at Queen’s Park.”

He goes on to say that we should try and stop this trial balloon by the government. “If the suggestion doesn’t get much media attention and there is minimal flak from the province’s seniors, this travesty will be jammed through and set in concrete in the wink of an eye.

“We can do something about this.”

He goes on to encourage people to sign the petition that’s available in my offices in Alliston and Collingwood and by calling my toll-free number. So they broke two promises there—broken promises to seniors.

Other promises they broke come to mind, just as a short list I made this morning:

I can remember Sandra Papatello in this House very adamantly trying to ensure that the Harris-Eves governments provided IBI treatment to autistic children over the age of six. They promised to do that and they’ve broken that promise. Just last week they indicated more money for autism, but they’re actually in court with a number of parents who are trying to get fair treatment for their children over the age of six.

Reduce the use of private consultants. Cap hydro rates at 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour until 2006. Stop 6,600 homes on the Oak Ridges moraine. The Liberals also promised to cancel P3 hospitals in Brampton and Ottawa, which are private-public partnerships. They promised to hold a public inquiry into meat inspection.

McGuinty and the Liberals also promised not to raise your taxes, and one of the first bills they introduced here was to cancel the education property tax rebate of some \$475 per senior citizen household in this province that we had passed and that would have taken effect of January 1 of this year. One of the first bills they brought in was to cancel that promise, therefore costing all seniors more money with respect to their education property taxes.

They were going to provide two cents of the provincial gas tax for municipal transit. Well, we saw in the papers today and all last week that the Liberals are probably going to give that just to Toronto, and perhaps nothing for all of our small towns and villages that we represent in rural and small-town Ontario. And they promised to govern with honesty and integrity, something they’re clearly not doing with respect to the Sorbara affair.

I want to elaborate on the autistic children promise. I think that’s about the lowest thing I’ve heard in this place in a long time. For months and months the Liberal Party, while in opposition, hounded us. We knew the program to extend IBI services to autistic children over the age of six might cost up to \$1 billion. So as tempting as it might have been during the campaign, I certainly didn’t promise that we could do that and my party didn’t promise we could do that, because we knew it would be a very difficult commitment to keep. So, to provide autistic treat-

ment beyond age six, Dalton McGuinty said, “The Ontario Liberals support extending autism treatment beyond the age of six.... In government, my team and I will work with clinical directors, parents, teachers and school boards to devise a feasible way in which autistic children in our province can get the support and the treatment they need. That includes children over the age of six.” He actually said that in a letter to the parent of an autistic child on September 27, 2003.

1110

What is happening, according to Christina Blizzard of the Toronto Sun on January 21, is that “The government is appealing an injunction granting some parents of autistic children a temporary 90-day extension of IBI treatment” for children over age six. “Government lawyers are fighting the Human Rights Commission ruling—and now the Liberals are even seeking intervenor status at the Supreme Court of Canada in a similar court case involving parents of autistic children in British Columbia.” It’s a shame that they broke that promise.

Electricity rates: Today is April 1. I was the energy minister for some four years under the Harris government. We capped electricity rates. Now you are going to see electricity rates go up as high as 27% for some households, as high as 27% for businesses in the province. Farmers particularly are going to be hit extremely hard. They need another kick like a hole in the head at this point, because they are already going bankrupt with respect to mad cow disease and the government’s lack of proper response to or support for our farmers. It’s just going to absolutely devastate all of our farms; I think of dairy farms in particular, and chicken, poultry and beef, where the lights are on in many barns, and have to be, 24 hours a day. There are also greenhouses, as one of my colleagues mentions.

We all know hydro rates are going to go up and you’ve only seen the beginning of this, I say to the residents of Ontario.

They were going to stop 6,600 houses on the Oak Ridges moraine, and that affects my riding; the south end of my riding touches on the Oak Ridges moraine. What did they end up doing? Well, the Liberals promised that they would cancel those houses. It seemed to be a very clear promise made by the Premier. And what do we have? We see in the Toronto Star on October 17 that the minister, Mr Gerretsen, “was forced to announce that 5,700 houses will be built, and pleaded that the Liberals were perhaps naive for making that promise.” At least there is a little bit of honesty there.

The fact of the matter is that there are 19 broken promises to date. My colleagues will elaborate on those. We need a mechanism in this province. Since you can’t trust some politicians, we need an independent third party to review those promises and hold the government accountable.

In my election campaigns since 1990, I have made one promise. I have followed the advice of my predecessor, the Honourable George McCague, who sat in this House for some 15 years. He said, “Jim, all you can ever really

do is to promise to do a good job.” That is all I ever promise in my election campaigns. I promise to do a good job and I promise to do it with honesty and integrity. I hope the Liberal government will begin to implement some of their promises. The track record to date is disgraceful, and this is a way to try to make them accountable.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I stand to speak against Bill 41.

Interjections.

Mr Racco: I thought we were sent here by the people to provide leadership and to do what is good for the people. Surely, intervening when someone is speaking is highly unacceptable. I hope the members will allow me to express my opinion, and I will do the same for them. That is why the people sent us here. One of the reasons this House has not received the respect it should be receiving is because of this type of behaviour in the House. I take pleasure in reminding us all that maybe by acting a little more responsibly in this House, we will be able to do exactly what our constituents expect of us, that is, to deliver what is best for the people of Ontario. Now, Mr Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me just one second. Not only are some members intervening when they shouldn't, they're not even sitting in their seats. I'd ask for order. Continue.

Mr Racco: Let me tell you what my constituents of Thornhill and Concord are expecting me to do in this House. It is to do what we indicated during the election we were going to do. They don't need bylaws or directions in writing that try to force them to do things that tomorrow don't make sense. The people are looking for leadership, that we do the right thing. Certainly my constituents were very disappointed when the Tories decided to sell the 407, the biggest issue in Thornhill. Those individuals sold the 407 so they could balance the books. They sold it for \$3.1 billion when the 407 at that time was worth \$12.5 billion. Let me remind all of you that that is a difference of \$9.4 billion. If you took all this money, \$9.4 billion, and invested a portion of it in building all the subways we are talking about, whether that be the Spadina extension to York University and to the corporate centre of Vaughan or the one to Scarborough or the one to the airport or any other transportation system that we have been speaking about for years, we would still have money left over, if the Tories had not sold out the people of Ontario.

That is what the people of Thornhill want to make sure doesn't happen. They want to make sure that when we sell something, we sell it at market value, not at a discount. The \$9.4 billion is a disgrace that I will repeat over and over again while I have breath in my body. That was the biggest robbery anywhere in this world, and nobody has gone to jail yet on this matter.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: The standing orders are pretty specific in terms of speaking on the matter in

question. He's not even speaking on the matter. We've got a bill in front of us. Can he speak to the bill?

The Deputy Speaker: Well, we'll leave that to my interpretation.

Mr Racco: I certainly intend to speak on the bill. I felt that we were talking about politicians making promises. That's part of the bill, and that's what I intend to do.

The Liberal Party, in the last election, made it very clear that we were going to put money into the public education system, and we certainly did it. We don't have to have somebody forcing us to do that. We were committed and we delivered, and we will deliver even more in the future.

Also, the past government, under Mike Harris's leadership, closed 45 hospitals in this province. My area was significantly affected. The North York General Hospital and the other hospitals associated with that were affected. The Branson hospital, which a number of my constituents used, certainly was significantly reduced and forced to amalgamate, even though they were not in favour of it.

We all know what the Tories have done to the environment. They certainly reduced their contribution and we have a significant problem in our province. That is what the constituency of Thornhill doesn't want to see happen. They don't need anyone to say what must be done in writing. Statements are made during an election, of course. They want to have leadership that will respond properly, that will use our knowledge and know-how to implement what we indicated during the election.

The Tories, who say they do what they promise, promised a balanced budget in the last election. We all know there is a \$5.6-billion deficit, but we have also been learning lately about more than \$2 billion in unfunded liability. We also should know—nobody speaks about that, but I certainly do—that normally in business, we put money aside for a rainy day so we can buy the assets or equipment or whatever we need in the future. We normally put money aside, and that is not accounted.

That is what the people of Thornhill are looking for, to deliver on what we said in the election and not be forced in writing.

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to introduce to the assembly the students from Smithville District Christian High School who have joined us here today.

The Deputy Speaker: That's not a point of order, but we welcome them this morning.

Further debate?

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm very pleased to join in the debate today on Bill 41, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act and the Members' Integrity Act, 1994 with respect to the election platforms of registered political parties.

This bill is about accountability. It's about making political parties accountable for their election promises. It's about trust in politicians. It's about having politicians who say one thing in an election campaign and actually deliver on what they say. This is certainly not the case with what happened in the past election.

1120

I'd like to read from today's paper. This is obviously a very current topic. A headline in today's Toronto Sun says: "McFlip, McFlop.

"Enough with the lies, Premier McFly? But here we go again—with yet another broken promise by the Liberals, as today (April Fool's Day) Dalton McGuinty lifts the caps on electricity prices in a province whose manufacturing-based economy relies on safe, reliable and affordable hydro."

Now, whether you agree or disagree that the price of electricity should go up, the fact is that Dalton promised to maintain the cap on electricity prices during the election campaign, and he is very, very clearly breaking that promise today.

He made a very clear promise during the election campaign to do with small business, and I'd like to read further from this article. It says: "Small businesses, who are the province's largest job creators, are getting hit with a double whammy as McFly breaks another promise and lifts the Tory's commercial property tax cap. Businesses have also been hit with McFly's rollback of corporate tax relief, plus a new blue box tax."

If I remember correctly, many times we saw Dalton in the news during the election campaign saying something along the lines of—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. Just take your place for a minute. I think we should attempt, when referring to another member, to either use their position or, at the very least, their last name. Thank you.

Mr Miller: Yes, Mr Speaker. I'll respect that. The Premier, during the election campaign, said, "I won't raise your taxes, but I won't lower them either." That was a very clear statement that I certainly saw several times. I'm personally very concerned about the disregard for business in the province of Ontario that we're seeing, and I'm concerned about the fact that this is a broken promise.

We saw as of January 1 this year, for medium-sized businesses in the province of Ontario, an effective 27% increase in taxes. The tax rate would have been 11% for medium-sized businesses as of January 1 of this year. It is now 14%. That is a 27% increase and a very clearly broken promise. I worry about the effect that will have on the economy of this province.

That 27% seems to be a popular number. Today's increase in electricity prices above 750 kilowatt hours is also a 27% increase in the price you pay for electricity. The removal of the cap on property tax for businesses is also effectively another tax increase. When you add them all together, they are definitely going to adversely affect businesses.

During the election campaign, the Premier talked about the possibility of tolls on highways to pay for highway construction. What he said at that time was that he would consider tolls where there's an alternative route. Yet just recently in Sudbury, he talked about the possibility of tolling on Highway 69. What I have asked

in the Legislature and would like to know is, what is the alternative route to Highway 69? Does he consider driving to North Bay via Highway 11 the alternative route to 69? I don't think that's a reasonable alternative route. So I consider this another broken election promise, and I certainly hope they don't follow through on this. That is certainly the opinion of most people in the north.

There's a current poll going on in Sault Ste Marie where 80% of the people say this would be a bad idea. I quote from the Sault Star from Friday, March 26:

"No Toll for Highway 69.

"Sault Ste Marie city council should urge the Ontario government to unequivocally and immediately declare Highway 69 south of Sudbury to be a toll-free road.

"A similar demand ought to be sent to Queen's Park by every municipality in northeastern Ontario. This is a regional concern rather than a problem for Sudbury alone....

"Until even the possibility of a toll road is taken off the table, economic development for the entire northeast will be compromised. What entrepreneur in his right mind is going to invest in the region without knowing the transportation costs?...

"Queen's Park should clarify immediately that it will not put a toll on Highway 69 or any other northern Ontario route that has no alternatives. Every day it dithers is another day the north suffers."

As the critic for the north, I certainly will keep pushing that issue.

Another broken promise that has been in the Legislature recently, certainly that we've been pressing every day, is promise number 16, "Govern with honesty and integrity." This is from the throne speech: "Your new government has made a commitment to bring an open and honest and transparent approach to government." That was November 20. Yet Finance Minister Greg Sorbara refuses to step aside while the Ontario Securities Commission, Revenue Canada and the RCMP investigate the company of which he was a director for 10 years and a member of the audit committee. Sorbara also knew about the investigations and retained responsibility for the OSC for 66 days before the company finally made them public. He didn't bother to tell the Premier in those 66 days, which is a little shocking. We've been pressing that issue every day in question period. Yesterday, the general government committee, with a Liberal majority, did away with the possibility, the request from Marilyn Churley, to look into this affair further. That's democratic renewal in action.

I could go on with many more broken promises, but I know there are others who would like to speak as well.

But last night while watching the National, there was a segment about increasing voter participation in elections. There was a panel of students and a political science professor who said the thing that needs to happen to get more voter participation in the process is that the general public needs to be able to trust politicians. Why would the general public trust Ontario provincial politicians when the current government is so blatantly breaking so

many promises? I quote from the Toronto Star Web site: "I am on the verge of never voting again because every member of every party makes campaign promises that they always break, although the speed that McGuinty is breaking his is truly astonishing and unprecedented." Another quote: "The attitude of this government is typical of the disappointing governments in the developing world—promise anything to win the elections and, once elected, blame everything on the previous government." So I think we need to establish some trust. It really is a sad day when we need a private member's bill to ensure that political parties keep their promises. I think it can be said that in the time that we were in government, a promise made was a promise kept. It was something that we stuck to.

I commend the member from Simcoe-Grey and support his Bill 41, An Act to amend the Election Finances Act and the Members' Integrity Act, 1994 with respect to election platforms of registered political parties. I'll be voting for it.

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I am pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 41. My comments are being made knowing full well that today is April Fool's Day. Back in my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, I know the constituents can draw comparisons between this bill and its debate on this date. I would be foolish to support it, and in the minutes allotted to me I wish to outline the reasons why.

I would like to put this scenario before the members of the official opposition: Let's say they were elected to a government where the Liberals had left them with a \$5.6-billion deficit on a new government. First of all, I say this wouldn't happen, but just imagine for a moment that it did. Would they continue to forge ahead with election ideas and ideals—what they call promises—or would they rejig those ideas and ideals and work with them over the next four years in a clear, precise and thoughtful way? That's what we're going to do; that is what we are doing. The Tories left us with this deficit, and they left us with a public safety deficit, which is listed in the auditor's report, and also with an energy deficit, as outlined in the Epp report.

If Bill 41 were to pass, how would a government possibly deal with such a predicament? We do not need a bill to require the leader of a party to give the Chief Election Officer a statement declaring the measures and bills the party intends to pursue if they form government. No, what we need is a clear program of ideas and ideals and a government that is determined to see to fruition those ideals which we promised.

As I campaigned door to door in the last election, as Mr Wilson did, I made one promise, and he did too: to represent my constituents to the best of my ability. No promises, just a platform of ideas and ideals. Yes, I was proud to run on Growing Strong Communities and on Growing Strong Rural Communities, on The Health Care We Need, on Excellence for All. With the ideas and ideals expressed in our platform, the McGuinty govern-

ment is changing the direction of government and dealing with the messes we have inherited from the Tories. As we are doing in health care with Bill 8—and I'm proud to say that I've done a lot of work on Bill 8—we are delivering real, positive change that will make Ontario strong, healthy and prosperous.

1130

We don't need Bill 41 to tell Ontarians that—listen to this—we declared that health care dollars will be invested wisely—Bill 8; we've increased the minimum wage; we've announced an intention to freeze college and university tuition; we've hired 50 more prosecutors as we work to build safe communities; we've introduced a bill to impose a one-year moratorium on further urban development on rural and agricultural lands; we are moving to create a permanent greenbelt in the Golden Horseshoe; we are making Ontario's emission standards the toughest in North America; we've removed the supervisors—yes, we did—from the Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto school boards, giving the trustees and the parents and those people who have the voice a voice in their local democracy; and, yes, we passed legislation promoting excellence in learning for all Ontario students by repealing private school tax breaks. We've done a lot, and we hold our six-month record before Ontarians—saying, though, that we will have great mountains to climb as we tackle the \$5.6-billion deficit. Time and again we hear the member for Nepean-Carleton crying, "Shame" on our government. Well, I am not ashamed of our accomplishments to date, nor am I ashamed of the steps we will take in the future as we work to overcome the problems of the past.

The member for Simcoe-Grey talked about promises and the breaking of them by our government. I wish I could walk across this House and hand him and his party the bill for the inherited mess we have received.

Talk about breaking promises; from the Tory campaign promises of 2003 that they could not keep, nor could they deliver a plan to keep, listen to this: "We will not run a deficit." We are looking at a \$5.6-billion deficit, \$2.2 billion in unfunded liabilities, and \$5.2 billion in tax cut promises committed to. Imagine that added on to \$5.6 billion if they were in the government now. I can't understand.

This was another promise—and 94% of promises were not accounted for in the Tory platform costing backgrounder; a backgrounder presented 94% of the promises not costed—a promise to upload 1,000 rural bridges a year for 12 years at a cost of \$4 billion, or \$333 million per year, yet only \$41 million per year was budgeted in the platform.

These are promises—I call them ideas and ideals, but they refer to them as promises—that could not be kept if they were in government, and to think that they would be added on to \$5.6 billion which we did not know about. We have great hurdles, and there's no way with that record that I could ever support Bill 41.

Mr Tascona: I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate with respect to the private member's bill brought

forth by my colleague from Simcoe-Grey, a bill entitled the Keep Your Promises Act.

In this particular situation, the member is our critic for the Management Board of Cabinet. He's introduced this piece of legislation, which I think has merit. He's been a member here since 1990, and I think he knows what he's doing in this particular area.

The bill he is putting forth, the Keep Your Promises Act, amends the Election Finances Act to require the leader of a recognized party to file with the Chief Election Officer during a general election a written statement of what their party intends to implement on forming the government. The bill also amends the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, to require the Integrity Commissioner to include in his annual report a statement of which promises contained in the leader's statement the government has implemented and introduced. The bill will allow for more accountable and transparent government. It will hold the governing party's feet to the fire and will force the government to be guided by their commitments to the people of Ontario.

The McGuinty Liberals are battling about 1,000 in the field of broken dreams. It's quite devious for the Liberal Party to promise in every all-candidates' debate and in every advertisement that they won't raise your taxes, and then to form the government and introduce the largest tax increase in Ontario's history. That's just a fact.

What we're dealing with here—

Interjections.

Mr Tascona: Perhaps I can speak. I'm being heckled from behind by the members from Guelph and North Bay, but I'd like to speak.

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): It isn't me speaking, but I can, if you like, and I'm the member for Nipissing.

Mr Tascona: The hydro rate increases—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Tascona: Mr Speaker, can I speak?

The Deputy Speaker: I just called order.

Mr Tascona: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Maybe they can respect the Speaker in that respect.

We have obviously dealt with other issues. The hydro rate increase, which came into effect today, is no April Fool's joke, I can tell you that. I got a call today from a constituent who has five children. Three are special-needs. They're in a situation where they're going to exceed the cap without doubt. Their usage will be in the 2,200 range because they have to have it on for medical reasons. She's asking me, "What is going to happen with respect to my hydro rate? What is the government going to do to protect me?" She told me she tried to contact the Ministry of Energy and, in fact, when she did, they hung up the phone on her.

I can say very assuredly that we're not going to drop this issue with respect to what people are going to do who have a legitimate health care reason for exceeding this cap. We have a twofold cap now. They're going to go into the area where there is the higher rate, and they need some help. I put it to you that when we were in the

campaign, the Leader of the Opposition, as he was at the time, was very clear that there was going to be a cap, that the cap was going to be kept in place, and then within days after the election, he said, "The cap's coming off."

As I said, these increases will start to kick in today when the cap on the first 750 kilowatt hours jumps from 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour to 4.7 cents, and to 5.5 cents per kilowatt hour on power consumed above the threshold. That's the situation facing my constituents, and they're probably going to use double or triple the amount. That's what they'd normally use because they have children with special needs and they need to know what we're going to do to help them.

I put that to the Liberal government, that they're hopefully going to have a plan to help individuals who are not going to be in a position to pay those hydro rates. It's not going to be just one individual; it's going to be many.

I commend the member from Simcoe-Grey because when you get into election campaigns and promises are made, you owe it to the public to tell them what you're going to do. That's transparency. It's also accountability in telling them, "OK, here's what we're going to do and this is how we're going to do it." That's what elections should be about, rather than flip-flopping after the election and hurting people, because a lot of people are going to be hurt after this day with respect to hydro rate increases. They relied on the promises that were made during the election and now they're finding out they're not going to happen.

The Keep Your Promises Act brought forth by my colleague from Simcoe-Grey has a lot of merit, and I think it should be taken seriously.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I must admit this is a bill that at first blush, when I read it, I considered purely political; I must admit I did. It's called Keep Your Promises Act. The member from Simcoe-Grey has put down his thoughts on what this bill might do to make all of us better politicians.

Upon reviewing the bill and reading it, I noticed that in many ways it is actually superior to the bill the Tories brought in called the Taxpayer Protection Act. That piece of onerous legislation, which was supported, I think, by far too many members of the previous House or previous Houses, did a number of things. It had a very direct bias against tax increases. If you wanted to increase taxes, you had to do referendums, you had to do all kinds of things. It had a very direct bias, on the contrary, for program cuts. So you had no choice. You couldn't raise taxes, so therefore you had to cut programs.

This bill is much better, because there are no referendums or fines contained within the bill. It is purely a political act that he is requesting. It is better than his own Tory Taxpayer Protection Act and is his attempt to make it just a little bit better. I started to read some more into this and tried to discover whether or not this bill should be supported.

1140

There are some very real problems with the bill. One of them, I would suggest, is that the Integrity Commis-

sioner, who since the inception of that position within this House has always stood above the fray. He is a person of some renown. I think he himself, and perhaps all of his predecessors, are people of some renown who have come to the service of the Legislature from judicial positions or other important positions in the community and are able to stand above the fray.

In fact, this will put him into the fray. It will put him into the fray of this Legislature in much the same way as the auditor is called upon yearly to comment on government programs, government waste, government ineptitude, and in much the same way we ask the Environmental Commissioner to report yearly, or from time to time, on places and times and occasions when the government has not acted in the best interests of the environment.

What this bill is going to do is ask that a third mandarin, a third bureaucrat, a third impartial person, be brought in and become very political. That may be awkward, but I'm going to give the benefit of the doubt to the member from Simcoe-Grey and say there is a possibility this may be of benefit to this House.

For it to succeed—the bill is rather silent on this and maybe it requires regulations or further studies if it passes this reading—it would require, in my view, a great many more staff to go into the Integrity Commissioner's office. Those staff who are there at present would not be able to look through, for example, the 231 promises or more that were made by the Liberals in the run-up to the election. They would not be able to look at all the promises the Conservatives made or indeed all the promises New Democrats made leading up to the election.

They would have to become very political in their own right. They would have to work hand in hand with the auditor to try to find out and look at whether the costs were realistic, whether they were appropriate, whether they had been vetted properly. It would become a very political act. Now, we already have people who do that for us. They're called the press. They do that kind of work literally every day. They have done a pretty good job of keeping this government and the previous governments of this province in line in terms of whether or not promises were broken. I listened at some great length to the member from Perry Sound where he was quoting an example from today's press. Today's press is outlining some of the problems.

Having put the whole thing in balance, I don't think the bill is necessarily a bad bill. It is one that requires more study. It is one that requires a great deal of fine-tuning. It is one that will cost the taxpayers additional money in the form of additional civil servants and resources that would need to be made to the Integrity Commissioner's office. But there is always merit in looking at what politicians promise and what they say before elections and what they deliver after.

As the members opposite in the government said, it's absolutely remarkable to me that members of the former government can stand here and say that they were going to be able to keep the promises they made. It's absolutely

remarkable to me that they are able to say they would not have run a deficit. I don't know how they could not have run a deficit unless they were to have sold literally billions of dollars in public assets to finance their last year in office when everything seemed to go wrong, everything from Hydro—literally everything. Would they have sold the liquor control board? I don't know. Would they have sold off a chunk of Algonquin Park? I don't know. Would they have sold off TVO? I don't know. So it works two ways. I would be very curious to see if the Integrity Commissioner, looking at all those things, would have thought or said whether they had kept their promise.

Having said that again, you run into the conundrum. The press has already reported on all of that and the people of Ontario have already decided, on all that, that they had had enough.

Again back to, what would the Integrity Commissioner look at? Right away I think the Integrity Commissioner would have his or her hands quite full looking at this present government. In the two minutes or so that I have left, I'd like to go through just a couple of the things that were promised that now appear to have bitten the dust:

The promise that we would set high ethical standards and then allow the finance minister to stay on as finance minister;

The promise to keep hydro in public hands, but then hire your Liberal friend John Manley to push for OPG sell-offs;

The promise to stop hiring consultants and then give a fat contract to Peter Donolo;

The promise to protect the Oak Ridges moraine and then allow developers to pave it over;

The promise to stop P3 hospitals, but then renegotiate the deal;

The promise to protect and promote public health, but then go to court and claim the government has no responsibility for public health;

The promise to ensure independence of legislative committees, and we all saw the independence of the legislative committee yesterday;

The promise to cap hydro rates for 2006—today is April 1, and we see that that promise was broken pretty fast.

The promise to lower auto insurance rates with an industry that is making profits 600% more than last year, and the auto rates do not in any way seem to be declining;

The promise for autistic children—now that's a real beauty, because this government is taking them and their families to court to ensure that they do not get the services they need once they turn six years old.

The promise to the people of Kawartha Lakes, which is, to me, one of the most serious—the promise to honour their referendum if they no longer wanted to stay in an amalgamated city that clearly does not work for them. The promise was made, and even after those people, in a democratic and minister-sanctioned referendum, voted to

get out of amalgamation, this government is willing to break that, and I would think for no apparent reason.

For those reasons, on balance, I will be supporting the bill.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): It's a pleasure to rise and speak to this bill. I have to agree with the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh; it appeared to me this must be an April 1 joke to some degree. I say that because this bill, in my view, shows definitely a lack of understanding of our parliamentary democracy. The other part it shows—and I don't want to use the word "hypocritical," because you can't use it. But it's definitely a tremendously cynical way of doing politics in this Legislature. I'm actually surprised at the member for Simcoe-Grey having the audacity to bring this forward with a straight face, considering his government's track record. According to many objective observers and experts, this shows again that there is a continuation of this negative, divisive, contradictory rhetoric and it's without substance.

There are ways that we want to restore and enhance the integrity of our democratic process. We, the current Ontario government, led by Premier Dalton McGuinty, are doing just that. We talk about transparency and accountability and we've done something about it. For instance, when we take a look at OPG and Hydro One, we have removed the cloak of secrecy that was put on these entities by the former government. We have removed that. We now have an ability to access information, because that is what good government is about.

1150

I heard the member speak about the Taxpayer Protection Act. You may have forgotten, but you actually broke that Taxpayer Protection Act by bringing in legislation, I believe two years ago. You did that. But there's this rhetoric, the nonsense I'm hearing from the opposition, that this type of legislation somehow is about good government. It isn't about good government. It's just a cynical, political stunt on April 1 in the Ontario Legislature. That's what it is.

When you talk about good government, one of the things that certainly got my ire up when we were in opposition was the partisan advertising, tax dollars continually spent on advertising promoting a partisan agenda. That means the government of the day did not understand the tradition of this place, of the parliamentary system, of our ministerial responsibilities in the ministries, that you don't use taxpayer dollars to promote yourself as a partisan entity. Yet they did that.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It filled up my blue box.

Ms Di Cocco: It filled up many blue boxes across this province. We've banned that. We've actually banned partisan advertising. We have a bill that is going to ban it.

Do you remember the outrage in this House—you were part of the executive, I believe—when under your government \$10 million was approved by a few members of your executive council for professional sports teams? That's the kind of government we had here.

Mr Leal: That no one could account for. They all said, "I wasn't part of it."

Ms Di Cocco: Exactly. Nobody knew anything about it, but \$10 million of the people's money was going to be given to professional sports teams.

This is from someone who has been in a government that chronically and habitually said one thing and did another, set one set of rules for themselves and one set of rules for others. He can stand in his place today with a bill such as this talking about promises kept?

Do you remember that you weren't going to close any hospitals? You closed 45 hospitals during your term. Do you remember when you said that the tolls on Highway 407 were only going to rise 2%? What happened? Do you know by how much they've risen? By 203%. Remember when you said that a smaller Legislature was going to cost less, that you downsized this place because you said it would cost less? It actually cost \$600,000 more after you came in with a smaller Legislature.

All I say is this: A choice was made on October 2, and we have a government in place that is going to be responsible and thoughtful. It's about good government.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I want to thank the member from Simcoe-Grey for introducing the Keep Your Promises Act.

It is difficult when you're in politics and you go to the schools and to the communities and they'll say, "The Liberals promised that they would do this when they got in, but now they're not living up to their word." That reflects on all of us as politicians. We're out in the community. I was a nurse before and held in high regard, and now, when I'm on the streets in my village, people say, "But you politicians don't keep your promises." It gives us all a bad name.

I want to mention a few things. There's a high proportion of seniors in my riding, the third-highest in Ontario. You've increased their taxes. You took the seniors' tax credit away. Their hydro rates are going up. You never said that their hydro rates were going to go up. You did not say they would increase. Now you're looking at the Ontario drug benefit plan? I have thousands of letters in my office. How are you treating seniors? Seniors are offended.

Farms, small businesses: I can hear the barn doors closing, the stores closing, because they can't afford the taxes, they can't afford the hydro rates. What are we doing for small business? In my area, small business is the backbone of all our jobs, our employment, our economy. We are not supporting them. We're losing business and we're losing jobs.

I speak to municipalities all the time, and they're certainly looking forward to promise number 46, where we will invest in public transit by allowing two cents of the existing provincial gas tax to go to municipalities. Is that going to be rural or is that just going to be urban? What are we doing to support the rural municipalities for their infrastructure?

It says here also that you're going to guarantee long-term funding for our rural communities—number 225.

Well, I can tell you, they're looking for some long-term funding. We were giving them a break by taking back municipal bridges. They need more infrastructure money. These are promises that are in here.

Promise 222: "We will make water in rural communities safe." The number of small community centres, the number of municipalities, churches—how are they going to operate? How are they going to do their fundraisers in the summertime with their beef barbecues? How are they going to continue?

In the city of Kawartha Lakes, there's a huge water project is going on. They need to have more provincial help for their new water system. You guaranteed, and I'm hoping you're keeping this promise, clean water across Ontario. This needs to be kept for health care.

For health care, in promise 201, "We will give rural communities a voice and provide them with stable funding so they can chart their own course. We will protect health care and education and tailor these essential services to the specific needs of rural Ontario." Then the other day, they cancelled the program for free tuition for nurses to work in underserved areas in northern Ontario. Nurses are the front line.

Doctor recruitment: a huge problem with a lack of doctors and front-line general practitioners and family doctors in our communities. Where are the benefits? Are you going to be giving free tuition for doctors to work in underserved areas? What are we doing with foreign-trained doctors? Are we going to increase their spaces?

So I rise today in support of my colleague from Simcoe-Grey and the Keep Your Promises Act. The public and all of us here on this side of the House are watching to see that you're going to support our communities and all these different aspects with the Keep Your Promises Act. The public expects it. We as politicians have to set the bar higher.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe-Grey has two minutes to reply.

Mr Wilson: I want to thank my colleagues who spoke in favour of the bill: the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, the member for Beaches-East York, and the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock.

I just want to say that if you don't support this legislation, the Keep Your Promises Act—and I hope all members will—then you're going to see more and more requests from the public for citizen-initiated referenda. You're going to see recall legislation introduced in this House by opposition members, I would think.

People are very, very frustrated. As Mrs Scott just eloquently said, you've got to keep your promises. As you break your promises, you make all politicians all across the world look bad. The fact of the matter is, you shouldn't make promises in the first place that you can't keep. We need something, since you're incapable of keeping your promises, and this bill is an attempt to make sure, as Mr Miller said, that politicians actually do what they said they were going to do during the election campaign. Clearly you're not doing that.

I want to touch on one thing that really discredited the members of the government who spoke against my bill this morning, and that is 45 hospital closures. I was the Minister of Health for two and a half years who did the hospital restructuring. I can only name two hospitals that actually closed in the province. One's in Pembroke, and that was because there were two hospitals very close to each other and they were amalgamated. The other one was the Wellesley Hospital, which was very old, needed tens of millions of dollars in upgrades just to fix the boiler system. I remember, before she died, Anne Archibald in my riding calling it the worst, dirtiest hospital she had ever been in for dialysis treatment, and that hospital had to close. As a result, St Mike's got expanded, Sunnybrook got expanded and eight new hospitals are being built today. It's the largest construction project in the history of health care in this province since hospitals became incorporated. You're discrediting yourselves by using briefing notes that say 45 hospitals are closed. You don't know what you're talking about.

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

EMERGENCY SERVICE PROVIDER'S
INSURANCE PROTECTION ACT
(INSURANCE AMENDMENT), 2004
LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PROTECTION
DES FOURNISSEURS DE SERVICES
D'URGENCE (MODIFICATION DE LA LOI
SUR LES ASSURANCES)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will deal first with ballot item number 7. That's second reading of Bill 40.

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

Pursuant to standing order 96, it will be referred—

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I ask that the bill be sent to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, and I request the support of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The member has moved that it be moved to the—

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

KEEP YOUR PROMISES ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 SUR L'OBLIGATION DE
TENIR LES PROMESSES ÉLECTORALES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 8, second reading of Bill 41.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Bring in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1202 to 1207.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour, stand and remain standing until recognized by the table.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Hudak, Tim	Scott, Laurie
Barrett, Toby	Kormos, Peter	Tascona, Joseph N.
Bisson, Gilles	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Brown, Michael A.	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Colle, Mike	O'Toole, John	Yakabuski, John
Dunlop, Garfield	Prue, Michael	
Hardeman, Ernie	Runciman, Robert W.	

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

Nays

Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.
Broten, Laurel C.	Hoy, Pat	Patten, Richard
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 19; the nays are 18.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried. This House is—

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, I'm ahead of myself again. Mr Wilson, I'm sorry.

Mr Wilson: I would ask if it's appropriate to have the bill referred to the general government committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1212 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

SAFE DRINKING WATER REGULATIONS

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): The environment minister recently announced that she will proceed with the implementation of regulation 170/3 concerning non-treated water systems. This regulation is going to have a devastating effect on small business, campgrounds, community halls and churches throughout rural Ontario. Many of them will simply have to close, as they cannot withstand the financial burdens being placed on them by this government through the implementation of this regulation.

The township of Bonnechere Valley in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has announced that the Gratton Hall will no longer be available because of this regulation, which requires that all community halls, small businesses and churches not on a treated system test for

72 parameters, even if there is no pre-existing water quality problem.

Some campground owners have already told me that they will close. Others, such as Angela Burgess of Renfrew, indicated that they will have to reconsider whether or not they can continue to operate under these conditions.

Great valley events such as the Wilno chicken supper at St Mary's Catholic Church will be threatened by this regulation. St John's Lutheran, Augsburg, faces a bill of \$38,000. There is no way they can afford this.

What has the minister done? She has taken out expensive ads in the newspapers, but given no money or assistance to rural Ontario. Mark my words: This regulation will close halls, bankrupt churches and cripple the tourism industry in rural Ontario. I say to the minister and the government, open your eyes before it's too late.

INVESTOR EDUCATION MONTH

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I rise today both as a member of this House and as a member of the financial community. Today marks the beginning of the seventh annual Investor Education Month, a public awareness campaign designed to encourage the public to take an interest in their own financial affairs.

This year's theme is "Knowledge is your best investment." It will be marked by a variety of public seminars and events across the country, including our province of Ontario, to raise financial awareness. This campaign will emphasize the fact that everyone can benefit from investor education.

Families and individuals who are trying to make their way through the myriad of financial products and services available are encouraged to engage the services of a professional financial adviser. A professional adviser can help investors make sense of financial issues and help them maximize any opportunities that may present themselves in each individual circumstance. By developing these relationships on a long-term basis, consumers can rely on a knowledgeable professional who can provide them with expert advice and help them to plan to achieve their financial milestones. As a certified financial planner, I can personally attest that these knowledgeable consumers with a plan do much better than those without one.

I submit to you today that Investor Education Month is an ideal time for the people of Ontario to focus on attaining greater financial literacy, a lifelong benefit for them, their families and our economy.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): I'm the proud representative of the maple syrup capital of Ontario, the county of Lanark. Right now across my riding, the sap is running. That means that those who tap our local woods are busy turning this natural nectar into pure maple syrup.

However, I'm sorry to report that there's trouble brewing in the woods of Lanark-Carleton and across Ontario. You see, MPAC has changed the way it assesses syrup operations in Ontario. This has cast a dark cloud over the industry. MPAC says that because maple syrup producers process sap into syrup on site, this part of their operation should be classified as industrial instead of farm. Many producers have received assessment notices that will dramatically increase the cost of producing maple syrup.

That's why today I'm introducing legislation that will protect our maple syrup producers from these crushing property assessments that are threatening the future of the industry. This bill would stop the change in the assessment classification from farm to industrial. I am pleased to report that this bill is supported by the municipalities across my riding.

Quite frankly, the provincial response to this problem has been totally inadequate. I absolutely refuse to accept any stalling tactics by this government, which has not offered any legislation or regulation to deal with this problem.

Maple syrup producers are a growing part of our economy. I urge all members to support this industry and to support my legislation.

KITCHENER-WATERLOO MAYOR'S DINNER

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): This Saturday night is the 17th annual Kitchener-Waterloo mayor's dinner celebrating the contribution of individuals who have demonstrated long-term and consistent commitment to our community. This year, two individuals involved in the creation of affordable housing will be honoured: Mary Bales and Martin Buhr.

Mary Bales is a volunteer founder of Heartwood Place, a 33-unit complex in downtown Kitchener, and is currently working on developing a second one in Cambridge. I had the pleasure of attending the opening of Heartwood and was greatly impressed by the caring community that Mary and her team have established.

Martin Buhr is the driving force behind Menno Homes, a non-profit housing complex established by the efforts of our local Mennonite community. Martin is also a former executive director of the House of Friendship, an outstanding community organization that works with the homeless and less fortunate in our area.

Adequate housing is the cornerstone of any attempt to address the plight of the most vulnerable in our society. I congratulate Mary Bales and Martin Buhr.

BEACHES CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is my privilege today to inform this House of the elevation of the newest Beaches citizen of the year. This institution is now in its third year in our community, and the recipient

is chosen from among a list of nominees put forward by the community itself.

All of those nominated are of course excellent citizens. This year, in fact, among those who were nominated were former MPP and now head of the United Way, Frances Lankin. But by unanimous choice of those who were in judgment this year, there was one person who stood out above all the rest, and that was Ted Randall.

Mr Randall is known in our community for a number of things. First of all, he has been a very successful entrepreneur within the community and has had a long-time store in the Beaches community called Randall's Stationery. But that is not why he is famous. In fact, why he is famous even for those who have never been inside the store is that he has done so much for our community: 40 years in the Beaches Lions; he has sponsored neighbourhood sports teams. The singular fact, though, is that no one can ever remember a time when he refused to help or give service to our community when asked by any community person or group. He always delivered.

Our congratulations to Mr Ted Randall, citizen of the year, and our congratulations to the community that has chosen him.

CENTRAL MANITOULIN PUBLIC SCHOOL FALL FAIR

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I recently had the pleasure of visiting Central Manitoulin Public School as part of the MPP back-to-school program.

On Friday last, I was honoured to attend an assembly at Central Manitoulin Public School in Mindemoya in the heart of Manitoulin Island, where Principal Lori Zahnow presided over a very special gathering. The students and staff were joined by Doreen Witty, Carol Gilmore and Doreen Campbell from the Providence Bay fair and the local agricultural society; by Richard Stephens, the reeve of Central Manitoulin township; and by Norm Blaseg, a superintendent with the Rainbow District School Board.

Mrs Pat Marcotte of the Association of Agricultural Societies was present to recognize the wonderful work the students do each year in hosting their own fall fair. This school's fall fair is an important event for all those in the district of Manitoulin. Mrs Marcotte fondly recalled her own ice cream-making activities with the students at a previous fair.

Principal Zahnow was presented with a plaque recognizing the Central Manitoulin fair as an honorary agricultural fair in the province of Ontario. Principal Zahnow praised the efforts that the parents, the volunteers, the staff and teachers have put into this fair. She particularly acknowledged Mrs Marie Kirk and Mrs Doreen Duncanson for their help and leadership.

All in all, the good people at Central Manitoulin have, through this fall fair, linked our agricultural roots, our agricultural traditions and our agricultural heritage together as an integral part of a balanced education.

We all want to congratulate Central Manitoulin Public School on being recognized for their fall fair.

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ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I rise today on an issue of concern to the senior citizens in my constituency, as well as the seniors across Ontario. We have read many newspaper articles and heard many news items which have quoted the Premier and the Minister of Health considering changing the Ontario drug benefit program to charge some groups of seniors for prescription drugs.

I've received over 1,000 letters to my office from concerned seniors around my riding requesting in the strongest terms that government not implement this proposal. My riding has the third largest number of seniors in Ontario, who would not be able to pay the costs for their prescription drugs. I do not have to remind the members opposite of the tremendous contribution that seniors in our society have given to this province and our country: Raising families, starting businesses, farming the land and, of course, defending our freedom are but a few of this generation's contributions.

The health care sector is large and complex, and all members would agree that changes to make the system more accessible and accountable are desired. However, to make the changes on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens who, in their advancing years, need the system the most, is not the appropriate course of action. I hope the members opposite take these issues into consideration as they struggle with the real challenges of governing, and I hope that other more workable solutions can be found.

TRANSIT SERVICES

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I'm here to again talk about the great news that the citizens of Toronto heard yesterday from our Premier, Dalton McGuinty. Yesterday, Premier McGuinty announced that our government will be providing the city of Toronto and the TTC with another \$90 million to strengthen and stabilize the transit system in Toronto. This new money includes a \$25-million unconditional grant so we won't have a fare increase next year—no fare increase. This is on top of Tuesday's historic \$1 billion, along with the federal and the municipal government put together. It's great to see all three levels governments working together for a change. The \$90 million is also in addition to a \$126-million investment the province made earlier this year.

I'm proud to be part of a government that believes in public transit. These investments in the TTC will make the city of Toronto stronger, environmentally and economically. What is good for the TTC is also good for the economy of the city and the air of the city. If you have a strong public transit system in the TTC, and you

have a strong public transit system in the GTA, you have a strong heart in Ontario. If you keep the heart of Ontario strong, you have a strong Ontario.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): This session of the Legislature has been characterized by one sorry Liberal excuse after another when it comes to democratic reform. We've seen nothing but affronts to the very democracy that we supposedly come here every day to fight for.

In the two weeks we've been back in session, we've asked over 20 questions of the Premier, asking him to explain how it is he can continue to allow his Minister of Finance to sit in cabinet with a cloud of controversy over his head. We've asked how it is remotely reasonable to have his finance minister appointing the very person who may sit in judgment of him. To date, we have not received one solitary answer.

We've attempted to call witnesses before the standing committee on government agencies to review the appointment of the OSC vice-chair. Liberal committee members were instructed to refuse, and they did. The culmination of the Liberal culture of cover-up came yesterday, as the general government committee met to decide whether to call Mr Sorbara before committee to clear the air once and for all. The six loyal Liberal backbenchers marched in lockstep, admitting they were charged with delivering the government line: a firm no. Mr Leal, Mr Rinaldi, Ms Wynne, Ms Van Bommel, Mr Parsons and Mr Dhillon, you should be hanging your heads in shame. You ran on the platform of democratic renewal. Yesterday, you didn't just break yet another promise, you broke an entire Liberal platform. Shame on you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT ACT (MAPLE SYRUP), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉVALUATION FONCIÈRE (SIROP D'ÉRABLE)

Mr Sterling moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 46, An Act to amend the Assessment Act / *Projet de loi 46, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation foncière.*

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

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): This bill amends the Assessment Act to allow that maple syrup operations be taxed and assessed as farm operations, rather than as industrial operations as MPAC has interpreted. This bill is necessary, following the finance minister's statement that he was going to alleviate the

problem with regard to these operations. The finance minister or the government has done nothing to pass a regulation or legislation to put into effect the words of the finance minister. This legislation will ensure that, not only this year but forever going forward, maple syrup operations will be taxed as farm property.

SAFEGUARD OUR SENIORS ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PROTECTION DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

Mr Hampton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 47, An Act to protect persons in care from abuse /
Projet de loi 47, Loi visant à protéger les personnes
recevant des soins contre les mauvais traitements.

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

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): As we know, the abuse of elderly persons in homes for the aged and nursing homes is a serious problem. Under this act, a duty is placed on operators of health facilities to protect patients from abuse and on persons who are aware of abuse to report it. The minister is given powers to have reported cases of abuse investigated and to take action to deal with abuse.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I'm pleased to inform members about the steps this government is taking to increase energy efficiency and improve conservation efforts in our operations. Once again, the McGuinty government will lead by example. We have made conservation and energy efficiency a priority.

This government made a commitment to reduce its own electricity use by 10% by 2007. That represents some 62 million kilowatt hours a year. Today I'm pleased to confirm we will deliver on that commitment. As my colleague the Minister of Energy has made clear in recent weeks, this government is committed to developing a culture of conservation in Ontario. We all have a role to play in conserving energy. Every action, no matter how small, contributes to the larger goal. It is incumbent on all of us to ensure the government makes prudent use of the resources entrusted to us by the people of Ontario.

The actions I'm outlining today focus on four main areas: first we will engage all of our 62,000 Ontario public servants in a government-wide conservation effort; secondly, we will aggressively conserve energy in our own buildings; thirdly, we will cut back on energy waste in any leased buildings and any leased space; and

finally, we invite the public to help us in attaining our energy-saving goals.

1350

The first part is our campaign with the Ontario public service. Earlier today, the government launched an awareness campaign across the Ontario public service to remind our public servants what they can do to help achieve energy conservation in the workplace. Earlier this year, the government launched the Ontario public service ideas campaign. We asked the people who work on behalf of the people of Ontario how government could be improved. Our employees gave us more than 11,000 suggestions. Of those, 500 were energy-related. I'm pleased to say that we've included some of those ideas in our energy awareness campaign. In fact, launching the awareness campaign was one of the ideas submitted.

Through memos, electronic posters on a Web site—all, I might add, produced internally by our public service—the awareness campaign encourages our employees to limit their use of space heaters and office fans, reduce the use of small appliances, turn off all unnecessary lights and turn off computer monitors at the end of every working day. Creating a conservation culture requires a change in behaviour. It's important for all of us to examine how we consume energy and how we can make changes that contribute to conservation.

The second part of the plan is, this government is showing leadership by reducing the demand for electricity in the buildings we own. We've established new standards for energy and electricity efficiency that will be applied in all our building operations, new constructions and retrofit projects. The government's facility manager, the Ontario Realty Corp, is now applying these standards. We are implementing a number of projects in our buildings to help us achieve our goal of reducing consumption electricity by 10% by 2007 and we are evaluating our options for additional projects.

The biggest single source of electricity consumption in government buildings is lighting. In fact, the average building spends about 37% of its energy on lighting. Effective immediately, staff have been instructed in all our buildings to ensure that only necessary lights are on in government buildings after business hours. Only minimal emergency lights are to be left on for security and safety reasons unless, of course, employees are working into the evening.

For example, in the Macdonald Block, the past practice has been that the lights would go out at 8 o'clock. Employees who worked late could request the lights be left on for another two hours. We've changed that procedure, and they will be one-hour intervals. We're also upgrading our lighting to take advantage of more efficient technology. We are undertaking 24 lighting retrofit projects to install slimmer fluorescent tubes. These tubes are approximately 25% more efficient than the ones we currently use. These 24 lighting retrofit projects are anticipated to reduce our electricity use by 9.6 million kilowatt hours per year. That is 16% of the target that we have set. So that project alone will get us 16% of the way toward our target.

Building automation is also helping us save electricity. We will be adding lighting and mechanical control systems in a number of government buildings. For example, automated lighting controls will be installed in Oshawa and Thunder Bay. The 19 building automation projects we are undertaking are anticipated to save six million kilowatt hours per year. That is another 8% toward that target that we've talked about.

Heating and cooling systems are also large energy consumers. They account for about 31% of the energy we use in a typical government office building. That is why we are improving our heating and cooling system, including pumps, fans and variable speed drives. We anticipate annual electricity savings from 18 heating and cooling projects of about four million kilowatt hours. That is another 6% toward our target.

We will also be moving forward with replacing several of the chillers in government facilities. Chillers cool and circulate the water through our office buildings as part of the air conditioning system. The Ontario government owns and operates a number of aging and inefficient chillers. The chillers in the Queen's Park complex, for example, are 35 years old. It is time for them to be replaced. We will be undertaking the 12 chiller replacement projects over the next few months. We anticipate that will save 4.3 billion kilowatt hours, or 7% toward our target.

The annual energy savings from the measures I've announced today total 24 million kilowatt hours per year. That will get us almost 40% toward the target we've set on behalf of the people of Ontario. In addition, the government, through its real estate arm, the Ontario Realty Corp, has undertaken a major initiative to change master building specifications to promote energy efficiency. The foundation of any good energy plan is to ensure that each building's energy use can be measured and monitored. Monitoring performance will be enhanced by installing sub-meters in major facilities that can identify electrical consumption in real time, enabling building engineers to investigate consumption immediately.

That's the second part of our plan to dramatically reduce the electricity we use in government-owned buildings. The third part is to work on the space the government leases on behalf of the people.

We will work closely with our government landlords to find ways to make energy efficiency work very aggressively. The government has approximately 800 leases with the private sector across the province. The government currently has a requirement outlining procedures and practices related to conservation of energy as part of a standard leasing agreement. This requirement is being enhanced to include the use of energy-efficient lighting in all areas where the government is a tenant. The requirement also calls for reduced energy consumption related to heating and cooling of leased space during work and non-work hours. These leases are being enhanced to encourage landlords to undertake initiatives to conserve energy, use alternative fuels and support clean energy production.

The fourth aspect of our plan is the role of the public. Today I'm inviting the public to play an important role in helping the province conserve energy. My colleague the Minister of Energy will be making announcements in the future regarding our efforts to engage the public on the subject of energy conservation. We will approach this issue like we do all others, recognizing that the best solutions to the challenges we face come from all of us working together.

Earlier today I wrote to all members of the Legislature to provide them with copies of the posters we are distributing to our public service as part of our awareness campaign. As I noted earlier in that letter, we will be reinforcing the conservation message with additional announcements of funding of policy decisions in the months ahead. I've also invited members and their constituents to contribute their suggestions about how we can improve energy conservation. I encourage all members, as I'm sure they will, to look for additional ideas that can save energy.

We know people have suggestions on how the government can do better and conserve more energy and electricity. We would like to hear from them.

This is important: We have established an online suggestion box. I say to the public that may be listening now that it's on the Management Board Secretariat internet site. The address is www.mbs.gov.on.ca. I ask and encourage members of the public, if they see that their government is doing anything to waste electricity, we want to hear from them. I repeat that: www.mbs.gov.on.ca. Let us know. This is a place for suggestions. For example, if someone notices a government building is leaving the lights on night after night, we would like to hear about that. Any and all conservation tips will be gratefully welcomed.

As I said at the outset, these are the first steps on the government's journey to become an energy-efficient public service and a leader in energy conservation. We will be exploring opportunities that make use of innovative new technologies such as fuel cells. We will develop partnerships with other levels of government and organizations with expertise in the use of energy and conservation.

The government will be making additional announcements on energy conservation in the weeks ahead. I look forward to telling you more about how this government is going to deliver on its commitment to reduce our electricity consumption by 10% by 2007.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Since the Chair of Management Board is directing people to a Web site, I would note that his press release on the Web site says, "McGuinty government to reduce electricity consumption by 10% by 2007," and talks about electricity consumption in the public sector. So that's dated today. If you go to the Ministry of the Environment Web site and you look at a media backgrounder dated December 20, 2002, almost a full year before you came into office, it says the following: "Energy Conservation In Government Operations: Through conservation initiatives, the govern-

ment” will “reduce electricity consumed in its own operations by 10%.” We already announced this. If you go and talk to anyone—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: —if the minister actually goes and talks—I just talked to six civil servants, by the way, on the phone, and they’re already implementing the 10% reduction. So I have no idea—

Interjections.

The Speaker: I’d like to hear the response from the member from Simcoe-Grey. He was very patient in listening to the minister’s statement. Proceed.

1400

Mr Wilson: Not only were we cutting electricity consumed in government operations by 10%, but we went a lot further than what the minister said today. We started to purchase power from green power sources and we pledged that 20% of the power used by government operations would come from green power sources. We had an energy self-sufficient government buildings policy in place, which you are re-announcing today.

We went further: We encouraged self-generation and small projects for new energy. We reduced barriers to clean, green generation. We supported green power marketing. We introduced and implemented tax breaks for energy efficiency equipment; Mr Baird did that. A tax rebate for solar energy systems was in place as of December 20, 2002, a full year before you guys got around to even thinking about it. We had retail sales tax rebates for energy-efficient appliances and a gas tax waiver for ethanol, and we started a centre for excellence for alternative energy, a joint project with universities and the government.

This is a non-announcement. You should be ashamed of yourself.

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): It’s indeed a pleasure to respond to Mr Phillips today because he is indeed launching an awareness program. In fact, he’s just raised the prices; that’s the awareness program. In my view, he’s using the carrot-and-stick approach, only he’s starting with the stick—or is it an electric prod?

Technically, I’d say to you that what you’ve announced—

Interjections.

Mr O’Toole: Mr Bradley is speaking over there.

If you really want the definitive lexicon on this issue, you should consult this book here which Mr Phillips, with all respect, is following, just as we had outlined in recommendations 42 to 60. I’d encourage you to move ahead with it. Clearly, the consumer has to learn to conserve. But I say to you that you’ve got the cart before the horse because, really, the lights are on over there but no one’s home. All the policies you’re implementing, in my view, have been thought out by an all-party select committee.

I can tell you right now that consumers are engaged; in fact, I would say to you, Mr Phillips, they’re enraged at this. Mr. Duncan should know today that the media are very unkind to his solution. In fact, he has no solution.

The whole idea here—and the cause for alarm—is to take time to educate the consumer. Give the consumer some tools to control the rate and time of rate they’re using.

Everyone on this side of the House knows that conservation is part of the solution. If I read the Manley report, one of the major recommendations is to close down 700 University Avenue, the electricity building over there that’s on all the time. So there are absolutely practical ideas. I looked at the Ministry of Finance last night. I thought Mr Sorbara wasn’t here yesterday, but the Ministry of Finance lights were on all night, as far as I’m concerned.

You have to lead by example, but you have to give the consumers some choice in this whole equation. Quite frankly, as member Wilson has said, this announcement today is a rehash of the policies this government had developed in consultation with an all-party select committee and the generation conservation supply committee. I encourage you to move ahead. There are absolutely no dollars in this. There are a lot of numbers. We are going to hold you accountable and clearly the people of Ontario are going to see if you achieve any of the targets. It’s just one more promise that’s been broken. I can assure you that we’ll be watching to see if you keep the lights on.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): If I were a Liberal today, I would be embarrassed by this announcement, because the reality is that if you go and check the announcement made two years ago by the Conservatives, this is the identical announcement. The only thing Liberals have done is repackage it and put a red ribbon on it. This is exactly what the Conservatives announced two years ago, and each and every one of you should be embarrassed that once again all you’re doing is repackaging discredited Conservative policies.

It’s worse than that. The minister has made a great huff about replacing coal, but what do we find when we look at who he hired as a consultant to give advice on replacing coal? The same consultant the Conservatives hired.

What we’re seeing day after day, week after week, is a government that takes discredited, disgraced Conservative policies and tries to find a way to repackage them and then say, “Oh, this is the new, wonderful Liberal picture for the world.”

Yesterday the Minister of Natural Resources tried to give a green announcement about electricity, but do you know what it amounted to? It amounted to this: The Conservatives were prepared to privatize all of the remaining water sites in the province that have the potential to generate hydroelectricity. The Conservatives were prepared to sell off all of the sites on crown land that have the potential to develop wind energy. Do you know what you announced yesterday? That you’re going to do exactly that. Any remaining water sites on crown land that have the potential to generate electricity are for sale. Yesterday you announced that all of the good sites on crown land that can develop wind energy are for sale.

Yesterday the IMO said that Ontario faces critical electricity shortages for the next 10 years. I thought what we’d hear today is the government coming forward and

saying, "Look, in California they implemented the 20-20 plan and they reduced the consumption of electricity by 3,600 megawatts, the size of the Darlington nuclear station." That would be an announcement. Didn't hear it. I thought you might look at the Tennessee Valley Authority announcement of the early 1980s where, by introducing a real, across-the-state energy efficiency strategy, they were able to shut down two nuclear reactors. No. What we got today was a repackaging of Conservative pap and nothing more.

Where does the average householder in this province stand when it comes to energy efficiency in this government? On their own. This government says that if you want to have one of the new electricity meters which tells you when the price on the private market drops, you're on your own; go buy it yourself.

This is no strategy. This is a repackaging of another Conservative embarrassment, and shame on Liberals for trying to get away with it.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I hope you don't see this as a prop. I do want to point out to the government that you don't need to go out there and consult again with Ontarians about what you need to do. You already know what you have to do. It's in *Bright Future: Avoiding Blackouts in Ontario*, put out by the David Suzuki Foundation.

A coalition of labour and environmentalists met today here at the media studio and told you that raising rates, which is really what this is all about today—it's a diversion from the real issue of today, and that is, you are breaking your promise and you are raising hydro rates in this province.

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): That's not what the environmentalists say.

Ms Churley: That is certainly what they did say today. The evidence is there. You'd better listen, because this is correct. Only a small percentage of energy is conserved through raising the rates. There are other ways to do it so people actually save money.

One of the things your Minister of Community and Social Services announced the other day, \$2 million to help low-income people, is a drop in the bucket. What you really should be doing is going into those homes, doing an audit and retrofitting them. You should be creating an atmospheric fund like I helped start at the city of Toronto—an energy efficiency office and fund. The greenprint is right here in this booklet. Don't keep on consulting; just do what you know you have to do.

1410

ORAL QUESTIONS

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question to the minister responsible for democratic renewal. In the Liberal Party platform document *Strengthening Our Democracy*, now-Premier McGuinty

claims, "MPPs used to be respected representatives of the people. Now they are bit players, manipulated to do the bidding of the Premier and his unelected advisers."

The same document states, "MPPs should be free to represent your views, not just parrot the views of his or her party." Yesterday, in the general government committee meeting, six of the government backbenchers put the lie to that promise. Clearly the parrot is live and well. They came there like robots, programmed to spew the government line, circle the wagons and continue to keep this sordid Sorbara saga hidden from public view. How do you square your promises to the people of Ontario for democratic renewal, for greater committee powers, with yesterday's shameful and embarrassing conduct by the Liberal general government committee members?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I thank the member for his question. I think it is refreshing that we have a new-found interest in democratic renewal from the party that brought us the Magna budget. I'd remind the member that when he was in government he had an opportunity to change the standing orders and the rules of this House; that since 1995, the Legislature sat but 78 days per year, or 21% of the time.

Time allocation motions were used by your government, I say to the member, more than any other government in Ontario's history. More than 60% of the bills that were introduced by this government were subjected to guillotine motions.

Public hearings: Fewer than half of the bills introduced by your government received public hearings. I say that for this member to complain about the state of democracy is truly like the rooster preaching abstinence outside of the hen house.

Mr Runciman: It's just more contempt for the members of the Legislature and the public. Back in the early 1980s, when I was a government backbencher in the Davis government and opposed the government's decision to purchase an interest in an oil company, I received a note from an opposition Liberal, now the Minister of Tourism, congratulating me and expressing a wish for more MPPs to stand up for what they believe in. That's clearly a sentiment that hasn't infected the current Liberal front bench.

Yesterday, Mr Leal, the lead trained seal for the government on the general government committee, the member for Peterborough, said that he was "charged with the responsibility to answer questions on the Sorbara issue." How does that comment, a confession that he's following directions, fit with your promise to give committees and backbenchers greater independence and authority? How does that fit in?

Hon Mr Bryant: I say to the member, that the question is being addressed to a government that has a democratic renewal secretary is one large difference between our government and yours. We are going to be—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Bryant: I'm going to. We are in the process, through the parliamentary assistant for democratic renewal, Caroline Di Cocco, of working with the House leaders, working with the Speaker's office, working with members, implementing many of these ideas that we had talked about in opposition to ensure that we make the changes that need to be made. We're going to have to do it consensually; we're going to have to work together. If we entrench ourselves, we're not going to be able to make those changes.

I recognize that this is going to take a little bit of time. We want to do our homework and we want to make sure that we get some consensus. We've made that commitment. We're going to be making those changes so that people do feel that their MPPs are playing the role in this House that they ought to be playing.

Mr Runciman: This is a continuing refusal to answer direct questions. This is the Liberal government's idea of democratic renewal. Have a cabinet minister stay on the job while his activities are under investigation. Have that same cabinet minister participate in the appointment of his potential judge and jury. Stonewall opposition questions and coerce naive rookie backbenchers into participating in a scandalous cover-up.

Is that what you call democratic renewal, or is that turning Ontario into a banana republic, where backbenchers are nobodies, puppets having their strings pulled by Dalton McGuinty? Is this just another in a growing list of Liberal broken promises?

Hon Mr Bryant: Firstly, I sure hope that you are not the poster child for decorum in this House, I say to the member opposite. In all seriousness, if we are going to undertake and do the democratic renewal that we need to do in this House so that we don't have that kind of a speech, much of which, frankly, is not contributing to decorum in this House, then we are going to have to work together on these things.

Your question purports to be about democratic renewal. I'm surprised, and I guess I'm a little refreshed, that your party is interested in this subject. The truth is you're trying to use democratic renewal, which is something that we have committed to, we've moved forward on, we've established and we're making changes on, to try and address an issue that has already come and gone. You're trying to talk about something the Integrity Commissioner has already ruled upon. I have to tell you that if I were in opposition and I received the kind of letter from the Integrity Commissioner that you have received and that you saw the Integrity Commissioner cleared—in fact, all of these outrageous allegations you're making in this House today—I would have thought you would have moved on to the issues that in fact concern the people of Ontario.

Now, it is a democracy and you get to ask those questions as much as you want. You get to choose your questions. But I've got to say it is just a little too rich to hear from this party anything—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Attorney General. Of course you don't want to hear

speeches and of course you would have hoped that the opposition would just move on on this issue that the Globe and Mail referred to today as a cover-up on the part of the Liberal members of the general government committee. What we have now is something that has moved far beyond the issue of a letter that the Premier has from the Integrity Commissioner to actions taken in the general government committee by Liberal backbenchers to block information that even the finance minister was prepared to bring forward.

Minister, as the minister responsible for supposedly a new era of government, why are you sitting by, and why are you condoning this kind of suppression of information?

Hon Mr Bryant: I say to the member opposite that when you were in government you had a chance to do something about changes to standing orders, and you didn't. We, in fact, have made a commitment to make those changes, and we will. We are undertaking an unprecedented approach to democratic renewal, electoral reform, campaign finance reform and parliamentary reform. We're going to clean up this House. We've already started to do that.

I think what the member is asking about is not democratic renewal; he's asking about something else. I respect that; it's his right as a member to ask any question that he wants to. But why don't you stop pretending that this is about democratic renewal and say what you think this question is about. Because I don't think it's about democratic renewal. I cannot believe that the party of the Magna budget is asking any questions about the subject of democratic renewal.

Mr Klees: I really don't care what the Attorney General wants this to be referred to as. Let's call it something else. Let's just call it coming up with the truth about a scandal that is involving the Minister of Finance. Let's just call it allowing members of the general government committee to do the right thing without having the strings pulled by the Premier. Let's just call it having the truth on this matter and allowing the Minister of Finance to do what he committed to do a number of weeks ago, and that is to give the general government committee the truth. Why won't you let him do that?

Hon Mr Bryant: I say to the member opposite, you can't handle the truth. Why exactly will you not accept the word of Mr Justice Coulter Osborne? What have you got against the opinion of Mr Justice Coulter Osborne? What have you got against the opinion of the Integrity Commissioner? Why on earth would you question the judgment of Mr Justice Coulter Osborne, the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, when what you could be doing, instead of challenging him, is reading this letter?

“Put bluntly, it would have been manifestly wrong for you to involve yourself or your ministry in any aspect of ... 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.”

That is the truth. You can't accept the truth.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Bryant: You can't handle the truth, but you just keep on asking these questions.

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Mr Klees: I wish the member would allow us to at least have an opportunity to handle the truth. Give us the chance.

I want to refer to some further suppression of information that I'd like the Attorney General to look into. On February 9, we sent an FOI request to Management Board for e-mails on certain accounts in the Premier's office. On March 10, we received notification that the price was going to be \$1,544. On March 15, we sent a cheque to cabinet office as per that request. We sent the cheque.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): You set the price.

Mr Klees: We're not concerned about the price. Listen up. On March 24, MBS said they lost the cheque. On March 31, we sent MBS a cheque in the new amount. On March 31, MBS advises us that it may take until July 9 now to receive this FOI.

The Speaker: Question.

Mr Klees: Isn't it interesting that the House isn't sitting in July? I'd like the minister to look into this suppression of information and report back and ensure that we get this information without any further delay.

Hon Mr Bryant: I understand why the member isn't interested in the price, because you set the price.

Mr Klees: It's not the price, it's getting the information.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjection: They set the process too.

Hon Mr Bryant: You set up the process.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm getting the impression there's a discussion going this way.

Mr Klees: He's not answering the question, Speaker.

The Speaker: Order. I'd like the question to be put through the Speaker and I'd like the answer to be put through the Speaker, and not have a debate going across like this.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. Would the minister respond, please?

Hon Mr Bryant: Secondly, I say to the member opposite that, as you know—

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Through the Speaker.

Hon Mr Bryant: I say to the member opposite, through the Speaker, that you were the government that excluded Hydro One and OPG from freedom-of-information-act disclosure, and as a result of this government letting the sun shine in, the people are now learning—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Could I have a new question, please.

HYDRO RATES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, today

you're trying to make April fools out of all those people in the province who believed your Premier's promise that he would keep the hydro rate cap until 2006, except for hundreds of thousands of people across the province it's no joke, it's very painful. They have trouble paying the rent now. They have trouble paying the hydro bill now. Yet you're increasing hydro rates today by at least 10%, and for many people it's closer to 30%, and then you say to the lowest-income people, "Oh, we'll give you a rebate." The rebate amounts to \$1 for every additional \$20 you're taking out of their pocket.

Minister, what kind of hard-hearted government not only breaks a promise, but then says to the lowest-income people, "Here, we'll give you \$1 back. You should be grateful for that."

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The provisions of Bill 4 take effect today. Prices will go up for some consumers, small consumers, around 5% to 9%. This government has also implemented a conservation strategy and a pricing plan that we believe will help consumers, through modest changes in their consumption, to reduce the effect on their bill.

What I think every person in Ontario must acknowledge is that if we didn't do this—the cost to the treasury already, under the Tory price freeze, was \$850 million. We had a choice. We could have let that policy continue on, or do something to constructively improve the electricity sector and provide electricity going forward in the future. These are difficult questions, questions this government is going to face. We believe we've provided enough protection. We are going to continue to monitor it. We are sensitive to the needs of everyone in Ontario, but the greatest need people have is reliable, safe, affordable electricity going forward.

Mr Hampton: Minister, you knew before the election that was the cost of the hydro rate cap. It was well known that was the cost of the hydro rate cap, but it didn't stop your Premier from going far and wide in the province and saying, "I promise I am going to keep the hydro rate cap." Now, for seniors living on fixed incomes, for those people who have to exist on ODSP or who have to rely on Ontario Works, or people who have very modest incomes, you are sticking it to them. Then your Minister of Community and Social Services says, "You should be happy that we'll give you \$1 back for every additional \$20 we take out of your pocket." A lot of seniors have homes or apartments that have electric heat. Their bills are going to be going up by over \$250 a year.

Minister, how does it feel? You promised people. You broke your promise and now you're going to stick it to the lowest-paid people in the province. How does it feel, after all the promises you made, that you stick it to the lowest-income people in the province?

Hon Mr Duncan: Governments have to make difficult choices. If we failed to address this question, if we acted and conducted ourselves in the way, for instance, Mr Hampton's government did when he was in office, we would leave our senior citizens and the poorest vul-

nerable. Who does Mr Hampton think pays for the mismanagement of the Tory price cap, the \$850 million? That's money that could create a lot of school spaces, that could create a lot of hospital beds. That involves a tax burden on the poorest.

We are looking and watching what happens as a result of our policy. We believe that with modest changes in conservation—the \$2-million fund my colleague set up is a first step. We will continue to monitor the situation. We've also looked at ways of dealing with billing problems to assist those who are hurt most. It is important that we have a sustainable energy policy going forward to ensure we have adequate, reliable power available for all Ontarians, going forward.

Mr Hampton: Minister, you knew the cost of that rate cap when you voted for it. You knew the cost of that rate cap when you went out across the province, yet you promised it to everyone. Now, as a result of breaking that promise, the lowest-income people in this province are getting hit and they're getting hit hard. If they look down the road, it's going to continue because virtually every announcement you've made on hydroelectricity since you became government involves more privatization.

We know what that means. It means more Eleanor Clitheroe salaries. It means that when you build a new plant you pay private sector borrowing rates. For every \$1 billion it's another \$200 million. We also know that it means all kinds of expense accounts and at least a 15% profit line. What you are announcing today, what you are doing today, is just the first of many rate hikes people will have to pay. Will you admit that, minister? Your energy policy is no different from the Conservative energy policy and it is going to hit the lowest-income people across this province very hard. Admit the truth.

Hon Mr Duncan: The energy policies of the NDP and Conservative governments failed this province. That's why we find ourselves today having to replace 18,000 out of 30,000 megawatts of electricity in Ontario. Prices on electricity have been frozen for 10 years, except for a period of about two months when the Tories subjected the poorest in this province to the spot market. It is important that we, as a province, come to terms with this reality. We must pay to develop new electricity. The plan we've established, this pricing plan that takes effect today is, in our view, the best approach. What we know for certain is that the policies of the last 10 years have been a colossal failure and have left not only the poor and the most vulnerable, but all of us, with a headache in the electricity sector that only Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals are prepared to face up to and fix.

1430

Mr Hampton: I just want to remind this minister that when the Conservatives started taking the province down the road of privatization, what did Dalton McGuinty say? He said, "We believe you've got to go toward deregulation. That's the way to bring this thing to heel. That's the way to introduce real competition." Then he said, "Throughout Ontario's electricity restructuring process, Dalton and the Ontario Liberals have been consistent

supporters of the move to an open electricity market in Ontario."

Let's be clear on something, Minister: Your electricity policy was their electricity policy. You voted for it then, you're implementing it now and it's going to mean higher rates for people across the province, higher rates for small business and higher rates for Ontario industry. Admit it, Minister: What we've seen over the last two weeks is that your energy policy is exactly the same as the Conservative energy policy, except now you put a red ribbon on it.

Hon Mr Duncan: Let me tell you about his energy policy. When they were the government of Ontario, prices went up 40% for the poorest and most vulnerable in this society—40%, the highest in history. Let me tell you something else about their policy. That party's policy in 1992 and 1993 was to cancel every conservation program the old Ontario Hydro had. Had you listened to Dalton McGuinty then, sir, we would have 5,200 more megas a year, resultant from a good policy on conservation.

Just last week we saw Hampton's most recent flip-flop on coal. Before the election, he was going to close down coal—that's our bold leadership over there—and last week he wanted to keep them open, stoking air pollution in this province like we've never seen. He wants to follow the same policies as the Bush administration; that is, relying more and more on coal. We reject you, just like we reject Bush and the Americans on coal—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member for Durham.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): My question is also to the Minister of Energy. The first thing I'd like to do is congratulate you and your government. I want to congratulate you for setting the world speed record for destroying Ontario's economy and competitiveness. That's the record, that's the accomplishment. In just six short months, you've taken Ontario's leading economy in North America, piece by piece, and torn it down to the very foundation, after we created over one million new jobs.

Minister, you should know that Ontario's small business really does create the jobs. In fact, the record is clear. Right from the beginning of your mandate, you've increased taxes by \$4 billion, and now you're increasing their operational cost of electricity. Yesterday you announced a miserly \$1.73 per year to protect the consumer. What are you going to do to protect the economy and small business in Ontario?

Hon Mr Duncan: The best thing we can do to protect small business and encourage economic development is to have a sustainable electricity policy in this province going forward. Let me remind the member opposite that no new generation came on stream under his government. They did not address—let's talk about Pickering, shall we, and what happened at Pickering. You were supposed to fix it; it's not fixed. It ran over budget and overtime at a cost to small businesses in the rates they pay. They froze the price of electricity at a level that cost this treasury \$850 million. Last night, they tried to block

debate on disclosing salaries at Hydro One and OPG. What a desperate shame that was to watch in this House, to watch that party try to block freedom of information.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Simcoe-Grey on a point of order.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): The minister keeps referring to “no new energy projects built in the province.” We built the largest energy projects in recent history—

Interjections.

The Speaker: You made some comments there. I would appreciate it if you’d withdraw that.

Mr Wilson: I’ll withdraw if I offended the House, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Let me just say this to you. It was so effective when you were speaking through the Speaker, and we got some good dialogue going. Then it went on to cross-shouting again. I would really appreciate it if you’d continue to do that again. I think we would all feel better. Member from Durham.

Mr O’Toole: I appreciate the interruption because the substance of that answer has been refuted by Mr Wilson. In my riding, Sam’s Italian Deli is asking me what the minister is doing. This rate increase isn’t something like 9%; it’s more like \$250 a month. I see nothing in your plan to look after the affairs of business, small business specifically, in this province. In fact, Minister, I would say you’re wrecking the engine of Ontario’s economy. You’re throwing sugar in the gas tank.

What am I supposed to tell my small business people, owners who are being forced to potentially shut down their businesses or indeed lay off people? Your government offers a shameful promise of support. What’s your plan to keep the economy of Ontario strong, recognizing the importance of energy as the engine of this economy?

Hon Mr Duncan: First of all, I say to the member opposite that our plan is to undo all the harm they did in the electricity sector over the course of the last four years. The people of Ontario chose change this year. They got change. That party left a broken record on the electricity sector. Everything they promised in 1998 didn’t work out. As recently as last night, they tried to keep from the public information that’s vital to understanding how the sector will work.

In terms of economic development and growth, the policy of the Tory party was a failure. When they put small consumers and small businesses on the spot market, prices for electricity shot up. They had to basically throw out their own policy. We’re replacing that with a system of reliability and stability that we believe will serve the interests—and time will show that we will fix the failure of that member and his government over the entire electricity sector.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is to the Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet. You announced today that the government is committed to

reducing electricity consumption in its buildings by 10% by 2007. We all know how important energy conservation is—not only the government’s commitment to shutting down coal-fired plants by 2007, but how important it is in helping to reduce the amount of emissions that we put in our atmosphere. That being said, how much will this program cost, how much energy will the government save based on our government’s belief in results with measurable outcomes?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I appreciate the member for Peterborough’s question. Just in terms of the four-point plan we outlined today, I’d say that the plan obviously was developed internally and all the public service work was done internally. But there is a requirement to make some investments. We have put a huge priority on the projects in our buildings that will conserve energy and electricity. So the capital cost for the four areas I outlined today will be around \$17 million. The major part of that will come from our Ontario Realty Corp capital budget. That \$17-million investment will reduce our annual usage of electricity by 24 million kilowatt hours a year. That is getting us 40% of the way toward our goal. I say to the member for Peterborough, roughly \$17 million allocated on capital investment will save 24 million kilowatt hours.

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Mr Leal: Leading by example is crucial. I’m glad to hear that you’re taking positive steps to curb our energy consumption. Energy conservation is a topic of concern among my constituents. Indeed, the PA to the Minister of Energy will be in Peterborough tomorrow meeting with Bob Lake, an acknowledged expert on conservation policies throughout Ontario.

Sometimes I wonder why the government office lights are on all night. Can you tell me why that is and, in light of today’s announcement, what action are you taking?

Hon Mr Phillips: They shouldn’t be on, and it is our goal to have them turned off. Earlier I announced the automated lighting projects which will automatically turn them off, but many buildings don’t have that, so we’ve asked all of our building managers to turn the lights off. If for some reason or another they are not turned off, again, I would ask the public to let us know. Tell us about it. Today I outlined the Web site address: www.mbs.gov.on.ca. Tell us about it. If we are leaving the lights on, we want them off. I’ll make the assumption that the lights will be turned off in our government buildings as per our plan.

BEEF PRODUCERS

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to Minister of Agriculture and Food. Ontario’s farmers waited patiently for your announcement on how compensation for BSE would be distributed to our cull cow farmers. Those farmers were looking for a direct per cow payment. Imagine the disappointment when they found out that money they were supposed to get is going to the processing industry. Even the federal government had

envisioned farmers would get money per head, and producers were promised an average \$320 per cow.

I know you and your ministry suggested the money per head was insignificant, but that's not what farmers and people were telling me. Farmers had to give away cows while you took your time deciding what to do, and then they found out that there would be no help for them. What are farmers supposed to do now that their money has been given to the industry that has been accused of price gouging those same producers? Is this just another broken Liberal promise?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I thank the member for his question. Perhaps the member should remember what he said in the Tillsonburg News on March 5 of this year, that if we had enough capacity, the border being closed to the US market wouldn't be such a hardship.

Perhaps the honourable member should talk to the individuals within the cattle industry and the dairy industry. When the federal government announced the cull cow program in November 2003, we talked and consulted with the cattle and dairy industry. The leaders of that industry came back to me and said, "Don't just put a small cheque into the farmer's pocket." We need to do something that's going to have a long-term solution. That long-term solution is increasing slaughter capacity in this province.

The industry came to us and we're working with the industry. We're investing \$7 million to help increase new slaughter capacity in this province, and an additional \$3 million is going to be allocated to the Ontario Cattle-men's Association to help market it. Unlike your government, we listened to the agricultural community. The agricultural community came to us, we listened and we delivered.

Mr Hardeman: That's the same answer the farmers that have cull cows heard from the minister when this announcement was made. The headline in my local paper said that is a lot of bull.

Speaking of broken promises, not only do farmers with cull cows not receive fair compensation for production costs they have because of BSE, they're now being asked to absorb higher electricity prices, starting today. Another broken Liberal promise.

In this House you promised to work with the agricultural community on this issue because you said farmers could be part of the solution. What is the solution for these farmers today? It appears your solution will be, "You'll just have to pay the bill, pay the increase." Is this another broken promise to an industry already in crisis, and have you given up on their survival?

Hon Mr Peters: Not at all have we given up on the agricultural community's survival in this province. We've flowed over \$92 million in support to the cattle and dairy industry in this province. We signed the agricultural policy framework in December that is going to put in place the new CAIS program. The Canadian agricultural income stabilization program is going to be there to help farmers get away from the ad hoc programs that

that government continued to introduce. We are going to bring long-term stability to the agricultural community.

As well, my parliamentary assistant, the member for Huron-Bruce, is working with the Minister of Energy and his conservation committee so that we can make sure that agriculture is going to be part of the solution. We know there are great opportunities from biomass methane digestion where agriculture can be part of the solution. We can help create new generation in rural Ontario. That's what we need to do to help stabilize electricity markets. We are not going to continue down the path your government did of putting \$850 million on the backs of the taxpayers. We're going to be there to help people.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. As you know, Speaker, northern Ontario comprises about 90% of the landmass of this province. You would also know that of the issues that are important to northerners, right at the top of the list is our transportation and highway system. Knowing that there has been a lot of idle chatter concerning tolls on Highway 69, my question to the Minister of Northern Development today is, can you assure this House that there will be no tolls on Highway 69?

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): I'm very pleased to announce that there will be no tolls on Highway 69. Let me repeat: There will be no tolls on Highway 69. The antics of the opposition over the course of the last week and a half have reminded me of the children's story, when Chicken Little ran around saying, "The sky is falling, the sky is falling." The reality is the sky has never been brighter for northerners. Finally, we have a government that hears the concerns of northerners, listens to the concerns of northerners and acts on the concerns of northerners.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): We seem to have a lot of discussions going across today. Supplementary from the member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr Brown: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is good to know that the Minister of Northern Development's strong advocacy on behalf of northerners is being recognized by all members of the House this afternoon. I would like to ask the Minister of Northern Development, on behalf of my constituents, who have a very deep and abiding interest in transportation issues, if he could explain to me why the decision was made regarding tolls on Highway 69.

Hon Mr Bartolucci: There are several reasons. A few of them are, first, that there is no alternative route, so people have to take Highway 69, and it would be unfair to make that a toll highway. Second, it doesn't make economic sense to toll Highway 69. Third, our government understands what northerners have been saying to the previous government for eight years: that Highway

69 is an economic lifeline for Sudbury and northeastern Ontario.

Let me tell you, I am so proud to say that we as a northern caucus and as northerners have advocated successfully, and I am very proud of the decision made by our government.

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OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR GENERAL

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To the Deputy Premier: The Deputy Premier will know that across this province folks have been waiting six months and more to get birth certificates and other critical personal identification information from the Office of the Registrar General. Your government says that service has been improving, but I tell you, the dirty little secret of this government is that in fact service has been getting worse. One of our sources from within the Office of the Registrar General tells us that the backlog is not 71,000, but in fact has now escalated to 90,000 unprocessed documents. People need these documents for any number of critical reasons: for passports, to open bank accounts.

For months you've been promising to clean up the mess but in fact things have gotten worse. Will you admit that the backlog has grown to 90,000, and what are you going to do about it?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): My colleague the minister responsible has put in place a plan that has been approved, that has in fact reduced the backlog of time. We acknowledge there is still a backlog there. It's a long backlog. Every member on this side and the minister are working hard to ensure that we get that backlog down.

It's important to note that we are attempting to deal with this in the context of all the changes that have been required with respect to security. That being said, the time wait, the backlog, has been shortened in terms of the number of days from the time an application comes in to the time it's being processed.

Mr Kormos: I tell you that the number of unprocessed documents, the volume of the backlog, has increased. It's not the 71,000 that the government says it is, it's now up to 90,000.

One of the other interesting things about this process is that the ministry and the office charge a \$15 fee for 48-hour service. It's unfortunate that the Minister of Consumer and Business Services, in charge of this office, is also in charge of consumer protection, because this very ministry is ripping consumers off. When they pay \$15 for 48-hour service, what they get if they're lucky is one-week service—more often than not 10- to 14-day service—yet they're still being charged the 15 bucks.

The problem is that the office is bogged down. Neither the emergency service nor the regular service has undergone improvements. People need these documents. When, oh, when is the government going to get this office under control? When are you going to keep your commitment for 48-hour service, for which you're

charging Ontarians \$15 in addition to the regular fee? You're ripping these people off. Will you consider paying back the money to those who haven't gotten the 48-hour service?

Hon Mr Duncan: This past weekend, 109 ORG staff worked overtime to help. As of March 26, ORG staff were processing regular birth certificates as at November 10, 2003. The Thunder Bay night shift has been expanded from 38 to 69 staff and the second shift is now permanent in the Toronto office. The government acknowledges that this is a challenge; the government has taken steps to address it. We've shortened the waiting period.

This should be a lesson to all of us, like the previous government that just cut without thinking of where they were cutting, and the impact of those cuts: We saw the impacts on our kids and schools, on our health care system. This government's addressing those cuts and this cut specifically. We're reducing the time and we're continuing to work on the problem.

HIGHWAY 404

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. I was pleased to read this week on the front page of the Georgina Advocate, one of my local newspapers, that after a meeting you held with mayors in my riding, Mayor Rob Grossi of Georgina announced that you had committed to him and the other mayors to fund the extension of Highway 404 in my riding from Green Lane to Ravenshoe Road.

Minister, will you confirm in the House today this funding commitment that you made to my local mayors?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank the member for the question. When I met with the mayors from Georgina, what I committed was to do the environmental assessment so that we can move ahead with the construction of the highway if the EA is done.

Mrs Munro: Minister, the 404 extension is vital to my constituents, and they want to know that your government remains committed to its completion. The PC government finished the environmental assessment on the project. The engineering studies are almost done, and land acquisition will follow. As each of these processes is estimated to take about two years, construction could begin in 2006. Will you commit to maintaining this timeline? When will construction begin?

Hon Mr Takhar: I understand the importance of this highway, and we are absolutely committed to moving ahead with the environmental assessment. As soon as the environmental assessment is complete, we will move ahead with the construction.

SCARBOROUGH HOSPITAL

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The Scarborough Hospital received approval from the

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for its new emergency and critical care centre in May 2002. As you are aware, this hospital was at the epicentre of the recent SARS outbreak. Based on their experiences, they have identified a need for new infection control and isolation capabilities, requiring a reworking of some of the original plans.

After submitting the revised designs and costs to the ministry, there's concern that approval could be delayed to proceed with this essential project. Further delays to this project could jeopardize the Scarborough Hospital's ability to provide the care our community needs, including adding to increasing waiting times. Can the minister ensure that every effort is made to bring forward the required approvals and support for this project as soon as possible?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'd like to thank my honourable friend for the question. I should take the opportunity, and I think everyone would want to join with me, to recognize that the Scarborough Hospital is not just a great hospital every single day, but played an exemplary role during the SARS challenge that our province faced.

The efforts that they are involved in are to enhance the quality of their facility from its standpoint of dealing with infectious disease control, in a similar fashion to what occurred at South Lake hospital in Newmarket. Of course, we recognize that this is in our interests. The ministry is working closely with the hospital, and although we haven't resolved it all, I do know that there's a meeting coming up later in April. I'll certainly put my personal attention to this and work with the member to satisfy the needs of the Scarborough Hospital and the local community.

Mr Duguid: As the minister knows, the Scarborough Hospital is one of the busiest emergencies in all of Canada. In fact, this hospital receives up to one in three of the ambulances in the greater Toronto area. The hospital has become the benchmark for ensuring that city paramedics' wait times are reduced so that our ambulances can be kept on the road and ready to respond.

Will the minister agree to visit the Scarborough Hospital so that he can see firsthand the great work being done here for our community, as well as experience the necessity of proceeding forward as soon as possible with the emergency and critical care centre project?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I've had the opportunity on a couple of occasions to speak with the president and CEO of the hospital and indicated that it's a priority for me to visit. I had the opportunity a few Friday nights ago to spend three hours at St Michael's Hospital emergency ward as someone just watching what was going on. That's in my riding and also a very busy ER. So I'm happy to confirm with the member that I want to get there for a visit and look forward to making sure we get that confirmed.

The reality is that several of our hospitals in the greater Toronto area have enormously active emergency rooms. This is one of them, and it's essential for the full

functioning of our health care system that it works well. I'm pleased to go and visit it with the member.

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SAFE DRINKING WATER REGULATIONS

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Minister, you will know that I wrote you and several of your colleagues a letter on March 3, 2004, soliciting your support for rural Ontario's community halls. You haven't responded to my letter yet, even though government officials told Mike Jennings, a reporter at the Stayner Sun, that I'd get a response within a week.

Your party promised, and it's promise 222, to "make water in rural communities safe." Instead, you're making places in my riding like Clearview, Springwater and town of the Blue Mountains make the water safe at their own expense. Clearview township operates six community halls. They estimate it will cost around \$33,000 per hall to make the necessary upgrades required by the Safe Drinking Water Act to help keep the water safe. Springwater expects to spend well over \$25,000, and town of the Blue Mountains is having trouble with the Marsh St community centre.

Will you stand in your place today and promise Mayor John Brown, Mayor Fran Sainsbury and Mayor Ellen Anderson-Noel that you'll foot the bill for these mandatory municipal upgrades?

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I'm quite delighted to reply to the member opposite. In fact, we are undertaking negotiations, as we speak, with the federal government on the rural municipal infrastructure fund. I hope to have some very good news where our government has succeeded where others have failed to work co-operatively with our federal colleagues to come up with a significant fund for infrastructure. You've seen some of the early agreements, whether it's the strategic highways partnership or whether it's some of the Canada strategic infrastructure funds that we use for transit here in the greater Toronto area.

As we're moving forward, we are looking at financing strategies that will improve our drinking water and waste water systems. I can assure all members of this House that this doesn't mean privatizing our water, but it means finding the investment to be able to meet the clean, safe drinking water needs of all Ontarians.

Mr Wilson: I say to the minister that these halls are closing now. The expenditures are being incurred now. The regulation has been in place for a few months requiring them to make these necessary upgrades. My colleagues John Yakabuski, Laurie Scott, Bill Murdoch—several people on this side of the House—have brought this to your attention and to the attention of your government over the last few months. You will hear pretty soon from the Conservative rural caucus and our northern critic about halls, named, that are closing around the province.

This is happening now. We can't wait for you to get in bed with your federal cousins and come up with some rural infrastructure program. Since this House passed my Keep Your Promises Act this morning and since you promised, "We will make water in rural communities safe," promise 222, why don't you just stand in your place and do what other ministers don't do here: Give us a straight answer and say yes, you'll support rural and northern communities and their halls?

Hon Mr Caplan: I must tell you, I find it a bit hard to take a lecture from this member from this government that cut back and downloaded on our rural communities; in fact, on all communities in Ontario. I say quite frankly to the member opposite, the McGuinty government does not need to take a back seat. We have taken aggressive action already to be able to engage the federal government, to be able to find the investments to enable all communities—urban, rural and northern communities—to ensure safe, clean drinking water. This is yet another wonderful legacy so far, in only six months, and there is much more to come. We are working cooperatively with the federal government. That is a strength. That is very positive. We are going to have strategies in place to be able to finance the crumbling infrastructure that you and your government, quite frankly, sir, cut back on, putting all municipalities—rural, northern, and urban—in such a vulnerable position. We are going to succeed where you and your government failed.

PRE-BUDGET TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): My question is for the Minister of Finance. Having had the opportunity to participate in a number of the regional pre-budget town halls across the province, as well as a number in my own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, both open to the public and in our local high schools, I am wondering how your ministry is handling the volume of information to ensure that the citizens who participated in these processes will be heard in the upcoming budget.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I appreciate the question from my colleague from Etobicoke-Lakeshore and the notice that she gave me of the question.

I'm delighted just to put a few facts on the record regarding that unprecedented conversation that we engaged in with the people of Ontario. There were 50 sessions held across Ontario. Some 2,500 citizens participated, including, I might note, people like the eminent mayor of Mississauga, who is in the members' gallery.

Applause.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'm not done.

The Speaker: You took your time with that.

Ms Broten: There were wonderful ideas and suggestions that came to us in the pre-budget town halls across the province and the citizens' dialogues. I wonder

how you're gathering that information to put it through in the upcoming budget.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Mr Speaker, through you to the mayor of Mississauga, you took up all my time in the first response, so I'll have to compact what needs to be said on this very quickly.

I say to my colleague that it's going to be challenging; there were so many voices. But let me put it this way: At the end of each session I chaired—and there were 14 of them—I said to those participating that it is our determination to make sure they hear their voice in the budget when it is presented. That's going to be challenging.

There were three components to the consultations: the conversation that the Premier launched a couple of months ago, my own ministry's pre-budget consultation and, of course, the work of the standing committee. We are determined—we are committed—to make sure that what we heard from the people of Ontario is reflected in the budget we present later in the spring.

TRANSIT SERVICES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Yesterday you gave Toronto a modest one-year bailout for public transit. It wasn't the two cents a litre of the gas tax that your Premier promised, but it is better than what the city of Hamilton got, which is nothing.

Hamilton ratepayers face an \$83-million deficit caused by downloading. They can't afford a big property tax hike, and they can't afford to cut public transit. Yet the Premier has turned them down on the two solutions they have suggested. Minister, why are you freezing the people of Hamilton out? Why are they suddenly being told, "No help for you"?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I am actually very proud to talk about our record on public transit. This is the first time in a long time that the provincial government, the federal government and the municipal government have come together to announce \$1.05 billion for Toronto. In addition to that, we announced another \$90 million for Toronto to support their operating needs. This money is not coming from other municipalities. We are committed to moving ahead with our two-cent commitment to help the other municipalities with their transit needs. That, hopefully, will form part of the budget as we move through.

Mr Hampton: The question was, we saw that you didn't give two cents a litre of the gas tax to Toronto, but we also saw that you basically told the city of Hamilton they get nothing. Here is the reality: People in Hamilton are facing a 6% increase in property taxes, they're facing cuts to public transit and they're facing huge fee hikes for the use of arenas and communities centres. What is your answer to Hamilton, or are they just a victim of another broken promise? What's the answer?

Hon Mr Takhar: It looks to me as if the member opposite is busier asking questions than listening. I already said we are absolutely committed to honouring

the two-cent gasoline tax commitment to all municipalities, and we will phase it over a four-year period. I also understand the Premier is meeting with the mayor of the city of Hamilton and will be addressing that issue.

1510

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I just want, of course, to officially recognize the mayor of Mississauga, Hazel McCallion, who is with us today.

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just wondered if anybody had reported that the Saskatchewan NDP government, in its budget, had cut several civil servants.

The Speaker: I know very well that's not a point of order, and the member also knows that.

PETITIONS

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I have a petition entitled "We Reject Tobacco Tax Hikes," signed by farmers from Mount Brydges, Eden, Vienna, Bothwell, Springford and a number of other communities.

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

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

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

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

"That the government of Ontario reject tobacco tax hikes, reject a smoke-free Ontario, reject the ban on tobacco displays and provide compensation and support for the continued existence of Ontario's tobacco growing communities."

I sign these petitions on behalf of the communities in my area.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to present a petition from Black Creek Leisure Homes, signed by Johanna Grimme and Aubrey and Betty Taylor, among others, which 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."

I sign my signature in support.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberals by no means campaigned on raising the rates associated with the Ontario drug benefit program; and

"Whereas the majority of seniors, many of whom live on fixed incomes, cannot meet the expense of higher costs for essential medication; and

"Whereas seniors in Simcoe-Grey and across Ontario should never have to make the choice between eating and filling a prescription;

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

"To cancel any plans to raise the costs for prescription drugs for our seniors and to embark on making vital medications more affordable for all Ontarians."

I agree with this petition, and I've signed it.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): As you can see, I have a large number of petitions. The Ontario Forestry Opportunities Coalition has sent them to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and they say:

"Whereas the current forest management practices in Ontario do not take into account labour opportunities for residents of Ontario;

"Whereas an important economic tax base is being lost;

"Whereas the government of Ontario does not take into consideration the residents of Ontario or their future by allowing Ontario's timber to be processed out of province;

"Be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take immediate action to ban any harvesting of any species of tree for the purpose of transporting or processing outside of the province of Ontario."

I note there are signatures from many parts of northern Ontario, from Cochrane, Timmins, Val Gagné and especially from Tunis.

LANDFILL

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's my pleasure to present a petition. Actually, the member from Simcoe

North has worked tirelessly on this issue and I am supportive of the work he continues to do.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On behalf of the member for Simcoe North, I am pleased to support and sign this.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by a great number of tobacco producers in my area and in neighbouring ridings. The petition is entitled "We Reject Tobacco Tax Hikes."

"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 create a smoke-free Ontario; and

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

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

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

"That the government of Ontario reject tobacco tax hikes, reject a smoke-free Ontario, reject the ban on tobacco displays, and provide compensation and support for the continued existence of Ontario's tobacco growing communities."

I affix my signature to the petition.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My petition is 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" customers "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."

I'm very pleased to sign my name to that petition as well. It's a great location.

LANDFILL

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm pleased to be here today to support my colleague from Simcoe North and present this petition to the House:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

definitely affect the design of site 41 and the nearby water sources.”

I'm pleased to support my colleague from Simcoe North and to affix my signature to this petition.

1520

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of some constituents of my beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, and it says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the community of Yearley, Ontario, within the electoral district of Parry Sound-Muskoka experiences frequent and prolonged power outages; and

“Whereas the power outages have become a health and safety issue to the residents of the community and the students who visit the outdoor education centre;

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

“That the Minister of Energy instruct Hydro One to conduct an investigation of the distribution and feeder lines that serve Yearley and take the necessary steps to ensure reliable energy through ongoing forestry maintenance and required line improvements.”

I agree with this petition, and I sign my name.

LANDFILL

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Whereas the citizens of Ontario will be expecting a standing committee of the Legislature to hold province-wide 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 nearby water sources.”

I've signed this petition. This proposed dump site is near my riding, and I want to congratulate my colleague from Simcoe North for his hard work on this important issue.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Again, this is on the agency store program.

“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.”

I'm very pleased to sign my name to that.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): A petition 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”—in my riding—“an LCBO agency store.”

I want to thank my colleagues for their help in this endeavour. I've signed this petition, and I thank all those who signed it.

LIABILITY INSURANCE

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from my constituents of Parry Sound-Muskoka, and it says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas liability insurance is a necessary coverage; and

“Whereas the rising cost of liability insurance is of great concern;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to review liability insurance rates and take steps to ensure reasonable rates now and in the future.”

I agree with this, and I'll add my signature.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I thank all the people who have read my petition today.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

“Whereas the Minister of the Environment has on numerous occasions stated her passion for clean and safe water and the need for water source protection legislation; 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 by Justice Dennis O’Connor’s report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign this, Mr Speaker, and I would like to give it to Michael to take down to you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF MEDICARE ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR L’ENGAGEMENT D’ASSURER L’AVENIR DE L’ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 31, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi créant le Conseil ontarien de la qualité des services de santé, édictant une nouvelle loi relative à l’accessibilité aux services de santé et abrogeant la Loi sur l’accessibilité

aux services de santé, prévoyant l’imputabilité du secteur des services de santé et modifiant la Loi sur l’assurance-santé.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I understand the member had completed her speech, so it’s questions and comments now.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): When Liberals say that Bill 8 is going to end “buy your way to the front of the line” health care, I know they haven’t read the bill. If you look at the election document, the health platform from the Liberals says the following: “The Harris-Eves government opened private, two-tier MRI and CT clinics. These clinics will sell vanity scans alongside public services, giving quicker access to those who can afford to buy their way to the front of the line. We will cancel the Harris-Eves private clinics and replace them with public services. The Romanow commission proved there is no evidence to support expanding private diagnostic services.”

I agree. The question is, how come the Liberals haven’t shut down the private MRI clinics? I looked to Bill 8 to see where in the bill the government was going to shut down the private MRI clinics. I asked Minister Smitherman in the standing committee on justice and social policy, February 16, 2004, “Where are the provisions in the bill that ban for-profit ... MRI clinics?” The minister said, “Regrettably, they don’t exist.” No kidding. This government has no intention of shutting down the private, for-profit MRI clinics. The bill does nothing to stop the “buy-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line” health care in the province.

Secondly, when Liberals try to say that accountability agreements will be negotiated, I know they haven’t read the bill. Go to page 27 of the new bill, subsection 21.1(4). It says the following: “The minister shall consider any representations made under subsection (3) before making a decision to issue a compliance directive or an order....” Does that sound like negotiation? No.

Page 28, subsection 22(2), “The health resource provider shall comply with a compliance directive.” Does that sound like negotiation? No.

Subsection 26(2), “The health resource provider shall comply with an order issued under subsection (1).” Is that negotiation? No, it’s not. The minister continues to have unilateral power under this bill, never mind negotiation.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I’m pleased to have an opportunity to provide some comments on yesterday’s debate, which is being continued today. Both members from the government, the member for Guelph-Wellington and the member for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, made excellent presentations and really outlined some of the key aspects of Bill 8. Above and beyond all, the key word in this bill is accountability. This government is committed to an accountable health care system and also a health care system that is not two-tier.

Throughout the past few years, we have continuously heard from people, whether they be local residents or

whether it be certain interest groups, that we do not want a two-tier health care system in Ontario. This is a concern that many people, especially seniors, have raised to me and I'm sure to many other members of this Assembly.

1530

This bill enshrines, once and for all, the fact that the medical and medicare system in Ontario will not be, or will never become, a two-tier system. People were nervous about this in the past and this finally takes care of it. So let's not get lost in the message here. We can talk about other aspects, we can go into other areas, but the bottom line here is we have a bill that is accountable and makes accountable agreements with hospital boards and the minister, and it prevents a two-tier health care system from being created.

I look forward to further debate this afternoon. I hope that members of the opposition are interested in debating this and not doing what they did last night, which was to stall the debate, ring the bells and lose approximately two hours of time with bell-ringing, a very unfortunate tactic which accomplished absolutely nothing. They claim they were a party that got things done. They've now become a party that likes to obstruct things. I hope that will not be case today.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): We will certainly take his words under advisement. Such brilliant Q and A we just heard there.

I'd like to talk a little bit about Bill 8 and what I'm hearing from my hospital boards. In my part of province—I don't know what you pay your hospital boards in the GTA, where you've got your 22 seats and you're making all your promises about the subway and bailing out Mr Miller and everything—but we have a lot of volunteers. They're very professional people; they're people who are dedicated to the hospital.

I can tell you, those citizens are very, very concerned about what can happen to their hospital boards under Bill 8. There's a sense of community, a sense of identity with a hospital board. I can think of Chairman Karen Wilford from my hospital board in Orillia, Soldiers' Memorial Hospital, someone who's dedicated many hours of her life to make sure that hospital—she works for the chief executive officer—runs smoothly. We're very proud of that hospital. I talk to the folks there at the hospital, I talk to the CEOs, I talk to the treasurers, and they're very concerned about Mr Smitherman's bill, what Bill 8 will do. We won't be supporting it because of that, plain and simple.

Primarily, the Ontario hospitals do not like this bill. When we finish this debate—and there's lots of opportunity for debate—I'm looking forward to going back out to debate this again. We need a lot of public hearing on this. Certainly, as soon as this bill—we've finished the debate in the House on second reading. We're expecting this government of democratic renewal—we heard the Attorney General talk about democratic renewal today—back out on the road. We want to see what the citizens of the province are saying. With democratic renewal, I'm sure that Dalton McGuinty and the Minister of Health

would love to go out and debate this bill again and hear lots of information from the citizens of the province on Bill 8.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I've got two minutes. I'm here with Michael Prue, the member for Beaches-East York, and Shelley Martel. She, of course, sat through the committee. I was fortunate, or should I say unfortunate, enough to spend some time in that committee with Ms Martel. I was down in Niagara Falls when the committee was down there. It's been a long time. I can't remember ever seeing a bill where there was unanimity amongst the participants, amongst the public attendees—unanimity in opposition. I sat there and sat there—I'm waiting.

Surely the government could conjure up, could scrounge somewhere, could lift a rock and find something to come forward with in front of the committee to praise the bill. Even an impostor, if you will, like somebody's brother-in-law, some campaign manager for a failed Liberal campaign, could come forward. From time to time I've seen the Tories do that. Ringers, they call them. Produce a ringer, have a ringer come forward and endorse the legislation. Not one of the public participants praised the bill. Not one. Not one of the public participants had anything but criticism of the bill.

Ms. Martel worked her buns off to generate amendments, to try to advocate for effective change to the bill, and what does the government produce? Nothing. The government produces nothing. The government has not altered the substance of the bill so as to make the bill anything other than it was at its very inception.

This is bad legislation. Thank goodness this is only second reading, because government members have an opportunity to demonstrate the independence that their Premier tells them they are going to be entitled to, and perhaps should be. I saw Mr Leal demonstrate that independence at the finance committee yesterday, and today when he was questioning somebody in cabinet.

The bill has got to be scrapped. It's finished. It's over.

The Speaker: The member for Guelph-Wellington has two minutes in which to respond.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'd like to thank my colleague from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, with whom I shared time last night, and the members from Nickel Belt, Scarborough Southwest, Simcoe North and Niagara Centre, who have commented.

First of all, last night the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh reinforced the importance of this bill, the consultative process that has gone on in terms of improving it, and the importance of the accountability provisions in the bill, which I must emphasize, contrary to what the member from Nickel Belt has said, are negotiated agreements. It is true that after a certain period, if there is an inability to negotiate, there are other mechanisms there to bring the process to a conclusion, but I would point out to you that that is not unusual. All negotiated processes under the Labour Relations Act, for example, have some process where at the end of the negotiations, if they are unsuccessful, they must reach a conclusion.

I want to talk about the volunteers on hospital boards, because I too have volunteers on hospital boards. The volunteers in my community do a wonderful job. Not only do they work on their own hospital boards, but some of the members from those hospital boards actually sit on a county-wide health network that works on joint planning for the hospitals. That work will continue under Bill 8. Those volunteers will continue to do marvellous work.

Finally, I must take issue with the member from Niagara Centre when he says that the amendments have brought no improvements. In fact, I have had a number of constituents in my office who have said thank you—

The Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 8. Having spent a great deal of time in cities right across this province in the hearings relating to this bill, I am pleased to now have this opportunity in the Legislature to call on the minister to withdraw the bill.

As has been said before here, and we just heard from the previous speaker from Niagara Centre, this is an historic event in one respect. That is that in all of the years that I've been in the Legislature, I have yet to see one bill that was so unanimously condemned by every single stakeholders group that came forward. It was as though the government had created this bill to create unity. They should have called it the unity bill, because what it did was unify every stakeholder group in the province against this piece of legislation. It was like the lion sitting down with the lamb, because whether it was doctors, nurses or hospital boards that came forward, or unions representing front-line health care workers, all of them didn't have a good thing to say about this bill.

They came forward with amendments over the course of the hearings, and I show you this because I want to demonstrate the number of amendments that were proposed throughout the course of these hearings by stakeholder groups. These weren't amendments that were put forward by the NDP caucus or the Conservative caucus; these were amendments that were brought forward by stakeholders who obviously did the best they could to bring forward these amendments, hoping beyond hope that the government would listen at least to some of these amendments.

1540

You know what is interesting? For a government that came forward on the election trail and promised to implement democratic reform measures, to make government more transparent, to give a greater role to backbenchers—I see the member from Scarborough Centre, who travelled on this committee and whom I saw cringing with embarrassment on many occasions when stakeholders came forward and condemned this bill that he had been sent out to defend by the Minister of Health. He did a good job. I have to say that he spoke well, but he wasn't convincing because even he wasn't convinced. He felt embarrassed that the Minister of Health would have put something like this out for consultation.

Obviously consultation is an important process. It was our government that started the process of putting bills

out after first reading so that we could get direct input from the public and from stakeholders on specific provisions of a bill, but I can tell you, just because a bill goes out after first reading, that doesn't mean that you don't consult with stakeholders prior to formalizing that bill, constructing that bill and putting into legislation significant measures that affect the health care system of our province.

I recall the first day in committee when the Minister of Health came forward and spent an hour with the committee. He presented the bill, and it was as though he saw it for first time, because when we started questioning him about the intent of the bill and the various flaws that were there, he immediately admitted, even at that initial stage, in that first hour of hearings, that this is a very flawed piece of legislation. So off we went, on the road, and we started to hear from various groups about what these flaws would do to the health care system, and to hear repeatedly from stakeholders that for a bill that was intended to improve health care, it stands to destroy health care as we know it in the province.

I would like to take this opportunity to read to you from a letter that was sent in by York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill, in my riding. It reads, in part, "given the way the bill is drafted, that Bill 8 will have the opposite effect and fundamentally undermine medicare in Ontario."

Interjection.

Mr Klees: I hear carping from the back. Speaker, I would appreciate it if you would ask the member to kindly settle down so that we can get on with legitimate debate in the House.

The letter goes on, "We strongly oppose the way Bill 8 undermines the role of hospital boards by imposing agreements on them without negotiation or their approval. The bill also circumvents the board's responsibility to govern the affairs of its organization. We are deeply concerned"—and this is York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill—"that by undermining local voluntary community governance, our hospital will find it increasingly difficult to recruit community leaders to sit on our board.... We strongly feel that the government needs to act quickly to address these fundamental shortfalls in the bill."

Contrary to what the carping from the backbenches is, this bill, even after all of the revisions that we have now, does not address that fundamental concern. It's still not in the bill. Either the member in the backbench who's doing the carping hasn't read the revised bill or doesn't understand the appeal that is being made by these stakeholders to preserve the integrity of the local boards in our hospitals. Either way, we have a fundamentally flawed piece of legislation before us and it's not in the best interest of the people of Ontario.

No one is saying that the health care system doesn't need improvement—it does. We have an ever-growing population and the pressure on our health care system is horrendous. We are spending more per capita in this province on health care than most western world

jurisdictions, and yet we continue to fall behind the expectations that people have of our health care system.

I want to read a comment made by Southlake Regional Health Centre. This is, again, an excellent hospital in York region, located in Newmarket. In their comments they again point to an area of the legislation that so undermines the authority and ability of the local board to do its job, to represent the health care needs of the community, to ensure that the appropriate policies are put in place, that the appropriate priorities are addressed within that hospital, and to ensure that the catchment area that the hospital serves will in fact have its priority needs addressed. I'd like to read it into the record: "After lengthy discussions with our board members, many individual trustees felt that the main impact of Bill 8, which is the undermining of boards and the possible elimination of voluntary governance in Ontario, would compromise their individual abilities and interests in serving on boards post Bill 8."

The fact of the matter is, we now have in front of us a piece of legislation that members who were representatives on this committee refused to listen to. When we went into clause-by-clause, there was not one single amendment that our caucus presented or the NDP presented that was accepted. What is wrong with that picture? I'll tell you what's wrong with it: As a result of this government's arrogance, we have experienced a process that fundamentally undermines the credibility of every single member of the Legislature who believes they are making, and want to make, a contribution to this.

We had a similar thing happen yesterday with the general government committee of this House, which refused on the direction of the Premier to allow the Minister of Finance to come forward and give evidence relating to a scandal that is sitting in the front benches of this government. Because of that kind of disregard for the political and democratic process on the part of this government, and its arrogance, I am going to move adjournment of debate.

The Speaker: The member for Oak Ridges moved adjournment of debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

Those against, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I said the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1550 to 1620.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Would all members who are in favour of the motion please rise and remain standing.

All those opposed to the motion, would you please rise and remain standing.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 5; the nays are 35.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost. The member for Oak Ridges has the floor.

Mr Klees: I'm pleased to resume debate. Let me clarify, for those who are observing these proceedings at home, what's just taken place here. I just did an interview with the CBC, which asked that same question and the reason for that—

Interjections.

Mr Klees: Speaker, I'm going to let you get order here.

The Acting Speaker: Would the members come to order. I can't hear the member from Oak Ridges and he's sitting about eight feet away.

Mr Klees: Thank you, Speaker. I want to make it very clear to people what's just happened here. We were in debate and I made reference to the fact that, with regard to this legislation, as members who were sitting on the committee hearing recommendations from stakeholders for amendments in the course of sitting in the justice committee and in clause-by-clause, not one single amendment put forward by the Conservative caucus was accepted by this committee—not one. I underscored that that is certainly not consistent with what the Liberal Party promised when they were in the election, that there would be democratic reform, that members of the Legislature would, in fact, be given their due authority and responsibility for bringing forward and helping to make legislation better.

I made reference to the fact that yesterday in the House on the general government committee, the same thing took place. When it was proposed that Mr Sorbara be brought forward for testifying, as he had agreed to do, all members of the Liberal caucus who sit on that committee, with one voice, as instructed no doubt by their Premier, voted against having information disclosed to the committee.

I was moved to move adjournment of the debate because we have available to us in opposition only so many levers to get the attention of government. As I just said in an interview now, it is really the last resort we have to draw attention to the arrogance of this government, that it absolutely ignores not only members of the opposition, but strips members of their own caucus of their right to make their own decisions. No doubt the chief government whip cracked that whip, not only in the justice committee, but he cracked it again yesterday in the general government committee, and he has effectively, on the direction of the Premier, undermined the very purpose for which we're here today.

I would like to share my time with a colleague for the remainder of my comments.

Mr Kormos: You do that at the beginning.

Mr Klees: Really? Again I say, isn't it interesting that members opposite are now refusing that request. I would like to test just how democratic this assembly and members of the government caucus are. I will ask for unanimous consent to allow me to split the rest of my time with my colleague the member for Simcoe North.

The Acting Speaker: I say to the member for Oak Ridges, you don't require unanimous consent. At any point during your remarks you can indicate your willing-

ness or your preference to share your time with another member of your caucus.

Mr Klees: Thank you. I will do that. I will share my time with the member for Simcoe North, who will take up the remaining time that is left.

At this point in time, out of frustration for the reasons I've given, I am moving adjournment of the House.

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

All in favour? All opposed?

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be another 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1627 to 1657.

The Acting Speaker: Would all members who are in favour of the motion please rise and remain standing.

Would the members who are opposed to the motion please rise and remain standing.

Clerk of the House: The ayes are 6; the nays are 27.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Mr Klees has the floor.

Mr Klees: In light of the fact that we seem not to be getting the attention of the government on very important issues of the day, I'd like to take the remaining time to make one final appeal to the Minister of Health.

Not one of the amendments we put forward was accepted by the justice committee for inclusion in the bill, so we now have a bill—Speaker, you've seen it. In all the time I've been in this Legislature, I have not seen a bill after second reading that has as many lines through it and as many amendments reflected in it as this one, but none of which reflects the stakeholders who came forward and who still have significant concerns.

Here's my appeal to the Minister of Health: At least allow this bill to go forward for hearings after second reading, now that it has been changed so substantively. That request has been made by all the stakeholders with whom we met in the course of the first round of hearings. I don't think it's unreasonable.

I'd like to hear from members opposite why they think that would be unreasonable. They have two-minute responses available to them now, and I would ask, instead of carping, why not stand in your places now and tell us you will also support this bill, after it passes second reading, because I'm sure from the speeches I've heard that it will. But it certainly is not a bill that the health care providers in this province can live with. That's the message we've heard.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Speaker, I want to refer you to standing order 23(b), which says:

"23 In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she:...

"(b) Directs his or her speech to matters other than:

"(i) the question under discussion, or

"(ii) a motion or amendment he or she intends to move, or

"(iii) a point of order."

The member has not been directing his attention to the appropriate bill. I just wanted to point that out to you, Speaker, and ask you to bring the member to order

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Certainly all members are aware they have to speak to the issue at hand.

I recognize the member for Oak Ridges.

Mr Klees: I know the member was trying to run out the clock, just one more example of the kind of gamesmanship—

Mr Kormos: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I draw the Speaker's attention to the clock. Your attention having been drawn to the clock, you are compelled to follow the clock.

Mr Klees: Or put the time back on that he took up.

The Acting Speaker: It's apparent to me that the minister was attempting to make a point of order. Certainly it eliminated the opportunity for the member for Oak Ridges to conclude his speech, so I was allowing the member for Oak Ridges a few extra seconds to conclude his speech.

Mr Klees: That is very wise, Speaker. I want to thank you for your wisdom. I will wrap up.

As I said, I'm simply challenging the Minister of Health to allow this bill to go for second reading, and for committee hearings once it has passed second reading. That's not too much to ask. I'm asking members opposite in their two minutes to please stand in their place and at least support that part of the political process.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: Mr Prue from Beaches-East York is going to have some comments of his own in just a couple of minutes.

I've got to tell you, it is sweet, almost, to sit here and watch the Tory opposition members hoist on the petard they constructed during the course of eight and a half years of changing the standing orders.

It is pathetic to have to watch an opposition resorting, as I have many times when the Tories were in power, to 30-minute bell-ringing in a futile effort to draw attention to a grievance. I agonize when I see that being done, just as I agonized over the course of the last eight and a half years when New Democrats had to do it once the Tories changed the rules and effectively shut the door on any meaningful role for opposition members to play in an ongoing debate.

Having set the standard for time allocation and closure motions, be it under the guise of programming motions, the Tories taught the Liberals well. Every draconian, arbitrary and undemocratic practice the Tories engaged in over the course of the last eight years we now see being engaged in by the Liberals. I find that no more pleasant than when it was being done by the Tories, but I take some perverse pleasure in seeing it done to the Tories.

Having said that, I will be using my time, in about eight minutes, to speak to the bill. As I said, Michael Prue, for those folks from Beaches-East York and other fans of Michael Prue, will be making a two-minute comment in about six minutes' time, so I tell those people to please stay tuned.

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My thanks to the member for Oak Ridges for mentioning me in his speech. It's always nice to be acknowledged. Even though what he said may not have been all that complimentary or accurate, it's nice to be acknowledged nonetheless. I enjoyed, as the member did, the time we spent travelling across the province and listening very carefully to the views of Ontarians and all stakeholders in considering this legislation.

We, on our side of the committee table, noted the discomfort of the member for Oak Ridges and his colleagues as we listened intently and as we brought forward amendments, something his government would never, ever have done. We can understand his discomfort, and in fact the bewilderment of the member, because he's not used to seeing a government that's actually working hard and listening hard to what people are saying. He's used to being part of a government that liked to ram through legislation, using closure at every turn. He's used to being part of a government that would not listen at committee; in fact, would not likely have let bills out for public hearings in the first place. So I understand that he may have been a little bit confused at committee as to the process that was going on.

Frankly, I've got to tell you, I'm proud of the work our members have done at committee. We listened extremely closely to the stakeholders, and we've improved this legislation. We've made it very good legislation. I'm proud of my support on committee. I'm proud to support this legislation.

Unlike the previous government, we're determined to tackle the problems in our health care system. We're determined to reform that health care system from an institution-based system to a system that's more community-based, that's more patient-centred. That's not going to happen easily. It's going to require some accountability in the system, and that is why we're working very hard to make sure this legislation goes through so we can continue our reforms.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): It's my pleasure to rise in support of the comments of my colleague from Oak Ridges and also to support his absolute frustration at what this government is doing. They campaigned on a promise of democratic renewal, democratic reform and enhanced roles for individual MPPs. They even went so far as to create a cabinet position of minister responsible for democratic renewal. What they've done is insult every Ontarian, because the very first time that was put to the test, they failed miserably.

We as an opposition that feels the people of Ontario must be represented by a strong opposition, feel we have no option than to register our disgust and displeasure at the actions of this government, not only in this House but in the committee yesterday.

On the question of Bill 8, I too have had letters from hospital boards in my constituency of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. I have sat with the board at the Deep River and District Hospital. I have letters from the

Arnprior hospital. They are, at the very least, injured and even insulted by the position of this government that they are simply going to walk over them and ignore these people in their communities—these people who are the heart and soul of their communities. The Minister of Health can simply brush them aside, should he choose to, and enforce his position on the CEO of that hospital.

1710

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I rise actually to compliment the speaker, Mr Klees. I compliment him because he did stick, by and large, to the issue. I'm not going to compliment him particularly for the tactic of ringing the bells, but I do understand why he rang them. I was in that committee yesterday. I witnessed the complete shutdown of the opposition in a very sensible motion that would have taken the whole issue outside of this Legislature—

Interjection.

Mr Prue: Please. I don't interrupt you, and you very seldom have anything to say.

It would have taken them outside of this Legislature and put them in the committee, where they could have been dealt with without everything that's happening here today. Notwithstanding that, what he had to say about the bill itself made eminent sense.

We see in this bill a number of factors which are not going to allow the bill to do what it's supposed to do. The proposal is to promise to stop two-tier hospitals. In fact, there are two real, great flaws—overwhelming flaws—to the bill. The first is the issue of the accountability agreements, and the second is the toothless tiger that is known as the health quality council.

With respect, Mr Klees did talk about those things, and what is happening in a lot of our hospitals, including the hospitals in the Toronto area, is that members of the boards are coming and telling us privately, as members of provincial Parliament, that they are reluctant to continue working for the hospitals. They feel that they are not being appreciated. They also are telling us that it will be impossible to recruit quality members if the minister has such draconian powers. Mr. Klees is correct in addressing that. This government, in pushing through this bill—I'm asking first that they withdraw it, but if they don't, at least hold hearings again to make sure that this is going to do what it's supposed to do for the boards and the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes questions and comments. The member for Oak Ridges has two minutes to reply.

Mr Klees: I want to thank members for their comments. The fact of the matter is that we are, as opposition members, frustrated at the process that is ongoing here. I want to just reassert the appeal on behalf of our caucus that the government would seriously consider now, once this bill has gone through this phase of the reading, that it does go back out for public hearings.

We don't have to take the time to travel the province. I'm not asking for that. I think it's sufficient for us to at least have a day's hearing here in the Legislature that will

give stakeholders an opportunity to come forward, register their concerns with some of the things that are still outstanding that they feel are important to them. I'm not asking this on behalf of my caucus; I'm asking this on behalf of stakeholders who have come forward. I'm sure that members opposite are getting the same kind of appeal.

So yes, they have the majority to be able to do whatever they choose. They can flex their muscles on this, and perhaps in the short term that will prove something to someone. I don't believe, really, that it's in the interest of the government to do that. I don't think it augurs well for their credibility, for their reputation. It certainly doesn't augur well for health care in the province.

So once again, I close my remarks by simply leaving this as an appeal to the Minister of Health, to the government to allow this bill to go forward for hearings so that we can have one final opportunity before it goes to third reading to make the necessary changes that will ensure effective and sustainable health care delivery in our province.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate on Bill 8?

Mr Kormos: I'm going to speak to Bill 8, I suppose, in due course. But before I get there, let me speak for just a moment, because of course folks watching have listened to the bells. I want to express my sympathy to Mr Klees and opposition members, who have been forced to ring bells to draw attention to what is a legitimate grievance. It's very difficult, as opposition members, when the government uses the heavy hand of its majority to control committees, and when the government whips its members. I guess I understand the process as much as anybody. I suppose, at the end of the day, you've got to have whipping. Mr Levac would probably agree with me. He's the government whip.

But I do feel sympathy; I understand the frustration of the Conservatives. For instance, it would have been so nice had a member of that committee—because, as it was, Ms Churley brought that very rational and reasoned motion, which of course the Liberals, with their majority on the committee, scuttled. It would have been so nice if the committee had had the power to simply unilaterally, without needing majority support, consider a matter like this.

As a matter of fact, I remember standing order 124, which in its day—it was an order that I used often in my early days here at Queen's Park—allowed any committee member to require that the committee spend up to 10 hours on any issue, investigating it and then reporting back on it, so long as the consideration of that matter did not displace any government business. When a committee member made that application pursuant to standing order 124, the competition was between the committee member and the government House leader, because the government House leader would then start shipping government bills to that committee to displace consideration. But fair enough. That was a contest that was relatively even-handed and you lived with the results of it. There was an element of gamesmanship in it.

So I regret that Ms Churley wasn't able to use that standing order 124. When I listen to the Conservatives, like the member for Oak Ridges, express his frustration, I tell him that I suspect he regrets not being able to use standing order 124 to bring a matter before a committee, as a right as a member of that standing committee, for consideration by the committee of up to 10 hours.

Having said that, I want to remind the member for Oak Ridges that it was he and his party that changed standing order 124. You see, I remember debates around standing orders going back a long time now. I remember my admonitions to government members from the very first rule changes: "Be careful what you wish for." I even recall cautioning some members of the government that I was a member of, cautioning them to be careful what they wished for.

Well, I say to the Tories, you not only wished for but got substantial rule changes, and don't expect this government to all of a sudden—notwithstanding the Attorney General's schmoozing of the press gallery with talk of democratic renewal and reform—revert to the old standing order 124. I say to the Conservatives, you wanted to crush the opposition with, amongst other things, the significant alteration that you did to standing order 124. Well, guess who you ended up crushing? Because you are the opposition. You thought you were oh so clever, you were oh so smug, oh so arrogant, oh so cocky, oh so disdainful of the opposition—all characteristics that I witness currently amongst this majority government. Perhaps it is a quality or a characteristic—not a quality, certainly, but a characteristic—of majority governments. The Tories thought they were just sharp as tacks. By goodness, they were going to show the opposition there would be no messing around with the Tories, not when the Tories are in power.

There were members of the opposition who cautioned the Conservatives that governments don't last forever. In fact, the more recent history of provincial legislatures is that governments are more likely to be defeated than they are to be re-elected. Well, take a look. I'm not saying that we've seen it long enough to witness a trend, but it's certainly been the phenomena over the course of elections. Think about it: Governments are more likely to be defeated than to be re-elected, just as MPPs—I think Mr Prue has made this observation a number of times—are more likely to be defeated than they are to be re-elected. Those are just the probabilities that high-priced statisticians and people like that will tell you.

So I say to the Tories—what is the saying?—you reap what you sow. Well, you sowed some pretty nasty business in this Legislature over the course of eight and a half years. You did. You spat on democracy. You trampled the rights, freedoms and abilities of opposition members. You did. You set a new standard, and now, regrettably, this new government told people that folks were voting for change and they're getting more of the same. Now you've got a new majority government that has no qualms whatsoever about taking advantage of your disdain for this Parliament and its traditions, your disdain for the opposition, making that disdain your own.

1720

New Democrats are voting against Bill 8. The committee process did not serve the bill well. There is no substantial support for the bill. As a matter of fact, as I indicated earlier, it's been a long time, if ever, since I've seen committee hearings around a bill where a government couldn't even come up with somebody's brother-in-law, not even with an impostor. It couldn't hire some Ryerson student to show up and say they supported the bill. There'd be a point at which I would have understood the government getting some young actor, a union actor, I would hope—whatever the base wage is; a couple of hundred bucks—and say, “Please, just go in there for five minutes and say you support the bill.” I'm not sure how ethical it would have been, but heck, I've been around here long enough and witnessed enough of majority governments to understand that. What did Mark Twain say about an ethical man? Mark Twain made the observation that an ethical man is a Christian holding four aces. I don't see anybody over on the government side playing cards. There are a few Christians over there, I'm sure, but I don't see any of them playing cards, never mind holding four aces.

If you really want to talk about improving our health care system, I say that this government, any government, should start talking about directly electing hospital boards. The largest single expenditure of taxpayers' dollars is the health budget. In any given community it's the largest single expenditure of taxpayers' dollars. Yet hospital boards are chosen in dark backrooms, inevitably by little cliques, traditionally of men, perhaps changing somewhat now, when in fact you would find that repugnant if that's how city councils were chosen or if that's how boards of education were chosen or any other public governance body.

I presented a bill in the last Legislature, Bill 114, An Act to provide for the election of members of the board of trustees of the Niagara Health System. However naïve it is of me—I apologize in advance—I believe in democracy. I believe that directly elected representatives who are accountable to their electorate can do an exemplary job, and that's what democracy is all about. When you're spending public dollars on something as important as health care, the introduction of real democracy to hospital governance would be the most effective and meaningful way to import some real, true reform to health care, to the delivery of health care and the expenditure of those health care dollars.

So I continue to be an advocate for directly elected hospital boards. I find our current hospital boards to be no more democratic than the Canadian Senate, and that's a group of unemployed, mostly elderly people, most of them incapable of working anywhere else, and the ones who are aren't in the Senate other than for a couple of days a month anyway, just enough to pick up their paycheque. Talk about corporate welfare bums, you've got the Senate welfare bums who should be ashamed of themselves. Find me a senator who will advocate for Senate abolition and I'll find you one I'm a fan of.

If we want real reform in the delivery of health care, let this government adopt my proposition for direct election of hospital boards and, by the way, let's abolish the Senate while we're at it.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments.

Mr Prue: There are no members of the government who want to comment on such a good speech and no members of the official opposition.

Mr Kormos: They're not here.

Mr Prue: Yes, there is one who wants to comment.

I'm pleased to comment on the speech because I think—

The Acting Speaker: Member for Beaches-East York, would you please take your seat for one second. I think the member is aware it's inappropriate and wrong to mention the absence of any member of the House. Please continue.

Mr Prue: I apologize and withdraw. I was acknowledging the presence of a member of the House. Perhaps I should not have done that. In any event, I've only got a minute left now.

I believe the speech by Mr Kormos was appropriate because it put in a historical context what has happened in this Legislature. This Legislature, of course, will be debating this issue when the appropriate minister reports in the weeks and months ahead on how to democratize this institution and how to make it work better. It works best when all voices are heard and when all members are given an opportunity for meaningful input.

I believe that some input was received around this bill, Bill 8, and that there have been some changes made. To the credit of the present government, this is novel. In my first two years here, almost every recommendation that I saw made in committee or in this House was never acted upon and was rejected without any hearing whatsoever. So this is novel, and I do appreciate that.

But having said that, this is a very flawed bill. It is not a bill that's going to work well. It is a bill that should be withdrawn; it is a bill that should be reworked. Should you choose to rework it, I can think of no better place to start than the suggestion of Mr Kormos. It is time that hospital boards that spend billions of our dollars are democratic.

Mr Dunlop: It's a pleasure to rise again and listen to the comments from the people from the New Democratic Party.

Hon Mr Caplan: What did he say?

Mr Dunlop: I was watching it on TV upstairs. It was very interesting. Oh, yes, I heard all about the democratic renewal and everything like that.

I want to go back to two things. One is the public hearings, and the second thing I want to go back to is the democratic renewal.

We've heard a lot on Bill 8. The member from Oak Ridges mentioned it and I've mentioned it a few times before, but I think it's extremely important that we take advantage of our people here and of the citizens of Ontario and listen to the concerns they have once again after this debate is entered for second reading and we go

to public hearings. I'm sure you'll all agree with that, because the minister responsible for democratic renewal again said that today. He mentioned a few times in the House how important it was for some change here, and that's something we're not hearing a lot of.

I don't know what the Minister of Health's plans are right now, but it's important that we proceed down that path and have a lot more input from all the different stakeholders that are very concerned about this, particularly the stakeholders from our hospital sector, because I'm hearing it continually, day in and day out. We've had a number of letters, and I know there's some controversy around that, but the fact of the matter is that there are some very strong concerns around the role of hospital boards and the fact that volunteers have played a very important role.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Of course they haven't supported it. You know full well they haven't supported it, and we look forward to that future debate.

Mr Klees: I'm pleased to participate in the debate. It's always interesting to listen to the member from Niagara Centre. He makes some interesting points regarding the democratic process, and I don't disagree with him. The fact is that rules were changed in this House.

Hon Mr Caplan: By whom?

Mr Klees: By the former government. They were changed. Every government has changed standing rules over the years.

Here's the issue, though: Those rules, as in fact they were changed, allow for the standing committee on general government to bring forward Mr Sorbara for some hearings, Mr Sorbara having agreed to do that. There's nothing wrong with the standing rules. They would, in fact, have allowed this Legislature to do precisely what members of the opposition were calling for. We would have had an opportunity, as was said before, to have Mr Sorbara come forward, as he had volunteered to do and as the members of that committee and the opposition proposed to do. It was the members of the Liberal Party who were directed, no doubt, by their Premier, by their chief government whip, regardless of what they thought personally, to act as one person and shut it down, to suppress information, to ensure that Mr Sorbara did not have even the opportunity to talk about his circumstances and to clarify—I would have thought that Mr Sorbara would have appreciated that opportunity. I would have thought that in the course of a day's hearing he would have appreciated the time to set the record straight. So I suggest that, drunken with power and the opportunity to shut down and suppress information, they have actually done their colleague a great deal of harm.

1730

The Acting Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre has two minutes to reply.

Mr Kormos: I'm drawn back by the member from Oak Ridges into the secondary consideration, and that is the frustration of the opposition. Mr Klees, the member from Oak Ridges, makes a very good point about being

frustrated at not seeing government members willing to do something other than read the script.

What Mr Klees is suggesting is that it's tough to find a person, a member around here with the guts or the gonads—and I use that in the broadest sense, not in a sexist sense; I use gonadal in the broadest sense. Look, they're as scarce here amongst the Liberals as they were amongst the Tories. And those amongst the Tories, who is the person there with the courage of their convictions like Garry Guzzo or Billy Murdoch or Ted Arnott? Did Ted Arnott ever see the inside of a cabinet office? Did Ted Arnott ever find himself on the receiving end of a juicy perk? No. Did Garry Guzzo ever find himself on a junket? Did Garry Guzzo ever find himself graced with a perk and with a padded position, a non-job that provided a few extra dollars? No. Billy Murdoch—well, Billy Murdoch finally got himself a PA position, but if I recall, it was to Chris Stockwell. So that might not have actually counted, because Chris Stockwell didn't have room for Billy Murdoch in his luggage when he went to Paris.

So look, Mr Klees, don't cry to me about not finding Liberal backbenchers with the guts or the gonads to defy their House leader or whip. They were scarce among the Tory caucus as well, and the few that I recall were effectively ostracized and cut loose. I applaud those with that courage and with the commitment that let them do what was right rather than what might have been politically expedient. But, Mr Klees, thou dost protest too much.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon Mr Caplan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to provide members the business of the House for next week.

Monday, April 5, 2004: Afternoon session, second reading of Bill 31, health promotion act, day two; evening, second reading of Bill 8, commitment to medicare act, day four.

Tuesday, April 6, 2004: Afternoon, second reading of Bill 27, greenbelt protection act, day two; evening, second reading of Bill 8, commitment to medicare act, day five.

Wednesday, April 7, 2004: Afternoon, throne speech debate; there will be no evening sitting.

Thursday, April 8, 2004: Afternoon, second reading of Bill 42, MPP pay freeze, leadoff; no evening sitting.

COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF MEDICARE ACT, 2003 (continued)

LOI DE 2003 SUR L'ENGAGEMENT D'ASSURER L'AVENIR DE L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ (suite)

The Acting Speaker: Further debate on Bill 8?

Mr Dunlop: It's good to see that the Liberals are wanting to debate this so much. One second they're

criticizing the opposition for calling a motion of adjournment or a motion to end the debate, and the next time they don't even want to debate it themselves. So it's interesting to see this. It's very, very interesting to see this tonight.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): The artwork is finished, sir.

Mr Dunlop: You may call it the artwork.

Bill 8 is a very interesting piece of legislation. We've had 72 members that I would have thought would want to say a few words on this. It's interesting to note that they want to bring the debate to an end. They had all kinds of time put aside. What's really interesting is that we're seeing a piece of legislation that many of our constituents, the people who work in our hospitals—I've had people from CUPE come to me, people from the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and particularly from the hospital boards and the administration of the hospitals who are very concerned about the future of this bill.

I have to go back to my hospital boards. I look at the volunteers who make up those boards. I've said this a few times here today. The fact of the matter is they have spent so much time as volunteers in their communities over the years. I believe the legislation or the rules, policies and procedures around hospitals actually allow you to spend up to eight or 10 years on our boards at home. They take the time to really learn the ins and outs of the hospital. They get involved in recruitment of positions and recruitment of different programs within the hospital. It's disappointing when they see that they may be undermined by this piece of legislation.

I'm disappointed in that as well, because these are volunteers. These are the heart of our communities. I know the Minister of Citizenship will probably be bringing out an awards program later on in the year. The fact of the matter is it's all around volunteerism. We have so many opportunities to award our volunteers.

Just last night in this House—it was downstairs—we awarded, I believe, 20-some people with the Order of Ontario, most of it for their accomplishments in the province of Ontario. There are many hundreds of them for the fact that they have spent so much time volunteering in their communities to make their communities better places to live.

We haven't seen that with this bill. It undermines volunteers. It puts the role of the volunteer, the role of the hospital board back in the hands of the Minister of Health. That's disappointing, because I thought we wanted to make these organizations, I thought we wanted to make the hospital boards more sensitive to the communities that raise thousands and thousands of dollars just for small projects.

In my community, I can think of people like the honourable Doug Lewis, the former justice minister for the Canadian government under Brian Mulroney, who single-handedly, with a core group of people under him, raised approximately \$12.5 million for the expansion of our hospital in the riding of Simcoe North, the Orillia

Soldiers' Memorial Hospital. He presented that money to the board for their contribution. Now we're thinking that those types of things will be undermined by the Minister of Health, and that's disappointing.

What's more disappointing is the fact that we're looking at an opportunity for this committee, as there are so many people who want to have a lot more input on this. The former Minister of Transportation, the honourable Frank Klees, the member for Oak Ridges, would actually like to see this move forward. He's not asking for province-wide consultations for committee hearings after Bill 8. What he is looking forward to is to come back here to the House and actually have meaningful debate right here in the Legislature under our committee hearing system. I hope the minister will allow that to happen. I hope the House leader will allow that to proceed. We're looking forward to that type of debate.

Hon Mr Caplan: We've already renewed democracy.

Mr Dunlop: Well, you talk about—I'm hearing the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal talking about his concerns. Your Attorney General talks about democratic renewal, and I don't see anything happening there. I see nothing happening in the fact that he actually wants to do—

Mr Berardinetti: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just draw your attention to page 18 of the standing orders, section 23(b), where it says that the member must direct his or her speech to the matter under consideration. With all due respect, this member across from us is not directing his speech to the matter and issue before us today.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. I know that the member for Simcoe North knows he's got to speak to the bill. I know he's talking about health care in his local hospital. I would suggest that he's speaking to Bill 8.

The member for Simcoe North has the floor.

1740

Mr Dunlop: The fact of the matter is that volunteerism in our hospital is a key area of—

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: I don't know if you've ever been around a hospital or not. Do you know what the hospital boards do in your area? Do you know what the auxiliary does? It's all about volunteers. It's all about attracting people. I'm sorry if he doesn't know what his hospital boards do, but the fact of the matter is, he has no idea what he's talking about.

Mr Berardinetti: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I apologize for this, but once again, with all due respect, the member is not directing his speech to the matter, which is Bill 8. He's asking about volunteerism and whether or not I myself know anything about hospitals. I think that is beyond the scope of this bill.

The Acting Speaker: In my opinion, the member is speaking to Bill 8 and he's making relevant comments with respect to the governance of hospitals, which is the issue raised by Bill 8.

Member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: Naturally, if you take volunteerism out of the hospital boards and the auxiliaries, then you destroy the health care system. I'm sorry that you don't agree with volunteers, because obviously you don't or you wouldn't have brought up that ridiculous point of order. It's as simple as that. The bottom line is that volunteers are a very important part. Not only that, but the fact of the matter is that our volunteer board members are the heart of our hospital system.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Member, take your seat. Would the House come to order, please. The member for Scarborough Southwest, I've already ruled that the member is in fact speaking to Bill 8. Have you got another point of order?

Mr Berardinetti: Yes, I do: page 20, number 23(h), where a member "makes allegations against another member." He's making allegations against me. I ask that he withdraw those allegations and I would ask for your ruling on that.

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the member make any inappropriate allegation, but if the member for Simcoe North would like to withdraw any comment that he's made, he's certainly welcome to do so.

The member for Simcoe North has the floor.

Mr Dunlop: May I have some time put back on the clock for the time he's wasted talking about nothing?

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: Pardon me? I know that they really don't want to talk about health care and they don't want to talk about volunteerism. They want to try and rush this bill through any way they possibly can. And of course, what they also don't want referred to is the fact that they're taking away the committee hearings after second reading. That's very, very important as far as we're concerned.

There's an opportunity here. They know the number of concerns and amendments that were not made here. There's an opportunity here for much more debate and an opportunity for a lot more committee hearings. Mr Speaker, I think you're probably very much aware of that. I know they want the debate to collapse. That's likely going to happen. I'm very disappointed, with 72 members, that they would actually—all the people who are wanting to be in cabinet here, and they're simply going to move in this direction.

I want to go back for a second to the volunteerism aspect, because I do think that under Bill 8 you're going to gut the volunteerism out of our health care system. This government talks about democratic renewal etc, and in the very heart of it, they are removing that.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: I've been looking forward to this for at least four minutes.

I say to the whip for the official opposition, you've got 24 members. You've got to have your members here. This is a government tactic. It's like the Tories, who never spoke to bills, thinking that they could exhaust the opposition. Do you remember that? When the Tories

were trying to shut down debate on a bill, what they would do is they wouldn't put up any more speakers. Don't express shock and outrage at what you saw. If anything, express some admiration for your sleazy tactics being replicated by this government. You see, that's what has happened. Is it democratic? No. Is it fair? No. Does it create healthy parliamentary debate? No. Is it impressive to the public? No. Is it, at the end of the day, fundamentally—oh, I can't use the word because it's unparliamentary, but if Diogenes were here with his lamp, he'd leave the room unsatisfied. Yes, it is.

But the fact is, it's a tactic that majority governments use. You used it. There are only seven of us. When you've got 24 members, you've got to get a few people here in reserve. So Tory members who are sitting in their offices, please come down to the chamber. Don't spill anything on the way, but please get down here as quickly as you can. I know it's Thursday afternoon, but here we are—this is called ragging the puck. We've got 12 more minutes to make this work, to take us into a new sessional day. Do you understand, whip for the official opposition? You've got to have your people here. You've got to explain to them, "No, you can't go home early. That's what you're supposed to do on Friday." You've got to be here, because these sons of guns may collapse the debate by not putting anybody up to speak. They may not even put anybody up for the two-minute responses. The Tories have to be here. You're the guys with the big budget. You're the guys who have the numbers. You've got to have folks here.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I just want to make sure the people watching across the province are very clear that the comment made about the member for Scarborough Southwest not appreciating volunteerism really concerns me. I don't think the member across understands the great history of volunteerism in Scarborough—great mayors like Gus Harris, Frank Faubert, Paul Cosgrove, Brian Harris. Scarborough is one of the most active places in the province when it comes to volunteerism. They have some of the hardest-working volunteers. In fact, today we mentioned Scarborough General Hospital, which was hit by SARS. The volunteerism in Scarborough is second to none.

I just want to make darned sure that we, as members of the Legislature, don't leave any doubt in anybody's mind that, as much as Toronto is a huge megalopolis, thanks to the former government, there are still very strong, vibrant communities in Toronto, and Scarborough is one of the most vibrant parts of the so-called—the city of Toronto, I'll call it. I just want to make sure, because I'm sure that if Brian Ashton ever heard us put down the people of Scarborough, he would not be very happy, as the sitting councillor from that area. I just want to make sure unequivocally that we in no way support what the member from Simcoe North has put in our minds. I think he probably didn't understand that the people of Scarborough are very sensitive when you say, of all things, something about volunteerism, when it's probably the home of volunteerism in the GTA.

Mr Klees: I want to compliment my colleague from Simcoe North for his remarks. To the member for Scarborough Southwest, who on two different occasions—really three—interfered with points of order, again, evidence of tactics by the government that add nothing to the debate, that certainly interfered and took some six minutes out of my colleague's time to discuss the issues. I don't think it goes unnoticed by people who are observing these proceedings around the province. I think it just continues to speak to the arrogance of a government that has an agenda that deflects information that people from across the province want to put forward.

I would say that my colleague from Simcoe North was not in any way suggesting that volunteerism is not alive and well in Scarborough. What he was referring to was the member from Scarborough Southwest, who clearly did not understand the bill, because to stand in his place and call a point of order because my colleague was speaking to the issue of volunteerism clearly demonstrates he has no concept of one of the most fundamental aspects of Bill 8. In debate we have said time and again that volunteers are going to bail from the health care system if this bill is passed in its current form. I want to compliment my colleague for the work he's done in understanding and debating the bill.

1750

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? The member for Beaches-East York.

Hon Mr Caplan: Stand up for Scarborough.

Mr Prue: Yes, I will stand up for the people of Scarborough, having lived there myself for a portion of my life. I want to stand up for Scarborough the same way I did at Metro Hall and at city hall when Scarborough was experiencing some difficulties, and standing up for the late councillor and mayor Frank Faubert when he was trying to defend that great city.

Scarborough is a great place. I also want to say that I don't believe the member from Simcoe meant any umbrage to the people of Scarborough. It is a place that has a long community history, a history that is more than 200 years from the time when the first settlers moved into the area, started to farm it, and to this day it has a huge number of people who volunteer for everything, including their historical board which I still go out to Scarborough Town Centre to see. One ought not to take anything away, but having said that, I believe what the member was trying to say, to be fair to him, was not against the people of Scarborough, but about the importance of volunteers to all of our communities. They're as important in Scarborough as they are in East York, as I'm sure they're important to Simcoe, the west end of the city of Toronto, Niagara Falls or anywhere.

This is what needs to be said: This bill will not do what is necessary to encourage volunteers because it leaves too much power in the hands of the minister to take over the roles and responsibilities of the hospital boards. That's what needs to be addressed in this bill. It is the one lacuna, the one weak spot of the bill that needs to be addressed. I agree with some of the previous

speakers that it needs to be addressed and should be addressed in additional committee hearings once we have finished this stage within the Legislature. They need not be long committee hearings, but they need to be dealt with. We need to protect our volunteers.

Mr Klees: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I want to draw to your attention that, while the member for Simcoe North was in debate, the member from Scarborough Southwest on three occasions took—I was watching the clock—at least three and a half minutes of the member's time for debate. I suggest to you, regarding the member's privilege to have his say in this House, that had they been legitimate points of order, I wouldn't be raising this point of order. But they clearly weren't—

The Acting Speaker: To the member for Oak Ridges, there were a couple of interruptions and I ruled the member for Simcoe North was in fact speaking to the bill. I'm now pleased to recognize the member for Simcoe North with a reply to the questions and comments.

Mr Klees: On a point of order—

The Acting Speaker: The same point of order?

Mr Klees: Yes, my point was that I felt it was important that the member be given back the three minutes of his time in recognition of that.

The Acting Speaker: I'm not going to add three minutes.

Hon Mr Caplan: Apologize.

Mr Dunlop: First of all, the heckler, the minister of infrastructure over there, maybe will read Hansard on Monday. That will give you an opportunity to see what I said to the people of Scarborough. I'm simply saying he didn't know what he was talking about. No one mentioned one comment, not one thing, about insulting anyone from Scarborough and you know it. You have these idiotic comments over there. The fact of the matter, what I'm talking about, is that Bill 8 undermines the volunteers in the province of Ontario. It's that simple. The volunteers start with the hospital boards. Then it works its way down through the system to all the people who work on the auxiliaries and all the people who do fundraising across our province. It's insulting to those people to take away that power and give it back to the Minister of Health. You're take away volunteers in the province. That's what's happening.

I'm sorry if the member from Scarborough didn't understand what I was saying, but no one insulted anybody as far as volunteerism is concerned. Quite simply, if you go back to Hansard on Monday, maybe you'll take the chance to read it instead of re-announcing announcements that we had made previously under your ministry and under SuperBuild.

Perhaps you can read what actually took place today and see if anybody from Scarborough was actually insulted. I don't think so, because I have no intention of apologizing to this guy for anything I said. That's for sure. You can be sure of that. There's absolutely no way.

Bill 8 undermines volunteerism in the province of Ontario. It's that simple.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Would the members please come to order. We've got approximately three more minutes and then we can adjourn the House. Please come to order and allow the member to conclude his response. I'll give the member a few extra seconds to do so.

Mr Dunlop: I've been interrupted a number of times this afternoon trying to make a few comments here simply because they're trying to kill the clock. They don't want to debate this. They want to push this thing through very quickly. They're so arrogant in the manner in which they're actually determining this.

I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to say a few words on Bill 8. I appreciate the comments made by my colleague Mr Klees from Oak Ridges.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate on Bill 8.

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I'm certainly pleased to have the opportunity to continue debate on Bill 8. Obviously all of us on this side of the House know how important the bill is and how important it is that we devote the right amount of time to a very significant bill that will benefit the people of Ontario.

Being a member of city council for 13 years and being right there on the front lines watching what happened in our community in Niagara Falls—I'm sure other members around the table saw the same situation happen in their communities. I think it's important, just for the record, that it be indicated why this bill has come forth, because there are some significant reasons why we're in this situation. I want to touch on those. I can tell you that all of the reasons I'm going to present in fact were reasons and situations we had in our community in Niagara Falls.

First of all, fewer nurses per capita than any other province: That's what we inherited from the previous

government. We were ninth out of 10 provinces for the number of family doctors per capita. I can tell you that in my riding, I think we were the third or fourth highest city with the least number of doctors. It was a very difficult situation. I can tell you on a personal level that my doctor left the profession and it took me and a number of his patients about a year to find a doctor. So I've personally gone through it.

We were eighth out of 10 provinces for health care expenditure per capita. More importantly, and I saw this first hand in my community, there had been no increase in base funding for community mental health since 1992.

I also want to talk about accountability because that's a significant part of this bill. Some of the things that happened with the previous government, the staff reporting to the public on emergency room backlogs in the year 2000 and on, why do you think they stopped reporting? The numbers were so high they didn't want the public to know about it.

They prevented the Provincial Auditor from auditing how health care dollars are spent. Everyone who watched television or received mail from the provincial government—they wasted health care dollars on tax cuts, and specifically on political advertising.

I want to read these into the record. I keep hearing constantly that nobody who attended those committee meetings supported the bill. I had the pleasure of touring Ontario as well. During those meetings there were a number of positive comments. I want to read a couple of them. "We support the overwhelming principles"—

The Acting Speaker: The member for Niagara Falls, would you please take your seat. It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 pm.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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