



No. 31

N° 31

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

First Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 14 April 2004

Mercredi 14 avril 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

Hansard on the Internet

Hansard and other documents of the Legislative Assembly can be on your personal computer within hours after each sitting. The address is:

<http://www.ontla.on.ca/>

Index inquiries

Reference to a cumulative index of previous issues may be obtained by calling the Hansard Reporting Service indexing staff at 416-325-7410 or 325-3708.

Copies of Hansard

Information regarding purchase of copies of Hansard may be obtained from Publications Ontario, Management Board Secretariat, 50 Grosvenor Street, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1N8. Phone 416-326-5310, 326-5311 or toll-free 1-800-668-9938.

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

L'adresse pour faire paraître sur votre ordinateur personnel le Journal et d'autres documents de l'Assemblée législative en quelques heures seulement après la séance est :

Renseignements sur l'index

Adressez vos questions portant sur des numéros précédents du Journal des débats au personnel de l'index, qui vous fourniront des références aux pages dans l'index cumulatif, en composant le 416-325-7410 ou le 325-3708.

Exemplaires du Journal

Pour des exemplaires, veuillez prendre contact avec Publications Ontario, Secrétariat du Conseil de gestion, 50 rue Grosvenor, Toronto (Ontario) M7A 1N8. Par téléphone : 416-326-5310, 326-5311, ou sans frais : 1-800-668-9938.



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 14 April 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 14 avril 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TAXATION

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): The McTaxMe—excuse me—the McGuinty government is at it again. With one hand on the wheel and the other in your pocket, they are determined to drive the Ontario economy into recession canyon. After promising in their election platform not to raise taxes, they have shown over and over again that a Liberal promise is meaningless.

Their latest plan to tax meals under \$4 is so unconscionable as to cause one to lose their appetite. This tax is a full frontal assault on the poor, on seniors and on average working families in the province of Ontario. This tax will cost jobs and place an already ailing industry, still trying to recover from SARS, in a very difficult position. Restaurateurs such as Don Carty, Tony Yantha, James McCluskey and Marty Recoskie, in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, have told me that this tax is absolutely wrong and will lead to job losses.

The McGuinty government claims that this new tax will help fight obesity. Well, the fat is in their heads. This tax is a cash grab, period, from those in society who can least afford it. It's no wonder the Premier's approval rating is so dismal. He's in a hole, yet he rejects the ladder and instead reaches for the shovel. Keep on digging, Dalton.

ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I rise today to speak of our history and celebration thereof. As we approach the anniversary of D-Day, the struggle of our Canadian soldiers at Normandy on June 6, 1944, I would like to take this opportunity to commemorate and pay heed to the hundreds of thousands of Canadian soldiers and youths who fought on our behalf to ensure the success of the Allied operations in World War II.

On that fateful day, 20,000 Canadian boys were killed or wounded, a fact that is eloquently written in a trilogy by George G. Blackburn, a lifetime member of the Lost Villages Historical Society in my constituency. His first-hand experiences helped him pen the *Guns of Normandy*, the *Guns of Victory*, and *Where the Hell are the Guns?*

History is the key to our future. By learning and understanding our past, our children learn of our history and culture, and hopefully heed our advice and avoid our faults. I strongly believe that the teaching of history in our children's schools is an essential aspect of the learning process. Our children deserve a solid understanding of the past in order for them to understand their futures.

Recently, Mr Blackburn contacted me with his concerns over the lack of historical knowledge of our children and youth. As a former educator, I concur that history is a key aspect of any child's education, and his trilogy and books like them are important to curriculum studies in Ontario. I stress that all members of this House take the time to educate the youth of their ridings on pinnacle points of Canadian history, such as the battle of Normandy.

STAN DARLING

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise in the House today to honour a remarkable man from the beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. Stan Darling proudly represented his constituents as the Progressive Conservative member of Parliament for 21 years, from 1972 to 1993, through six consecutive elections. He passed away on Easter Sunday, April 11, at the age of 92.

Stan was a wonderful family man and a great friend. Throughout his life, he distinguished himself by his service to others. I can't possibly mention all the boards and organizations on which Stan Darling served.

He was reeve of Burks Falls, president of the Georgian Bay development council and a member of the Burks Falls Lion's Club, where he had an exceptional attendance record for over 60 years.

Stan gave me his kind support as I embarked on my political career. In his 90th year he spent a day with me campaigning door to door during the 2001 by-election and more recently served as honorary chair of my 2003 campaign. He has been a great role model for me.

Stan was an outstanding politician. He made a point of attending every riding function and taking care of as many people as he possibly could.

He will always be remembered on Parliament Hill for his crusades for the environment and against acid rain pollution. One of the highlights of his political career was the signing of the treaty on acid rain in 1991.

Stan was a generous man, donating to charity all the profits from the writing of his memoirs, *The Darling Diaries*.

Few will come close to Stan Darling's outstanding record of service to his constituents, his family, his friends and his community. He is an inspiration to all of us in public office. Stan Darling will be sadly missed by his family, friends and the community in which he served and lived for so many years.

EDUCATION

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): On Tuesday, March 9, 2004, I had the pleasure of visiting Mason Road Junior Public School in my riding as part of the Minister of Education's back-to-school initiative. During this visit, I met with staff and students, along with Toronto District School Board trustee Gary Crawford.

Mr Don Snow, principal, took me on a tour of each and every classroom of the school, which caters to students from junior kindergarten all the way through grade 6. I heard first hand the concerns, dreams and suggestions on how to improve the education system.

This school educates students who come primarily from immigrant families and single-parent homes. This means that teachers have the challenge of not only making sure the students are successfully taught the curriculum required by the Ministry of Education, but also acting as a social and emotional support to many of these students.

These challenges led many teachers to tell us that they would prefer to have smaller class sizes, especially in the all-important early grades. They also want to be partners in working with the government to improve the education system, rather than being portrayed as obstacles to change. On that note, Principal Snow would like to convey to the government his satisfaction with the approach that Minister Kennedy and the Dalton McGuinty government are taking when it comes to respecting teachers and his desire to work with them.

1340

KEMPTON HOWARD

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I stand today to pay tribute to and honour the life of Kempton Howard. Kempton was 24 years old, handsome, bright and full of positive energy, which he shared with others. He grew up in the Blake-Boulton community until he was shot and killed in December by a single bullet to the head near his home. That murder is still unresolved.

Kempton was an amazing young man, full of promise. He had developed into a role model for other young people and was awarded a youth Ontario Volunteer Service Award. He had just secured a Boys and Girls Clubs of Ontario scholarship for college this year.

Kempton was a respected and effective youth leader and mentor in the Blake-Boulton community. He was a part-time staff person at Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre, contributing as the leader of the Torch Club, an after-school children's program leader, a head

summer day camp counsellor and a basketball coach for youth. He was 24 years old.

Kempton Howard will be forever remembered in the hearts of the children and youth of the Blake-Boulton community, colleagues at Eastview and other Boys and Girls Clubs, as well as other communities throughout Ontario.

Since Kempton was murdered, I have come to know his mother well and admire her greatly. Despite her overwhelming grief, she continues to participate in the community and is involved in a neighbourhood safety plan. She knows that is what her beloved son would want.

I want to take this opportunity to offer my sincere sympathy to Kempton's mother, Joan Howard, his brother, Kareem, and his relatives in Trinidad. I know he will live forever in our hearts.

BRAMPTON ARTS COUNCIL

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I want to bring attention to an important milestone that has been reached in the riding of Brampton Centre. This year, the Brampton Arts Council is celebrating its 25th anniversary.

The Brampton Arts Council is an important community organization in my riding. It is a non-profit, charitable organization. It has provided essential support and advocacy for artists and has served as a strong voice for the Brampton arts community.

Brampton has a vibrant arts community. It includes our actors, singers, dancers, painters and musicians. The Brampton Arts Council has been a pillar of support for our arts community. The arts council has been instrumental in recognizing the Brampton arts community. For example, this year Paulette Murphy was named the arts person of the year. Paulette is an artist, entrepreneur, architect, painter and ambassador for the arts. As well, for over 20 years the Brampton Arts Council has awarded bursaries to Brampton high school students who plan to further their education in the arts.

In recognition of this milestone, I would like to personally invite each member of this House to my Queen's Park office, where 26 Brampton artists have lent their paintings for display. Please come and see the amazing talent from my riding, which the Brampton Arts Council has supported for over 25 years.

HATE CRIMES

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Earlier today, representatives of the Ontario branch of the Canadian Jewish Congress called on the provincial government to provide additional assistance in their efforts to prevent further outbreaks of anti-Semitic vandalism in Ontario.

Our party strongly supports their call for help. I was proud to serve in a government under Premiers Harris and Eves which held a strong commitment to community

safety. Our government took many steps on this front, including the hiring of 1,000 additional police officers.

With the increased acts of anti-Semitic crime in our province, we have to act quickly and effectively to stamp it out. It's all well and good to offer condemnatory words for these kinds of despicable acts, but we have to ensure that we transfer those words into meaningful action. That can translate into a range of initiatives: tougher laws, increased policing, electronic surveillance at vulnerable sites, and a ban on plea bargaining, to name a few.

We've got to send a clear and unequivocal message: If you engage in this kind of activity in Ontario, you will be caught and you will pay the maximum penalty possible.

The scum who commit this type of hateful, thoughtless and hurtful crime have no place in Ontario.

VAISAKHI

Mr Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): Mr Speaker, through you to the people of Ontario: In the spirit of multiculturalism, harmony, tolerance and celebration, I would like to inform all members of this House that today is the 305th anniversary of Vaisakhi, a very important day for the Sikh community.

On this day in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th and last guru, founded the Khalsa, the Sikh brotherhood. He gave Sikhs a name, a visible identity and a code of conduct and discipline. In a sense, Vaisakhi is the origin of the Sikh nation. One of the world's great religions, Sikhism emphasizes the equality of mankind, truthful living and the remembrance of God at all times.

There are over 200 million Sikhs in the world, well over 300,000 of them in Canada, and in a particularly vibrant community that I'm blessed with in my own riding of Etobicoke North.

The first Sikhs settled in this country more than a century ago and they have contributed to the growth and development of this country, which they continue to do with full force. Their vibrant cultural organizations have worked hard not only for the Sikh community itself but also for the larger Canadian community. Most recently, they celebrated the transport from India of 149 copies of their holy scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib.

I'm sure that every member of this House and every member of this province will join me in extending congratulations and best wishes to the Sikh community on this auspicious occasion.

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Yesterday I had a chance to discuss Premier McGuinty's abysmal 25% approval rating in a Toronto Sun poll. I suggested one of the reasons was because he breaks promises on a regular basis. But don't take my word for it. I want to let you know what folks are saying across Ontario, particularly about Dalton McGuinty's newest plan to bring in the Dalton McGuinty meal tax.

In her column today, Christina Blizzard wrote the following on the McGuinty meal tax: "Sure, you can argue 8% on a \$4 meal is only 32 cents. Who's going to miss that? Well, a low-income senior on a fixed pension is going to feel it. A single mom picking up juice and muffins for her children is going to have to scrape deeper."

Here's an excerpt from an e-mail I received in my constituency office: "Everything keeps going up, like hydro, water, gas, taxes, but" does McGuinty "realize every time our bills go up, my husband doesn't get a raise? No, it's just less money we ourselves have for groceries, raising kids and anything else" our family needs.

Carly Epps, another hard-working Ontarian, is quoted in the Globe and Mail today as saying, "I don't think we need a sales tax on it," meaning the meals. "Why is that benefiting anyone? Who is benefiting really, besides the government.... I don't really think it's beneficial." Taxpayer pockets seem to be Dalton McGuinty's favourite side dish when his tax stomach starts grumbling.

In the business section in the Toronto Sun, Linda Leatherdale summed up the opinion of Ontarians by saying, "Only six months of government under Premier Flip Flop" McGuinty "and Ontario taxpayers are" mad as—I'll leave that to your imagination.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe I have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is it the pleasure of the House? Government House leader.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move, pursuant to standing order 96(g), that notice be waived for ballot item number 11.

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

DEFERRED VOTES

COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE OF MEDICARE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR L'ENGAGEMENT D'ASSURER L'AVENIR DE L'ASSURANCE-SANTÉ

Deferred vote on the motion by Mr Smitherman 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): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The bells rang from 1349 to 1355.

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

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Duguid, Brad	Pupatello, Sandra
Bartolucci, Rick	Duncan, Dwight	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bentley, Christopher	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Racco, Mario G.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Fonseca, Peter	Ramal, Khalil
Bradley, James J.	Gerretsen, John	Ramsay, David
Broten, Laurel C.	Gravelle, Michael	Rinaldi, Lou
Brown, Michael A.	Hoy, Pat	Ruprecht, Tony
Brownell, Jim	Jeffrey, Linda	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Sergio, Mario
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Craitor, Kim	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Crozier, Bruce	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wong, Tony C.
Delaney, Bob	Oraziotti, David	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dhillon, Vic	Parsons, Ernie	Zimmer, David
Di Cocco, Caroline	Peters, Steve	
Dombrowsky, Leona	Phillips, Gerry	

The Speaker: All those opposed, please rise.

Nays

Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Murdoch, Bill
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Prue, Michael
Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Runciman, Robert W.
Dunlop, Garfield	Martel, Shelley	Scott, Laurie
Flaherty, Jim	Martiniuk, Gerry	Wilson, Jim
Hudak, Tim	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 55; the nays are 18.

The Speaker: Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Mr Speaker, I request that Bill 8 be referred to the standing committee on justice and social policy.

The Speaker: The bill is accordingly referred.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): In the absence of the Premier, my question is to the acting Premier, whoever that is over there. There is a non-confidence motion to be debated today, and for good reason: non-confidence in the current government of Ontario.

The motto around this place used to be, "Promises made, promises kept." It is now, "Promises made, promises broken," including a fundamental promise, the promise in the Taxpayer Protection Act, the promise that Mr McGuinty signed during the campaign: "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise that if my party is elected as the next government, I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters."

This morning the Minister of Finance was asked at a press conference about this pledge. The learned Mr Benzie of the Toronto Star asked, "You said you're not going to raise income taxes. You said that categorically. The Premier said the same thing." The Minister of Finance said, "It comes from the campaign. We said during the campaign that we're not going to raise personal income taxes, and we're going to be true to our word on that." Which is true, the word of the Premier that he will not raise taxes or the word of the putative Premier that he will not raise personal income taxes?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): After that long run of hyperbole, it was interesting to see the member finally get to the end of it.

He raised the issue of non-confidence. The fact of the matter is that, notwithstanding all his claims, the people of Ontario spoke about the lack of confidence in that member and that member's party while they were the government in Ontario.

Our party looks forward to the opportunity to stand and be proud of the record we have as a government, because we're working to enhance the quality of the services that Ontarians require, and that stands in sharp contrast to them when they were in government. So with respect to the non-confidence motion the member spoke about, I'll be voting with all the confidence in the world in the work we're doing in this government, working hard on behalf of the people of Ontario.

1400

Mr Flaherty: We did not hear whether the Premier's promise applies or the Minister of Finance's promise applies. Perhaps they can answer when they're in the House.

Taxing and spending is what this government is all about. Another promise was to hold the line on taxes and to balance the budget. Now we see spending in excess of \$2.4 billion by that side in less than six months—new spending of \$2.4 billion—and not only that, but this morning an announcement of another \$500 million, half a billion dollars. Now they're up to \$3 billion. How are they going to pay for it? They're going to pay for it with a soup-and-salad tax to grab \$200 million from the lowest-wage earners in this province. Can you assure me, acting Premier, that you will not finance your spending spree on the backs of the lowest-wage earners in Ontario?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I find it amazing that the honourable member stands and talks about promises made and promises kept, and then likes to talk about the foundation of that government and their last budget in this province. Is that member prepared to stand in his

place and say that the promises made in that budget were kept? Since the veil has been lifted, the people of Ontario now actually know of the activities of that party when they were the government of this province. Today our Premier is standing with leaders from labour and business, and they are laying out, on behalf of the province, an ambitious plan to underscore the viability and vitality of the economy in Ontario by investing in the automotive sector, something this party and this government are indeed very proud of.

Mr Flaherty: That was a loud response, but uninformative and not responsive to the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Flaherty: The people of Ontario still want to know whether you're going to finance your spending spree on the backs of the lowest-income earners in the province with a soup-and-salad tax.

The acting Premier is also the Minister of Health. Maybe he can help us with this logic: You say you're going to justify this soup-and-salad tax on the basis of healthy eating. Would the Minister of Health explain to the people of Ontario why it is unhealthy to eat soup and salad, and why they should be taxed for the privilege?

Hon Mr Smitherman: Continuing the theme, that party, when they were the government, chose to have a budget at Magna. Today we stand with the automotive leadership in this province—labour and business—making a commitment to investments in the automotive sector, because we know that those provide great jobs for the people of Ontario.

With respect to the honourable member's question about healthy eating, I would encourage the honourable member to take up the advice I offer, which is the theme I have for myself: continuous improvement. I think we all should look for healthier eating opportunities every chance we can.

The Speaker: New question, the member for Oak Ridges.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Could I have a page, please? I'd like to deliver this to the acting Premier, Mr Smitherman. It's not a prop. I want to make very clear that what I have just sent to the Minister of Health is a very nutritious lunch I bought for him that cost \$3.95. It's a falafel and salad, a vegetarian meal that will be very good for the Minister of Health.

When I think of that tasty lunch prepared by hard-working entrepreneurs, I want to ask a simple question of the Minister of Health: What is wrong with buying a meal like that, and will the minister stand in his place today and admit to Ontarians that his healthy plan for Ontarians has nothing at all to do with health but is a tax grab from the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to stand in my place today and talk about our government's commitment. The essential element of our government's commitment with respect to health is healthier Ontarians in a healthier Ontario. We want Ontarians to be the healthiest Canadians. As a result of that, our government believes we should be encouraging peo-

ple to choose healthier options. With respect to all the speculation the member is involved in with respect to exemptions on fast food, these are a figment of the imagination of people who are out there talking about them. I have not speculated around these and I will not do so today.

Mr Klees: Whether the minister wants to speculate or not, it was not the restaurant and hotel association that floated this trial balloon. It is in fact the government that has been proposing that this take place. Only Mr Sorbara and Mr Smitherman and the Premier would suggest that to tax this kind of meal, which is a vegetarian meal and has absolutely nothing to do with fat, has nothing to do with big business, could be pawned off on the people of Ontario as the minister's health plan for Ontario. Why doesn't he at least stand in his place today and admit to the people of Ontario that it has nothing to do with health, that it has everything to do with scraping the bottom of the barrel and picking the pockets of ordinary, hard-working Ontarians? Why don't you just admit that?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I find it interesting that the member is from a party that imposed upon the poorest Ontarians a 22% cut in their welfare rates, is a member of a party that had a minister of the day who gave advice to people about how to shop for dented tuna cans, and would be offering advice about this government's initiatives to deal with the challenges that those most vulnerable in our society are facing. We have taken important steps. I want to make it absolutely clear that when I spoke last Thursday to the Empire Club, I conditioned the argument to Ontarians about taking personal choice and personal responsibility in eating healthier. I did not speculate about any tax.

Mr Klees: Well, in that case, we trust the Minister of Health has been lobbying his Finance Minister not to go through with this ridiculous idea. What this government fails to understand is that by floating trial balloons like this, there are true consequences. There are consequences for investors, for job creators and for the kind of investment confidence that people will have.

I want to read to the minister a letter from a constituent. "The fact of the matter is that the food service industry experience shows that every 1% increase in sales tax results in more than 1% drop in sales. The significant decrease in sales following elimination of the exemption will result in many industry job losses, primarily for youth." Will the minister at least confirm for us today that when this tax grab takes place, it won't be done under the auspices of a health plan proposed by this minister?

Hon Mr Smitherman: Last Thursday I made a speech to the Empire Club. I recommend it to the member. It spoke about many items, issues this government plans to initiate to enhance the quality of life of Ontarians by asking them to be partners in improving their own health. We think it's critically important in our society to make mention of the fact that some foods are better than others. I stand as someone who has been very taken to telling the personal story, because in my life I haven't always made those choices appropriately.

What I can confirm to the honourable member is that the Minister of Finance is responsible for bringing in a budget in this province and he will do so in a fashion consistent with this party's values. He will not do so in a fashion like that party did, out of this place, and frankly with numbers that turned out to be out of this world.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is again to the acting Premier. Howard Hampton, our leader, is in Hamilton today at Rankin's restaurant, a place that specializes in low-cost meals. He is there to start our province-wide petition against your outrageous 8% soup-and-salad tax. Minister, those who order the popular specials at Rankin's restaurant, the \$3.99 daily specials, are just a few of the 1.5 million people who order something under \$4 at restaurants in this province every day. Statistics Canada tells us that most people, the poorest people spend 21% of their income on meals away from home, higher than higher-income people.

My question to you is quite simple: This is an attack on millions of low- and moderate-income Ontarians and it has nothing to do with obesity. Will you tell us today that you will not impose this unfair tax for meals under \$4?

1410

Hon Mr Smitherman: The member, in his question, mentions low-income Ontarians, and I'm pleased to report to this House that this government, in fairly short order, has taken many significant steps to enhance the quality of life for people in Ontario. We've raised the minimum wage. We've reduced work hours legislation. We've brought in a rent bank. We are getting back in the business of making investments in affordable housing. My colleague has brought in a tuition freeze. And the fact of the matter is that, after a very short time in government, this government is standing out in contrast to that government on our commitment to enhance the quality of life for the poorest in our province.

Mr Prue: The question was quite simple. The question is, yes or no? Are you intending to impose this tax? Yes or no? That's the question and that's all we want to hear today. We don't want waffling, we don't want going all over the place. Just answer the question. People across Ontario want to know.

Hon Mr Smitherman: If the member were listening carefully, he'd know that I said earlier that it is not the responsibility of this minister to speculate on taxation matters. It is the responsibility of the Minister of Finance to present to the people of the province of Ontario a budget that outlines the government's commitments and priorities, and the Minister of Finance will do that.

HYDRO RATES

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I didn't get anywhere with that question. Let's try a different minister. This is a question to the Minister of Energy. Mr Minister, tomorrow you'll be outlining your new plan on the electricity sector and how it will run. No doubt, you

will spin all of that to say that you're helping consumers, but unless you close the spot market, we are afraid that consumers will not be helped but will continue to be zapped by rising hydro rates.

My question to you is very simple: Because the rates have gone up so far so fast because of the spot market, will you do the right thing and protect consumers from profiteers by closing the hydro spot market?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I will be outlining our plans tomorrow. Prices did go up 40% when the NDP were in office, but he must have missed the last 18 months. The previous government imposed a price cap that cost the treasury \$1.7 billion, led to no new supply, and failed to address the mess that was left by his government when they left office.

So we're taking a prudent approach to making sure that small consumers have a predictable source of supply, predictable pricing, and I'll be outlining the details of that tomorrow.

Mr Prue: Again, I'm not getting much of an answer, so I'm going to ask it in very simple terms. The consumers have been zapped over the last number of years. They have been zapped by 32% because of the spot market. Are you going to get rid of the spot market? Are you going to protect consumers, or are you going to allow costs to escalate for all things dealing with hydro? Very simple.

Hon Mr Duncan: What I can tell you is that for any party to pursue the policy that was pursued either by that party or the other party will result in consumers being zapped even more. We're going to take responsible action—we've already begun to do that—to address the very serious questions.

I am very proud of the initiatives that Premier McGuinty has undertaken in conservation. Contrast that with the NDP. We've invested a quarter of a billion dollars in conservation within four weeks of taking office. They cancelled all conservation initiatives when they were the government of Ontario.

Let's talk about hydroelectric power. They cancelled the Conawapa deal in 1992. Had that deal been in place, we would not be in the mess we're in today. There was a short-sighted government that left an awful mess. The next government left an awful mess. The McGuinty Liberal government is going clean up the mess of those 15 lost and painful years.

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): To the Acting Premier: During the election campaign, the Liberals had no problem making campaign promises. In fact, you had so many campaign promises you had five different platforms. Could you direct me on what page of what platform you promised to impose the new McGuinty meal tax?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I find it interesting that that member,

suffering from amnesia, apparently, likes to forget the role they played in creating financial conditions in this province. They brought in a budget at Magna where the numbers might as well have been written on a whiteboard, because they bore very little resemblance to reality.

I'm proud to say that we have taken office and we have taken responsibility for the affairs of the government of Ontario, and in a broad variety of areas directly related to our platform we've been able to move forward and fulfill commitments, on some of which I'll be pleased to respond to the member in supplementary.

Mr Hudak: If I were the member across, part of the McGuinty government that seems to have forgotten any campaign promises, I wouldn't be talking about amnesia. In fact, the answer to my question, which the member dodged in a bunch of bluster, is "No page." There's no page; there's no reference to the McGuinty meal tax. It was never mentioned. You want to know why? Because it's a bad idea. Taxpayers reject it. Taxpayers are angry about it.

Acting Premier, the McGuinty government has brought forward all kinds of wacky ideas. You brought forward tolling Highway 69. You brought forward mandatory retesting of all drivers in the province. After letting them twist in the wind, you finally shot down those trial balloons.

You're twisting in the wind once again. Will you do the right thing and put this sick dog of an idea to rest? Will you just say no to the McGuinty meal tax?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I know the honourable member wants me to speculate with him, but I will not. Instead, what I prefer to do is talk about some of the things our government has already done. With respect to children's services, we've enhanced the support for children with autism. On community and social services, we repealed the lifetime ban on welfare. My colleague has been very active on the democratic renewal front. In education, we invested \$112 million in literacy and numeracy. In the environment, we have moved to enhance the number of water inspectors.

My point very simply is this, Mr Speaker: The honourable member likes to make wild assertions about our campaign commitments. Here's the commitment that I make to the honourable member: If he continues to sit in his place and watch this government and its acts, I'm sure that he will see all of the progress that we're making on the commitments we took to the people of the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question. The member for Ottawa-Orléans.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

FORMATION PAR APPRENTISSAGE

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The supplementary will be asked by the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan.

Ma question est pour la ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités. Hier, vous vous êtes associée au premier ministre pour l'annonce exceptionnelle concernant les programmes d'apprentissage dans la province. Notre gouvernement a annoncé la somme de 18 \$ millions pour l'amélioration de ces programmes dont bénéficieront plus de 28 000 étudiants. Nous savons tous qu'une économie forte et prospère dépend d'une main-d'oeuvre hautement qualifiée. Je sais que cette annonce est une bonne nouvelle pour les résidents de ma circonscription à Ottawa-Orléans et un bienfait certain pour l'économie locale.

Madame la Ministre, quelles seront, sur la communauté d'Ottawa, les incidences et les retombées de ces mesures?

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Yesterday I was very pleased to stand beside the Premier at Centennial College as we announced a program of apprenticeship supports that will benefit programs in every single one of our public colleges across the province. I'd like to take this opportunity also to thank all of those colleges for submitting proposals for how they would like this money to be applied to their programs. We announced \$18 million, and of that amount, La Cité collégiale will get almost \$180,000 for the electrician and general machinist programs. Algonquin will get over \$1 million for programs there. That will include auto body repair, e-learning and several other apprenticeship programs.

1420

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My community of Thunder Bay-Atikokan also appreciates the importance of quality apprenticeship programs. Confederation College, located in Thunder Bay, serves a population of 230,000 spread over 215,000 square miles. We need skilled workers to work in our pulp and paper mills and manufacturing plants. It is important for northern residents to have access to training and educational opportunities within their home communities.

Minister, can you tell me and my community what this announcement means for Thunder Bay?

Hon Mrs Chambers: I'm very happy to say that Confederation College in Thunder Bay will get almost \$350,000 for their programs in carpentry, pulp and paper and motive power trades, and almost \$275,000 for a variety of other trades, including automotive service technician, brick and stone mason and general carpenter, just to name a few.

INTEREST RATES

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is to the Chair of Management Board. Will you be the minister who sets the interest rates for Ontario savings bonds to be issued this spring?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The Minister of Finance, of course, will be dealing with that issue.

Mr Flaherty: The whole issue is that the securities area has been designated by the Premier to go to the Chair of Management Board. The setting of interest rates for Ontario savings bonds is one of the fundamental acts of the government each year in the securities industry. The whole idea is to maintain the confidence of the securities industry, despite the fact that the current Minister of Finance is the former chair of the audit committee of a company that's being investigated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, by the Ontario Securities Commission and by the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency.

Would the Chair of Management Board please advise whether he is prepared to go back to the Integrity Commissioner and raise the issue, which has not been raised with the Integrity Commissioner, about which minister should set the interest rates for Ontario savings bonds this year?

Hon Mr Phillips: I think the public should recognize that the Integrity Commissioner has looked at this matter in considerable detail. He has determined that Minister Sorbara, at every step of the way, made the right decisions. He concludes, among other things, in this very extensive note, having examined all this, "I remain of the view that the steps you took on February 25, 2004, were sufficient."

I repeat: The Integrity Commissioner, a respected former judge, looked at this matter in detail, determined that Minister Sorbara made exactly the right decisions at every step of the way and concluded in his report: "I remain of the view that the steps you took on February 25, 2004, were sufficient." I believe that answers the matter.

WORKPLACE SAFETY FOR STUDENTS

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Labour. With summer fast approaching, Ontario students are completing their studies and are out looking for summer jobs. Unfortunately, each year a number of students are injured while working at summer jobs. I know from personal experience that this is a serious problem—my own daughter actually broke her pelvis on a summer job. What is the Ministry of Labour doing to ensure that young workers are safe on their summer jobs?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): The member for Guelph-Wellington raises a very important point. Our government is determined to make sure all workplaces are as healthy and safe as they possibly can be. Of particular concern is the issue of young workers. In the year 2002, there were almost 14,000 lost-time injuries involving young workers, so there is an enormous problem.

To address the problem, we have to address young worker concerns and employer concerns, and we have to work as a government with a comprehensive plan. With respect to the information that young workers themselves can acquire, I would make reference to several places,

because it's important that young workers have the information they need to ask the right questions. For example, they can access the WorkSmart Ontario Web site to obtain information and find sources for further information before they actually go to the Web site. We're pleased to report that occupational health and safety is already part of the educational curriculum that has been developed through the Ministry of Education and is supported by labour groups. And finally, at this time of year we have the WSIB's spring young worker awareness campaign to make them aware of the issues.

Mrs Sandals: I'm pleased to hear that your ministry is working so hard with various groups to try and make students aware. I was quite involved in working with the Ministry of Education around health and safety issues in my former role. Can you tell me a little bit more about where students get this information and about what the role of employers is, because they're the other piece in this picture?

Hon Mr Bentley: The member for Guelph-Wellington once again hits on a very important point. I've outlined the areas where the students can find the information, but the employers are a crucially important part of this.

Several weeks ago, I announced the minister's health and safety action groups. We have already had meetings with construction, manufacturing and health groups, bringing together front-line expertise from both labour and management. One of the common themes that is emerging is that employers need to do a better job of making sure that young, entry-level workers have the training they need in order to be able to keep themselves safe on the work site, because it's agreed by everyone that a healthy workplace is the most productive workplace. I'm taking this advice and hope to have initiatives in the very near future to address this very important point.

WATER QUALITY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Your government promised to protect the environment and public health, but you're hammering local communities with the bill. In Walkerton, for instance, the Ontario Clean Water Agency is forcing the municipality to pay 60% more than they had agreed to. They had to clean out their reserve fund to pay. Municipalities and individual property owners are getting hit with high bills all over Ontario. Trailer parks and community centres are being forced to shut down. When are you going to live up to your responsibilities and pay for the costs of clean water, as promised?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): It's a very important question. I know that many members in this House are hearing from representatives in their communities around the challenges in providing clean and safe drinking water to the people who live in their communities.

This government, as we've said many times during the campaign and since we formed government, is committed to implementing all of the O'Connor recommendations. There is a part of that report that very clearly indicates that when it comes to providing safe and clean drinking water within communities, that responsibility falls to the local communities. As well, we have in Ontario the Safe Drinking Water Act that was passed in the Legislature and lays out a structure for full cost recovery for those municipalities to provide safe drinking water to their residents.

Ms Churley: That is totally unacceptable. The mayor of Walkerton says a typical water bill used to be about \$15 a month. Now it's more like \$75 a month and many pay over \$100. That's on top of higher hydro rates, insurance rates and so on. They can't afford it. It's happening all over the province. Two resident groups representing Waldemar and Marsville in East Garafraxa township met with me about their huge water bills. They can't afford to pay them—pure and simple. These communities need your help. I'm asking you again: will you meet with representatives from these communities, because they've been trying to meet with you or representatives from your government to no avail; and will you help these communities pay for their water bills, because they cannot afford it?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: I have met with the mayor of Walkerton, and I am very aware of the challenges they have. Some of the challenges they have right now are short-term, because they are in a transition, and they are looking to upgrade their system.

With respect to other municipalities in this province, the Premier of the province has recognized that we have an infrastructure deficit in Ontario. To that end he has created the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, which will assist municipalities to meet these needs to provide clean water to the residents in communities across the province.

1430

BORDER SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Acting Premier. Yesterday I was shocked by Premier McGuinty's seeming indifference to the re-entry into Ontario of avowed supporters of Al-Qaeda, the Khadr family. In response to media questions the Premier in effect said, "It's not our problem."

The 9/11 commission in the United States is making it clear that that attack was preventable. In the United States the alarm was sounded, but no one listened. In Ontario, it appears Premier McGuinty just doesn't get it. This is our problem. The vast majority of law enforcement is provincial, and I ask the minister, what steps are being taken when known terrorist sympathizers are on our doorstep?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I listened to the exchange yesterday too, and what shocked me was that that member, in

questioning the Minister of Community Safety, seemed to suggest that minister was walking in his shadow. What I would say is that the member yesterday defended himself well and put forward this government's position. This government's position is that we continue to fulfill our responsibility to work with the federal government, to participate with the federal minister, as the Minister of Community Safety said yesterday.

We all believe that what comes with Canadian citizenship are the fundamental responsibilities and obligations of being a great Canadian, and we believe this is something that all members in all Houses in all Parliaments across our country agree with. For that member to try and find partisan advantage and disagreement where there isn't any I think is inappropriate.

Mr Runciman: That's nothing short of a disgusting response that should concern every thoughtful Ontarian. Today the chief of police—

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government Mr Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Surely the word "disgusting" can't be parliamentary language.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. We're getting quite emotional about this issue. I'd ask members to temper their language a bit and let us hear the question and the response. Thank you.

Mr Runciman: Today Toronto Police Chief Fantino has expressed his concern about the vulnerability of Toronto to a terrorist attack. We have prominent supporters of Al-Qaeda plopped on our doorstep and all we're getting from this Liberal government is indifference and smug arrogance, which we heard again here today.

Minister, we know the Khadr's are famous for losing passports. Can you tell us if your officials have looked into whether or not they also have a history of losing provincial documents like health cards and drivers' licenses? Please, be responsible for a change and give us an answer.

The Speaker: Order. I want to warn the members that the line of questioning seems to be on a different level of government and I just wanted to—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I just wanted to caution you, in addressing those questions, to make sure it's in the direction of—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. That it's within provincial jurisdiction. Minister.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I guess what we have some struggle with on this side is that that member, when he was part of a government, let an Al-Qaeda sleeper cell disappear into magic, into thin air. He acknowledges it himself, and today he's back on high ground. Our government—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr Smitherman: We take the health and safety of Ontarians very seriously. The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services in his answer yesterday

indicated very clearly that not only has he been working closely with federal officials, but also that he enjoys a very strong relationship with the chief of police in the city of Toronto. To suggest that this government is not involved in those kinds of matters is just plain wrong. The fact is that we will continue to be vigilant on behalf of the people of Ontario, to work in the interests of their health and safety.

LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, yesterday the World Trade Organization announced that it would uphold the existing US lumber duties. I believe it's crucial for the public to know that our government will continue to fight for the interests of the softwood lumber industry in this province. Can you elaborate on the impact that this decision will have on the lumber industry of the province of Ontario?

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I very much appreciate the question coming from the member for Sault Ste Marie. I know he, along with other northern colleagues in the Legislature, as well as all other members, understand that this particular trade dispute with the United States has impacted over 39 communities across northern Ontario by putting 4,000 people out of work. It is a top priority of this government and my ministry to work with the federal government in trying to resolve this.

While this WTO ruling is disappointing, we are looking forward to the NAFTA panel ruling coming at the end of this month. That panel, we are optimistically feeling, will rule there has been no injury proven by the United States. If that decision comes down that way, then the tariff duties would be returned to our companies.

Mr Oraziotti: Minister, I'm pleased that we are standing firm on our position with respect to softwood lumber duties.

As northern Ontario's economy and that of Ontario as a whole depend greatly on our softwood lumber industry, could you tell us what you are doing to ensure Ontario's softwood industry will get a fair deal?

Hon Mr Ramsay: I have been working with my colleagues across the country, especially with my federal colleague Jim Peterson, the Minister of International Trade at the federal level, who is in charge of this file. We are in constant contact and also in contact with the United States. While there is a litigation route going on at this time, we feel that in the end the only way to resolve this is going to be through negotiation.

I think it's wise and prudent right now to wait to see what the NAFTA panel rules at the end of this month. Depending on that ruling, we need to be seriously looking at some negotiation, not accepting the deal the Americans put forward at the beginning of December but looking at some sort of negotiated settlement that leads us very quickly to free trade, because that's what we all want in this province.

REPORTING OF GUNSHOT WOUNDS

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today as well is to the Acting Premier. Minister, just yesterday I asked your colleague Minister Kwinter when he would bring forth to this House the legislation he promised last December to make reporting of gunshot wounds mandatory. I report he promised separate legislation, not Bill 31.

I must say you all seemed a little content and confused in the feeble manner in which you, Minister Kwinter and the Attorney General are all pointing at each other as to who should take the lead on mandatory reporting of gunshot wounds. Now you're all pointing and saying that Bill 31 seems to be the answer. Minister, will you say here today that Minister Kwinter's promised legislation for mandatory reporting of gunshot wounds will be forthcoming and not just one more broken Liberal promise?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): From the party that once promised not to close hospitals in this province, that was very interesting.

I would say very clearly to the honourable member that the Minister of Community Safety will introduce a piece of legislation this spring. In order for the bill to withstand a constitutional challenge, we're going to make sure that we get the bill right in the first place, and if that takes a tiny bit of extra time, we feel that's a prudent step to take. But I reaffirm the commitment, which is that the Minister of Community Safety will introduce a bill this spring.

1440

Mr Dunlop: Minister, I appreciate your answer. Before you start talking to us and reporting to us on health care, maybe you should learn your own file on health care spending.

Minister, you know that the Ontario Medical Association has already endorsed mandatory reporting. By the way, the Toronto Star has, and so has the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. In 2002, emergency physicians in this province were asked in a survey, "Do you feel there should be mandatory reporting of gunshot wounds, intentional or accidental, by ER physicians?" Over 75% of the physicians surveyed said yes to that question.

So what are we waiting for? What's more important to you: the rights of criminals, or the safety of our communities? Minister, we need the Minister of Community Safety to finally take some action and not just keep warming his seat over there.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Thank you very much for that very generous question, Mr Speaker.

I want to say, in response to the honourable member, just a few things. Firstly, the Minister of Community Safety indicated yesterday that he would be in a position to meet with the Ontario Medical Association this Friday. I've undertaken conversations and am personally supportive of mandatory gunshot reporting. I've made that clear. I reaffirm the commitment I made a moment ago.

I would just remind the member that he stands up and asks a rather sharp question, but while he was a member of the government the then Minister of Health, Tony Clement, vetoed such an initiative.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a question for the Chair of Management Board. Last week, the minister announced that our government will aggressively conserve energy in our own buildings and that we will reduce electricity consumption by 10% by 2007. This commitment represents 62 million kilowatt hours of energy every year. Your four-point plan dealing with various projects, such as 24 lighting retrofit projects and 19 building automation projects, would see annual savings of 24 million kilowatt hours. How does your ministry expect to attain the other 38 million kilowatt hours needed to attain the full 10%?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I appreciate the question from the member for Davenport.

I think all of us share the responsibility of making sure this happens. The 62 million kilowatt hours is a 10% reduction, and if we are going to show leadership in this province I think the people of Ontario will want to see that we, as members of the Legislature, are following through on our own responsibility.

We did announce last week some steps that would reduce electricity use by about 40% of our target. We still have about another 60% to go. We're counting on our public servants to help us with that conservation, but frankly, we're also going to have to make some investments. The announcement last week was for investments over the next 12 months to reduce our consumption by that 40% of our target. We are going to have to make investments over the following two years.

What we've been doing is making sure we set the highest possible priority on energy-saving projects as we look at investing scarce resources in retrofitting our buildings. We've identified specific projects over the next three years that will get us to that target. We've already committed to the projects for the next 12 months that will see us get 40% of the way there. In the following two years, we'll hit the remaining 60%.

Mr Ruprecht: Minister, that's really good news, but let me ask you this question. A few weeks ago, my colleague from Peterborough—you know our colleague from Peterborough—asked you why so many lights were on at night. You responded that they shouldn't be. However, as you walk around the precinct at night you can still see the lights on. In fact, some buildings look like lit-up Christmas trees. Minister, can you explain to the House what your ministry is doing to make sure that these lights are not on when they shouldn't be on?

Hon Mr Phillips: To respond to the member for Davenport, I repeat what I said earlier: We all have a responsibility to save electricity, including getting the lights turned out at night. I would just say that we have a plan that every night our security organization goes

through the buildings to get the lights turned out. I would tell the public that we will complete, at the end of April, some projects at 880 Bay and 25 Grosvenor to automatically turn them off. Just last night, as a matter of fact, we completed a project in the Ferguson Block to automate some additional lights being turned off. The Deputy Minister of Finance told me the other day that the security guard came into his office three times when he was working late at night, wondering why the lights were out.

I would just say to the member for Davenport, we all have a responsibility here. We are trying to automate our buildings so they're turned off automatically, but any of us—when we see lights that are on, let's get them off. We're not going to solve this by ourselves. Collectively we have that responsibility and I'm looking for your support. I would say once again to the public, give us your ideas. Go to our Web site and let us know if we can do better.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, yesterday I asked the Premier the question I'm about to ask you and he wasn't very helpful. That's why I wanted to ask you this question: You announced money for the apprenticeship enhancement fund yesterday. We're not talking about the innovation fund or the other fund, the pre-apprenticeship program. We're talking about, specifically, the apprenticeship enhancement fund. Can you tell me, are you spending less or more on this fund than the previous Conservative government?

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'm happy to respond to the question from the member from Trinity-Spadina. We're talking about a \$10-million budget. Yesterday we announced \$9.3 million in new programs. The remaining \$700,000 was already spent earlier in the year, out of this budget. So the entire \$10 million has been spent.

Mr Marchese: I'm glad to hear that, because it wasn't entirely clear from the answer of the Premier. Do you think this fund is adequate spending on capital projects or not? What do you think?

Hon Mrs Chambers: As I indicated in my earlier response to another question on this subject, each project was submitted by the colleges across the province. They know what their constituents need, and I'm really pleased with the submissions that we have received. Every year, if there are funds continuing to do this, I will again look forward to their submissions. I think we've done a really good job as a community, as a system of colleges, to deal with the apprenticeship agenda.

LANDFILL

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): To the Minister of the Environment, in British Columbia

they are destroying 80% of their chickens because of avian flu, and many carcasses are being landfilled. In Ontario, Minister, people worry that you have no plan if Toronto's garbage were to be stopped at the Michigan border. If bird flu landfill was required in Ontario, what would you do, Minister?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): Our government is very proud of our most recent initiative to review the Environmental Assessment Act so that we can actually expedite the process to, in a very environmentally safe way, establish more landfills in the province of Ontario. I believe that the actions our government is taking at the present time are consistent with what stakeholders, municipalities, environment interests, as well as industry interests, have asked for. They asked you for it when you were in government. You ignored them. You gutted the Environmental Assessment Act. Now we have a situation in Ontario where there is a need to look for a better way to site landfills in the province of Ontario, and we're going to address that.

1450

Mr Barrett: You've just said, and your leader has said, that Ontario needs more landfills, and that's today. Even without a potential closure of the Michigan border, even without a potential need for an avian flu landfill, for example, whose backyard are you looking at for these new landfills you just talked about?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: The initiative that we have presented to this Legislature and that we have explained will provide a framework so that we have stakeholder partners who have had the opportunity to know first-hand the effect that the tinkering of your government had on the Environmental Assessment Act and the reason why it takes between eight and 12 years to site a landfill in the province. That is not acceptable.

We are looking to improve the process. We are going to involve the appropriate people who will actually be able to provide us with the kind of information and input that we need to move forward and site landfills in a timely and environmentally friendly way.

WATER QUALITY

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Coming from a rural riding like I do, I know what value you place on our community halls. Meeting the new regulation 170 has very much placed a financial hardship on them. In order for those community halls to continue operating, they have brought these concerns forward to me, and I take this opportunity to address the question to our minister. Minister, no one in this government is questioning the importance of public health by ensuring that we have safe water to drink, but what will your ministry do to address the challenges that our rural communities will face in meeting the new regulation?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I very much appreciate the points that have been brought by the honourable member, who obviously is

very ably advocating rural issues to this Legislature. I'm happy to report that at the Rural Ontario Municipal Association conference that was held, I met with 42 municipalities. Many of those municipalities identified for me the problem they have with regulation 170.

Interjection.

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: I find it interesting that the former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment is crowing over there. I would suggest that while he was at the table when this regulation was written, he obviously did nothing to bring those folks to answer as to why this regulation is not going to work well in rural Ontario. I have asked staff at the Ministry of the Environment to review regulation 170 and provide me with options so that we can make it more workable for rural communities.

Mrs Mitchell: I would be very pleased to inform my constituents in my riding. The riding that I represent is a very rural riding, and I know that my fellow members sitting across the way from me also represent rural ridings. I'm sure that if any of them had the opportunity to view how things were portrayed today and the time you took to wait to hear the answer to the question, which is very important—

Interjections.

Mrs Mitchell: Minister, I know that you will help our rural communities in order to meet these new standards. I would like to ask the minister to update the members on the status of the government's work today.

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: The Ministry of the Environment is intent on assisting municipalities to meet our commitment and their commitment, their desire, to ensure that people in their communities have safe water to drink. That is a priority for this government. We are intent on providing the tools that will do that.

Since we formed government, we have established two committees to provide us with advice and direction: a technical experts committee and an implementation committee on how to further implement the Walkerton inquiry recommendations.

I would like to say that today ends a 60-day period during which the public has had an opportunity to review the source protection initiative and provide us with input.

Again, I remind everyone in this House that the Premier has identified the infrastructure deficit in the province. He has established the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal to work with municipalities to assist them to meet this very important need.

RETROACTIVE LEGISLATION

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question. The member for Whitby-Ajax.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I want to hear the member for Whitby-Ajax's question and I will also hear his supplementary.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Attorney General. Your duty, as you know, is greater

than your political duty in terms of your obligations as chief law officer of the crown. I suggest there is a worrisome trend toward retroactivity in legislation that is being brought before this House.

As you know, in the rule of law we have a presumption against retroactivity; that is, people are entitled to know what the law is when they act. They ought to be able to plan their affairs and know what the law is. One example we saw in this House a bill in October or November repealing the equity in education tax credit, something that people planned for for an entire year last year. Most recently we had Bill 49, which is retroactive in effect as well.

I ask the Attorney General whether he has exercised his duty to advise the government against retroactive legislation.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Yes, I have.

Mr Flaherty: With respect to Bill 49 in particular—the subject matter is less important than the principle as we look forward to several years of legislation. Here we have an environmental assessment, someone who followed the rules, went through all the assessment, there was a conclusion in 1998, which is proposed to be repealed by the legislation. Not only that, but there's the repeal of rights to damages and compensation of various types—again, retroactively in this same bill.

My question to the Attorney General is, what advice was given to the government with respect to retroactivity in Bill 49 and the other bills that have come before this House that are retroactive in effect?

Hon Mr Bryant: The member is right. It is important when bills are introduced that they in fact withstand constitutional scrutiny. I can assure the member that we made sure that every bill that has been introduced by this government meets that standard and then some. That's consistent with the Ministry of the Attorney General Act, which the member is very familiar with, and consistent with the constitution. We will continue to introduce legislation that is consistent with the rule of law.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I have a petition entitled "Hands Off Our Food." It has the subtitle "Stop 8% Meal Tax."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government has plans to tax meals under \$4, ultimately raising taxes for working families, despite the campaign promise of, 'I won't cut your taxes, but I won't raise them either';

"Whereas the food industry expects a drop in sales if the PST exemption is lifted, leading to job losses, primarily for youth;

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

"The Dalton McGuinty Liberals support working Ontario families and youth through maintaining the provincial sales tax exemption on meals under \$4."

I affix my signature to this petition.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): "Whereas Ontario enjoys the continuing benefit of the contributions of men and women who choose to leave their country of origin in order to settle in Canada, raise their families, educate their children and pursue their livelihoods and careers; and

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

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

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

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

I sign my name to this petition with pride.

1500

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NATIONAL CHILD TAX BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

“Whereas in Ontario the ... government ... deducts the child benefit supplement dollar for dollar from those living on social assistance;

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

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

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned,” call on “the provincial government of Ontario stop the claw back of the national child tax benefit supplement and ensure this federal money reaches all low-income families in Ontario.”

These signed petitions were sent to me by the Housing Help Centre in Kingston. I agree with the petitioners. I’ve affixed my signature to this.

IMMIGRANTS’ SKILLS

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls.

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

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

“Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

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

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

I’m pleased to attach my signature to this petition.

TAXATION

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): This petition has a title; it’s called “The Death of the Happy Meal.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Dalton McGuinty government has indicated that it may impose retail sales tax on the purchase of meals costing less than \$4; and

“Whereas raising the price of affordable meals targets consumers least able to afford higher costs, including workers who earn their living on the road, students, and working Ontario families who need the convenience of consuming some of their meals outside the home; and

“Whereas eliminating the \$4 RTS will have a devastating impact on the food service industry, resulting in reduced sales and lost jobs; and

“Whereas this new tax will target outlets such as school” and classes, pizza day, “and hospital cafeterias, as well as small business and quick service restaurants;

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

That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario preserve food service jobs and lighten the tax burden of working Ontario families by maintaining the RTS exemption on affordable meals consumed outside the home.”

I’m pleased to support this in support of all those children and families that—

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

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I know this petition will upset the members of opposition, but I have to read it anyway.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario”—it’s addressed to you as well, Mr Speaker.

“Whereas the parliamentary tradition in Ontario of presenting annual budgets in the House of the Legislative Assembly has existed for decades; and

“Whereas the previous government in 2003 showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of Ontario by presenting a budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory; and

“Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly condemned the actions of his own party’s government;

“We, the undersigned, therefore petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to uphold parliamentary tradition and hold a public presentation and debate of the 2004 budget, and every budget thereafter, by our publicly elected members of Parliament inside the Legislative chamber.”

Since I totally agree, I’m happy to sign my name to it.

SEWAGE SLUDGE

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we the residents of Wasaga Beach wish to bring forth our concerns regarding the transfer of approximately 5,700 tonnes of 14-year-old sludge, which contains metals, from the North Simcoe transfer station to our recently closed landfill site. To date, there are no EBR requirements for hauled sewage. Due to this, and the geography of the Wasaga Beach site being so close to the longest fresh water beach in the world, and other sensitive areas, there exists a threat to the environment and the public’s health. This questionable product should be moved to a desolate location. Once damaged, the environment and people cannot be replaced;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: to stop the sludge from being transferred to Wasaga Beach.”

I have signed this.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of seniors from Black Creek Leisure Homes, like the Farrellys and Allan Strickland. It 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.”

In support I afix my signature.

LANDFILL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I’ll sign my name to that. I’m going to give this to Michael Murray, one of my constituents and a great page here for the last four weeks.

1510

HISTORIC VEHICLES

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of automobile enthusiast constituents of mine. Lennis Trotter, James Cutting and Don Morrison are just a few of them.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario, through Bill 99, enabled owners of historic automobiles to display year of manufacture plates on their vehicles; and

“Whereas John O’Toole, MPP for Durham, has worked hard with others, including MTO staff, to pass legislation allowing the registration of vintage vehicles using year of manufacture licence plates; and

“Whereas owners and restorers of older automobiles have made suggestions for improving regulations governing year of manufacture plates; and

“Whereas these improvements would enable more old auto enthusiasts to display year of manufacture plates and further encourage the collection and restoration of vintage vehicles;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario enact legislation that would make more licence plate numbers available to the public by freeing up the numbers that have been assigned to non-automotive vehicles such as trailers and snowmobiles; and

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario reduce the cost of year of manufacture plates to encourage more owners to make use of these plates and reflect the fact that most historic vehicles are not driven on a regular basis.”

On behalf of my constituents, I’m pleased to sign this in support.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I’m pleased to present yet another petition from seniors in Stevensville at Black Creek Leisure Homes. Merle Beers, among others, has signed these. It 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’m in support with my signature.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Again, I have a petition on Simcoe county landfill site 41.

“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.”

Mr Speaker, I’m pleased to sign this and I’m going to give it to Andrew to present to you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WANT OF CONFIDENCE MOTION

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I move that, in the opinion of this House, since the Premier has not adequately handled the conflict-of-interest allegations involving the Minister of Finance and has not followed the ethical standards promised in his throne speech, the government no longer has the confidence of this House.

I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to this motion. It’s a rare opportunity indeed when we deal with a want of confidence motion in the Ontario Legislature.

I think the circumstances surrounding this particular situation warrant the need for a want of confidence motion. I think the whole issue surrounding the Minister of Finance, Mr Sorbara, in his activities as a director and chair of the audit board of Royal Group Technologies and his subsequent appointment to the McGuinty cabinet and activities subsequent to that, have raised extremely serious issues which have not been, to say the least, adequately addressed by the McGuinty government.

To set the table with respect to what has happened here, the Minister of Finance, Mr Sorbara, prior to his and the Liberals’ election to government in October of last year, served as a director of Royal Group Technologies for over 10 years, as I understand it, and for a number of years laterally as the chair of the audit committee. Those are very serious responsibilities in terms of protecting the interests of shareholders in that company.

This is a publicly listed company on the Toronto Stock Exchange. We all know the concerns over the past number of years with respect to publicly traded companies—abuse, misuse of the trust of shareholders—and we're not talking about, for most part, very wealthy investors and speculators. We're talking about the average Joe and Jane Citizen in this province, people who have their future invested in—it might be a retirement fund, a whole range of investment interests that small and medium-sized investors in this province have made in terms of protecting their future. They rely on elected boards of directors to protect their interests, to ensure that their interests are being well looked after, especially when someone is appointed as an audit chair of the board, who has additional responsibilities to oversee the operations of that company and to make every effort to protect the interests of shareholders and ensure that everything is above-board in terms of the operations and decisions being made by the officers of that company.

The question arises that we now are concerned—not just us on this side of the House—but the Ontario Securities Commission and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are now conducting a criminal investigation, and Revenue Canada is now taking an active role in the investigations underway with respect to Royal Group Technologies' operations and some of the decisions and spending practices of that company. This is now a very serious matter where we have three entities investigating this company. We have the Minister of Finance, who served as a director and audit chair of that company during the time that has come into question with respect to the management of that particular firm.

Our concerns lie around the Minister of Finance's role, of course, but also the fact that he, as Minister of Finance, through his staff, was made aware of the initial decision to conduct an investigation at some point in December of last year. For reasons known best to the minister—and he certainly hasn't confided in us or in the public with respect to his decision, but for reasons that only he can answer to, he opted not to advise the Premier of the province with respect to the fact that these investigations had been initiated sometime in December. He opted for a total of 66 days, over two months, not to apprise his Premier, the leader of his party, the leader of his government, of the fact that a company of which he was a senior director and chair of the audit committee was under investigation by three separate entities, including a criminal investigation by the RCMP. This is totally unheard of and unprecedented in Ontario history.

1520

If you look back at the comments Mr McGuinty, the Premier, made as Leader of the Opposition about the platform of the Liberal party with respect to open government, transparency and ethical standards before the election and the subsequent throne speech—I probably should take a minute to put on the record some of the comments from the throne speech with respect to the ethical standards: “Your new government has made a

commitment to bring an open and honest and transparent approach to government.... It will open up government and its agencies, bring the voices of Ontarians to Queen's Park and make the entire public sector more transparent and responsible....” This doesn't relate just to the Sorbara situation but to a whole range of issues that I'll take a few minutes to get into later.

I was one of the individuals, in response to pressure from the Liberal Party, then in opposition, and the NDP—I was a minister of the Harris government who stepped aside, resigned, when questions were raised about the possibility of a young offender being identified in a throne speech through recognition of the mother, who wanted to express appreciation to the Harris government for establishing a strict-discipline facility in Ontario, which rescued her son from a life of crime. I should point out that that strict-discipline facility, the so-called boot camp, has now been closed by the Liberal government.

The mother wanted to thank our government for saving her son from a life of crime and was identified in the gallery. As a result, the Liberal Party of the day demanded my resignation and said we had committed a crime, that we had breached the Young Offenders Act and I should resign.

A question arose about this. I was not the subject of any investigation, let alone three investigations like Mr Sorbara. I was not the subject of an investigation, but because serious questions of ethical standards were raised, I stepped aside for three months.

I can say a similar situation occurred with my friend from Simcoe, Mr Wilson, when a question arose about one of his staff revealing some public information. Mr Wilson did the right thing. He stepped side until the question was resolved. That's the standard the Harris government set.

Mr McGuinty and his government had all kinds of fine words prior to the election and in the throne speech. But when push comes to shove, when he faced the first real ethical standard of this government, they failed the test miserably, no question about it—perhaps the worst ethical breach in memory.

Interjections.

Mr Runciman: That minister, even though he apparently denied information to his Premier for over two months, is allowed to stay in government. That is unfathomable, and every one of those members across and in the rump over here should be hanging their heads in shame. Not interjecting, not heckling, but hanging their heads in shame. That's the reality, but they don't want to admit it.

They don't want to admit that they're continuing to breach their promises day after day, week after week, month after month—breaking their promises. You wonder why people have no faith in politics or politicians anymore. You are setting the standard. If you want an answer to that question, look in the mirror. Look in the mirror, each and every one of you Liberal members of the Ontario Legislature.

What have they broken so far? At least 20 promises and growing, each and every day. Step aside. Come over and join us. We keep our promises. Join us.

Interjection.

Mr Runciman: Jim Watson, the member in Ottawa, used to be a member of the Progressive Conservative Party. Come back, Jim, come back. Come back where you belong, Jim. Come back. We'll forgive you, Jim. We'll forgive you.

Another issue related to this is the promises, the assurances, that Mr McGuinty and the Liberal Party gave to the people of Ontario during the campaign and again in the throne speech regarding the so-called democratic deficit, where they were going to allow private members of the Legislature—backbenchers of their party and the opposition members, and committee members—to have a real, meaningful role in the business of this place.

I'm very sympathetic to that cause. I was first elected in 1982. I spoke out against the Davis government and the arbitrary decision to purchase a share in an oil company. I suffered the results of that in terms of the government of the day, but I felt good about it and I've felt good about it ever since, that I did what was right. I did what was right and I spoke out about the government of the day.

I've encouraged members opposite. Many of them are new to this place, and it's a very difficult decision to make. I had been in politics for eight or nine years before that. I came to this place with a view that I was not going to be a sheep-like follower, that I was going to stand up for what I believed in, for what my constituents believed in, and not deviate because of pressure from the Premier's office.

Of course, we've seen what's happened here. Many of the new Liberal members have no political experience, and I understand their naïveté with respect to how they respond. We had the representative from Peterborough, Mr Leal, who was the spokesperson at the committee, indicating that he was charged with the responsibility of the government.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Leal the seal.

Mr Runciman: Leal the trained seal. That's what we'll call him: Leal the trained seal.

There they were, professing to be speaking on an individual basis, but Mr Leal gave the goods away. He said, "I have been charged with the responsibility to protect Mr Sorbara's tail." That's the reality. He didn't say it quite that way, but that's the reality. He was protecting the Minister of Finance's tail on this situation.

If we look at that, it should be of concern to all of us, not just us on this side but all of you who came here, I think, with the strong belief that you were going to play a meaningful role in the deliberations and decisions.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): We are.

Mr Runciman: You are not. This was a first real test of all of you with respect to how this matter was dealt with in the general government committee by the Liberal members of that committee, all six of them speaking as one, not because they believed Mr Sorbara did the right

thing, not because this was an ethical standard they supported or believed in. No, they did it because they were told by the whip's office, "This is what the Premier's office wants you to do"—clear and simple, no other answer to it.

You can get up today and try to put a different face on this, but it was so blatant, so clear to anybody participating in the committee or watching it on television or being a general observer of government activities that this was a miserable failure, another very significant breaking of a commitment by Mr McGuinty, which he just threw out the window, rubbed his heel on, and insulted each and every member who ran for his party in the election last year—absolutely insulting. You should all be offended. You shouldn't be standing here defending it.

Don't defend it. You can't defend it. It's in writing. Mr McGuinty stood up here and we heard the Lieutenant Governor read the speech from the throne in which these commitments were made. Get the throne speech out. Re-read it and look at the commitments in terms of integrity, in terms of ethical standards, in terms of enabling backbenchers to play a meaningful role in this place. It was all thrown out the window because of Mr Sorbara and the defence of Premier McGuinty.

Why did he defend a man who refused to tell him for 66 days that he could be the subject of an investigation by three different agencies? Why did he defend him? Why did he direct his backbenchers to defend him? It's a big question.

1530

What's the reality here? Why did this happen? There is no real reason for it other than the fact that the real Premier is sitting in that chair over there. The real Premier, the person really calling the shots in this government, is a man called Greg Sorbara. He's the real Premier.

We know, if we look at the polls before the election, if we look at the polls after the election and if we look at the poll this week with respect to Mr McGuinty, there is very little public support. I know, talking of members of the Liberal Party, that there is not a lot of confidence in their ranks. There wasn't before the election and there isn't now. Their confidence is in Mr Sorbara, and Mr McGuinty knows that. His strings are being pulled. It's shameful.

I've taken up too much time. I know other colleagues wish to speak on this.

After we come in here for a vote at roughly 6 o'clock, I encourage all the Liberal members of the Legislature who believed in the platform they ran on, who believed in integrity in government, who believed in maintaining a high ethical standard, to vote with us. Vote for your platform. Vote with the Conservative Party of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Further debate? The member for Guelph-Wellington.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Guelph-Wellington now has the floor.

Mrs Sandals: I'm pleased to rise today to speak in opposition to the motion of non-confidence. In fact, I'm

surprised that this group has the unmitigated gall to talk about the McGuinty government breaking its promises. These people have the ultimate broken promise. They arrived last year at the Magna plant in a whole lot of media hoopla and unveiled a budget which they told the people of Ontario was a balanced budget. Do you think that promise, their promise to balance the budget, was kept? Absolutely not. What did we find when we got here? We found that they had broken the ultimate promise. No more Tory good management—total mismanagement. They were running a deficit of \$5.6 billion, the ultimate broken promise, and what happened? The people of Ontario lost confidence in the Conservative government. That's why we have a McGuinty government today.

They've had the gall to talk about Bill 8 and complain because we are going to have accountability agreements with hospitals. But what about their record? They brought in supervisors and totally took over three school boards. Most of the public knows about that. It got a lot of publicity. What got less publicity was that the Conservative government took total control away from local boards in seven hospital boards, and they have the gall to say that we have draconian legislation. They're the people with draconian legislation.

You don't have to believe me or the Liberal Party about their record of mismanagement. One of the things I've been doing lately that has been very interesting is sitting on the public accounts committee and looking at what the Provincial Auditor has had to say about the Conservative record of mismanagement.

Look at the justice portfolio, the Attorney General's portfolio. We have the longest backlog in our courts in 10 years. Do you know that over half the people in our provincial jails have never been convicted? They're just waiting for a trial, because the Conservatives let our courts get into such a mess that we have a huge backlog.

It isn't just the backlogs in the courts. The Provincial Auditor talked about the mismanagement of funds for building and renovating courthouses, a record where no tendering took place, and suddenly a contract balloons from \$4 million or \$5 million up to \$40 million or \$50 million with no tendering taking place: total mismanagement.

We look at children's mental health. There are more kids on the waiting list, according to the Provincial Auditor's examination, than getting treatment.

Look at the Family Responsibility Office. Deadbeat parents are \$1.3 billion behind in court-ordered payments to their children. What happens if a parent calls from my neck of the woods outside the GTA to say, "Hey, I didn't get my support payment this month"? Some 90% of the time they get a busy signal. That data is several years old and we asked at public accounts, "Where is the most recent data?" Do you know what the answer was? "The minister told us to stop collecting the data." We don't know how bad the busy signal problem is now. They want to talk to us about our record and mismanagement? They are the people with the broken promises, the

mismanagement and a lack of confidence from the people of Ontario.

What about our platform? They like to talk about our platform and the things we promised as Liberal candidates going door-to-door.

First of all, I want to make it clear that we were crystal clear as we went door-to-door and talked to the people of Ontario that our platform was a platform for our whole mandate, for our entire term of government. Nobody said we were going to keep all our promises in the first month or two; no government could possibly do that. But that doesn't mean that we haven't been very busy. We have been here for less than six months, but let me tell you about some of the things we have done to keep our promises and to bring real, positive change to the people of Ontario.

The Conservative government gave hundreds of millions of dollars to private schools. We promised to stop funding private schools and to divert that money to our public schools, and we have already reinvested \$112 million in the most vulnerable children in our province. Promise kept.

One of reasons that we have this awful \$5.6-billion deficit is that this party kept handing out corporate tax cuts that our budget could not afford. We said we were going to stop that, and we did stop that. Promise kept.

When this Conservative government got funding for child care from the federal government, do you think they spent that money on child care? No way. We said we would change that, and we did change that. The new money that has come from the federal government—\$9.7 million—we have spent on child care. Promise kept.

This government, the Tory government, fired water inspectors. What did we end up with? We ended up with Walkerton. What have we done? We're hiring water inspectors, because we know that the people of Ontario want safe drinking water. Promise kept.

They fired meat inspectors. What have we got? We've got provincial plants where the quality of meat has been brought under question. What have we done? We've hired meat inspectors. Promise kept.

Interjection.

Mrs Sandals: They're just confused.

You know, they didn't raise the minimum wage for eight years. In my riding of Guelph-Wellington there are a tremendous number of people who are working poor. They are working very, very hard, they are working at minimum wage, but these people didn't care about the working poor. Oh, they tell you they care about the working poor. They are really concerned about whether McDonald's and Tim Hortons can keep making profits, but they didn't actually raise the minimum wage, ever. We have already raised the minimum wage. Promise kept.

1540

They muzzled the children's advocate. They ignored the children's advocate when they talked about the Toronto Youth Assessment Centre. We listened; we closed it. They ignored the children's advocate when they

talked about problems in children's aid societies. We've invested \$64 million in children's aid societies. Believe me, in my community that is truly appreciated. We kept our promise.

I could go on, I'm sure, for hours and hours, talking about the promises we've kept. It is totally frivolous to claim that this government has not kept its promises. We have. We have an amazing record. I'm sure my colleagues will tell you more about our record, but this is a totally frivolous motion. I am not supporting it.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this non-confidence motion debate, which is the first that we've had in this House since the new government took office. It's an opportunity for all the new members of the Legislative Assembly to act like individual members representing their constituents and express their constituents' views with respect to the performance of this government and the confidence that their constituents do not have in this government. So I expect we'll have a large number of members here at the appropriate time later today to vote in favour of non-confidence; to vote in favour of the motion.

There are good reasons to support non-confidence in this government, including, of course: promises made, promises broken; the integrity deficit that this government has created; and the reality of fiscal irresponsibility that we're seeing with this government.

If I may talk for a few moments about the promises: There are many promises that have been broken. The basic problem is this: When someone seeks to become government or a party seeks to become government, and Mr McGuinty, who seeks to become Premier, decides that his route to power should be to promise to be all things to all people and make in excess of 231 promises, then, regrettably, we end up in a situation where of course those promises cannot be kept. No one can be all things to all people, and that's what the Liberal Party tried to do during the last election campaign.

The most important pledge is the pledge that relates to spending and taxing. The two, as you know, are inextricably linked. In order to support massive spending, a spending spree that this government has embarked on, something in the neighbourhood of \$2.4 billion to \$2.6 billion so far in less than six months—there was another \$500 million today, so we're in the range now of something like \$3 billion of spending in less than six months, in addition to all the other spending, of course, that's part of the operation of government. If they keep this pace up, they'll be at \$6 billion or more in new spending in the first fiscal year of their government, which would be rivalled only, I believe, by the Bob Rae government back in the early 1990s.

The most important promise was the promise with respect to taxes and not raising taxes. Mr McGuinty signed the taxpayer protection promise. Here it is. He signed it. He made a big deal about it, actually, during the course of the election campaign. Mr McGuinty wanted everybody to know that, "I, Dalton McGuinty,

leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise, if my party is elected as the next government, that I will: not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters...." One would think, given that that pledge has been broken, re-broken and broken again, that all members of this House would support this motion of non-confidence in the government of today.

The promise also included not running deficits, and was signed by Mr McGuinty, who is now the Premier. We'll see, of course, in a few weeks. No doubt we'll have confirmation then that that promise, that fundamental promise to the people and voters of the province of Ontario, is broken as well, because it'll be difficult to see how this government could balance any budget if they're going to spend an extra \$3 billion in six months in Ontario.

They are hiding information. The government, we know, asked the public service to cost their promises, and we know that a report was prepared for the government, and we know that the government refuses to produce it. So the people of Ontario are asked to sit in the dark with respect to the costs of these promises. This is the open, accountable, responsible government that was promised by these Liberal members who are sitting opposite here today. How they could have confidence in this government, the government having broken those fundamental pledges to the province of Ontario, is unimaginable.

Now, this promise by Mr McGuinty not to raise taxes or implement any new taxes applied, as you can see, to all taxes. But now they are starting to weasel on this. Now we have a press conference today with Mr Sorbara, the Minister of Finance. He was asked by the reporter for the Toronto Star, Mr Benzie, "No, but you said you are not going to raise income taxes. You've said that categorically. The Premier said the same thing." Mr Sorbara replied, "It comes from the campaign. We said during the campaign we're not going to raise personal income taxes and we are going to be true to our word on that."

"True to our word" on what? Whose word? Who is the Premier? If the Premier is Mr McGuinty, we know what the promise is: "If my party is elected, I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes." That's what one Premier says. Then we have the putative Premier, Mr Sorbara, the Minister of Finance, who now modifies that to say, "I'll be true to my word"—and his word is about personal—"not going to raise personal income taxes." Well, personal income taxes are important. They are a large part of the budget of the province of Ontario. They are about \$18 billion. But the revenues are about \$70 billion, so there is all kinds of tax room there.

I say to the people of Ontario, get ready, because there are huge increases coming against you by this government—this government, this leader; this Minister of Finance, this putative Premier; this nominal Premier, Mr McGuinty, who promised that they would not raise your taxes, and now they are going to raise all kinds of taxes against you.

So that's the promise issue. I hear it in Whitby, I hear it in Ajax, I hear it around the province of Ontario: how truly disappointed people are. How it encourages cynicism, as my colleague from Leeds-Grenville said. How it discourages young people when they look at people in public life and say, "Is this what it means? Is this what it means, that a man who wants to be Premier of Ontario will go out and make 231 promises; promises that he knew when he made them he could not keep?" Look what that does to our young people, and look at the example, the negative example, that is for our young people in the province.

Broken promises; promises made, promises broken, fundamental commitments to the people of Ontario about not raising taxes and about balancing budgets and not running deficits that are being broken by Mr McGuinty, supported, I hope not, by his members here today. I hope they will support this motion of non-confidence when they reflect on their responsibilities as elected members of this Legislature.

There is another reason, a good reason, to support this motion, and that's the integrity issue. This is a big issue across the province of Ontario; it is across our country. When you look at a former Minister of Finance in Ottawa who says that he was unaware of a \$250-million program, \$100 million or so of which went missing; when we have a former Prime Minister of the country who stands up publicly and says, "Well, so what if someone stole a few million dollars?" The goal was worth it because it was national unity, in the view of former Prime Minister Chrétien. So what if someone stole a few million dollars? Well, say that to the person who is going to the Tim Hortons after the budget and has to pay tax for the first time, retail sales tax, 8%, on soup and a sandwich or on a muffin or whatever at Tim Hortons. Say that to them, that it is only a few millions that were stolen.

1550

These are integrity issues, just as it's an integrity issue when the Minister of Finance serves on the board of directors for 10 years or so of a publicly traded company, a company that went public, called Royal Group Technologies, serves as chair of the audit department, becomes the Minister of Finance, and then we learn subsequently and he learns subsequently that the Ontario Securities Commission is investigating a five-year period, during most of which he served on the board, and during a good part of which he served as the chair of the audit committee.

I am familiar with the duties of the Minister of Finance, having had the honour to serve as Minister of Finance for a time in Ontario. I am familiar with the dealings that the Minister of Finance necessarily has with the chair and the Ontario Securities Commission. I am familiar with the importance of market credibility, of there being absolute confidence in the regulators and in the Minister of Finance as the minister responsible for the Toronto Stock Exchange and the Ontario Securities Commission.

This is an investigation of this company not only by the Ontario Securities Commission but by the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency and also, then, by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Companies do not act in a vacuum. Companies cannot act except through agents. The agents that they use are the board of directors. One of the most important functions of the board is to make sure that full disclosure is made to shareholders. The investigation relates to something like \$32 million over the course of five years being exchanged between a casino resort in an island in the Caribbean and Ontario.

Interjection: St Kitts.

Mr Flaherty: St Kitts. This is a concern, that the Minister of Finance of Ontario is preparing a budget now and it may be that later on he is one of the persons cited in one way or another in one or more of the investigations. That's the problem. If we had a high standard being maintained by the Premier of Ontario and by this government, in which we do not have confidence, then it would be clear that the minister should have stepped down until the investigations were complete. Indeed, that was the practice of our government and was followed by Minister Runciman, as he then was, and Minister Wilson, as he then was, both of whom were exonerated and returned to cabinet.

So we have this standard now. We have seen it in Ottawa in the evidence before the House of Commons committee by former Minister Gagliano and former Minister Dingwall. Here is the Liberal standard of ministerial responsibility: "We are not responsible for what goes on in our ministries." Not only are they not responsible, but they don't know, they say, what goes on in their ministries. Well, they take the salary, they take the limousines, they take the Bombardier jets that they buy with taxpayers' money, they take their expense accounts. But they are not responsible for what goes on in their ministries. Worse, they don't know what goes on in their ministries. So what are they being paid for by the people of Canada?

Similarly, in Ontario we need to move to that parliamentary standard that was maintained by the government of Ontario before this government, which is that a minister steps down when a minister is under investigation over a significant matter. That's the standard that we have followed in this country until now with respect to ministerial responsibility. That kind of accountability is essential.

I can tell you once again that in Whitby and in talking to people around the province, they don't get the failure of the Premier to call upon a minister to step aside until he's cleared. He may be cleared; he may be exonerated. If he is exonerated, fine; then he comes back into cabinet. But if he is not, then no harm has been done to the credibility of government, the image of government, with the people of Ontario during that period of time.

I want to talk a bit about fiscal responsibility, because that is the third reason why this government should be held in non-confidence: spending more than \$3 billion of new money, a spending spree that is—

Interjections.

Mr Flaherty: Oh, I know they are going to say, “The government left us a deficit.” Then they are going to say, “Oh, the deficit is more than we said it was because we just went and spent another \$3 billion.”

It’s difficult to be government. At some point you folks over there are going to say, “My goodness, we are the government.” It’s difficult to be government. At some point you have to start making decisions. Some of the fundamental decisions deal with revenue and expenses, taxing and spending, and bringing those two into line.

There is a fundamental change in Ontario as a result of the Harris government, and that was, we moved from non-expectation of balanced budgets to a time when the people of Ontario came to expect and demand balanced budgets in this province. That was a cultural change politically. It has affected the government in Ottawa as well. This is good news, that government should live within its means. People believe government should live within its means.

People also believe that when promises are made, they should be kept. When I look at the revenue of the province, you see substantial revenue growth. These are the estimates that came from the government itself, from the Ministry of Finance, just a few months ago. It’s helpful to look at these. I welcome people to look at them online at the Ontario government Web site, to look at the kind of revenues the province of Ontario is anticipating: very substantial revenues over the course of the next several years.

“On the basis of private sector consensus economic projections, Ontario can anticipate average revenue growth of about \$4.1 billion annually.” Going forward, more than \$4 billion annually. You would think that would be enough for a government to live within its means as we go forward, but no, they’ve already spent something like \$3 billion in less than six months. How are you ever going to balance a budget? More than that, how are you ever going to have confidence from the people of Ontario when you can’t live within \$4-billion increases—staggering amounts of money.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: A little order, please. I can’t hear the member on the floor.

Mr Flaherty: Spending: Now we have a problem, big spending being planned. Total expenses for the current fiscal year, something in the neighbourhood of \$75 billion. You would think you would be able to run a government in Ontario with \$75 billion—staggering amounts of money. Personal income tax, more than \$18 billion; retail sales tax, more than \$14 billion; corporations tax, more than \$7 billion; all other taxes, almost \$10 billion—substantial revenue. As we go forward, we see that the revenues will grow—these are the government’s own estimates—in three years, to 2006-07, to \$81.7 billion.

If there is any prudence exercised at all by this government going forward, it will be easy to balance the budget, not only this year but next year and the year after that, with \$4 billion extra each year rolling in.

Then you look at the taxes. Now they’re planning to tax meals under \$4 in Ontario. This is a tax on students, on seniors. It’s a mean-spirited tax. It’s a tax, I can tell you, that is brought up by the folks who are responsible for revenue in Ontario, year after year. It was brought up with me when I was Minister of Finance. I said no.

Mr Runciman: Just say no.

Mr Flaherty: Just say no. The reason you say no is that that tax is on students, seniors and low-income earners in Ontario. It’s a regressive tax. Why on earth would you impose that tax on those least able to pay in Ontario?

For these reasons, then, for the promises made, promises broken, for the lack of integrity, for the Gagliano-Dingwall standard of ministerial non-responsibility being applied by the Liberals in this House and their fiscal irresponsibility, this tax-and-spend, which we warned the people of Ontario about and which we now see happening, for all of these reasons, I urge all members to vote in support of our motion for non-confidence this afternoon.

1600

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I was struck a number of times by the remarks of the MPP from Whitby-Ajax, the honourable Mr Jim Flaherty. He seemed to ask repeatedly, “Who is the Premier?” “Who is the Premier?” It struck me that the main reason he was asking that question was that he himself is not as yet the Premier. I would like to commit to Mr Flaherty that, for my part, our government will be most honoured to support you in your leadership bid of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, and would consider it a great honour, and perhaps even a great sport, to see you in the next provincial election—or federal, as the case may be.

I’d also like to speak for a moment about the MPP for Leeds-Grenville, the at times honourable Mr Bob Runciman. I’d like to note for a moment that the level of frothing, spouting and gesticulating makes it clear to us on the government side, and I think to the people of Ontario, that the honourable Bob Runciman is the type of individual who believes firmly that the louder it is, somehow it acquires the veil of credibility. Clearly, the MPP for Leeds-Grenville, the honourable Bob Runciman, not to be outdone by Mr Garfield Dunlop, is the type of individual who believes in making a scene and not making a difference.

The Deputy Speaker: I want to take a minute to remind the member that you should, at every attempt you can, use the member’s riding name rather than personal names. Thank you.

Mr Qaadri: Absolutely. The MPP for Simcoe North.

I have to speak against this motion of non-confidence for many reasons, as a member of provincial parliament, as a representative of the great riding of Etobicoke North, as well as of the McGuinty government and the McGuinty vision.

From the throne speech made some months ago, we on the government side have brought forth a number of

initiatives to bring real, positive change to Ontario: our initiative to build a stronger health care system, to be comprehensive, universal, publicly funded and add other quality of accountability; restoring an air of fiscal responsibility and deep respect for the monies that are handed over to the government of Ontario by taxpaying Ontarians; our emphasis on quality education and, I may add, a new respect for the educational communities who, on a daily basis, are engaging in a partnership with the eventual benefactors; that is, of course, the children of Ontario.

As well, there is our mandate to build stronger communities; also highlighting, in particular, our respect for the environment, an entire file, an entire portfolio, an entire mandate that was absolutely abrogated, left in the dust and dismantled by the previous regime; our initiatives in fostering greenbelt protection and smart growth and curbing urban sprawl; laying the foundations for the prosperity of tomorrow, including an intelligent energy policy that will bring forth new supply and conservation and an intelligent pricing mandate.

As well, something that I can speak to very directly, something that was very much missing from the previous regime, is respect and, I would say, further, a celebration of multicultural Canadians, new and newer Canadians, naturalized Canadians, naturalized Ontarians, something that was very sorely missing from the previous regime; and something that perhaps has not really taken place in these august chambers at Queens Park and within the public service is actually engaging Ontarians and the public service directly in an unprecedented consultation and fostering of ideas and of commitment to the bettering of Ontarians and Ontario, our legal structures and our infrastructure of government, as well as the broader public mandate.

In summary, we on the government side are taking responsibility for offering quality public services. We on the government side feel that all these initiatives—whether it's our highways, our energy sector, our health care system or our educational sector, we view these as a sacred trust, as a moral enterprise. Unlike the previous Tory-led government under then-Premiers Eves and Harris, we do not view these areas, these sectors, our sacred trust, as centres for profit to be privatized, to be securitized, to be sold off to the highest bidder and, for example, like the successor corporations Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation and so on, to be used as private fiefdoms, as reward centres in the untendered, secret contracts that seemed to be rife and offered willy-nilly by the previous regime. In sum—I speak with great confidence about this government—we are delivering real, positive change to make good on all our various commitments, whether it's regarding health care, education, building a stronger community or laying the foundation for the prosperity of tomorrow.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): It is my honour and pleasure to speak in support of this motion. The reason we're here is to talk about why we believe this motion is warranted, based on the conduct of

this government, this Premier and of course the finance minister. We've got so many unanswered questions here. On December 22 they became aware that there was an investigation of Royal Group Technologies.. He kept this secret for 66 days, kept it secret from his own Premier, which of course begs the question, who is the real Premier? But that's another story. This went on for 66 days, when there was no disclosure to the Premier that the minister was aware of this. An order in council on February 26 indicated that the finance minister lost his powers and duties with regard to the Securities Act. This investigation was threefold: the Ontario Securities Commission, the RCMP and the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency. It was a huge investigation of Royal Group Technologies that this minister chose to pretend didn't exist or to simply hide from his Premier.

On March 4, he also lost his powers and duties under the Commodity Futures Act and the Toronto Stock Exchange Act. Yet this minister participated in the discussions which led to the appointment of a very competent and worthwhile appointee, Susan Wolburgh Jenah, as vice-chair of the OSC, a body which could ultimately act as his judge and jury, depending upon where this investigation takes them and what turns up down the road. That's just a little bit of chronology.

Then the minister stated to the media on February 26, "When I put my interests in trust, I had no shares in Royal Group," when in fact it was a false statement. He had jointly held at that time 1,000 shares with his wife. Then there's the issue of the questionable involvement with regard to a casino in St Kitts. All these kinds of surrounding questions remained unanswered before the House came back into session and unanswered while we were in session. I want to read from a piece Michael Bryant wrote in the Toronto Star on January 25, 2001:

"The principle of individual ministerial responsibility ensures public accountability of the government....

"More importantly, the minister is accountable to the Legislature, which is, in turn, accountable to the electorate. This is the crux of our system of responsible government....

"But ministers are answerable to Parliament, always. When something goes wrong, they must explain what happened and why, and they must take remedial action to fix it. Sometimes they must resign; always they must answer to the people."

1610

Since this House reconvened on March 22, there have been over 100 questions asked to the Premier on the finance minister, and to the finance minister himself about his conduct with regard to the scandal. Not one question has been answered. They've dodged, they've ducked, they've played rope-a-dope, but they haven't answered a single question. So this is the kind of standard we can expect now from this government, because they've set the bar on the very first test. They've been given their first test and they have failed it, and failed it miserably.

The member from Etobicoke North talked about examples that we set for children. This is quite an example. We are telling children: "Do you know how you get ahead in life? You tell people whatever you think they want to hear. You bring out an election platform that is full of bunk, and then you do whatever you want when you get elected because it doesn't matter." Well, that's quite an example to the children of this province.

I want to read a little bit, quoting the Premier at the swearing-in ceremony on October 23: "A poet once described hope as 'that everlasting duty that heaven lays for its own sake on mankind's heart.' We embrace this notion of hope being our duty, our obligation, our shared responsibility. Our mission is to build a government that inspires hope in all Ontarians."

Applause.

Mr Yakabuski: And it got applause then. But those same Ontarians gave this Premier a 75% disapproval rating just this week. I wonder where their hope quotient sits at this time with this government. Where's their hope with this government? This is the first mess they've been faced with and this is how they've handled it.

"I want you to know that yours is an idealistic government," quoting the Premier again. Some ideals. When you're caught, deny, run and hide, avoid responsibility, don't own up to anything and hope that it will go away. Those are quite the ideals to live by.

Here's another one: "My friends, let our new government govern with a full heart. Let it provide honest service. And let it show as much love, sacrifice and courage as the people we have the privilege of serving."

Wonderful, platitudinous words and phrases, written by someone else, no doubt, but spoken by the Premier at his swearing-in ceremony on October 23.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): That was a great day.

Mr Yakabuski: That was a wonderful day for the Liberal Party; no doubt about that.

Throughout all of this, there was a motion put forward by the honourable member from Toronto-Danforth to take this issue back to the committee on general government. The finance minister indicated that he would gladly go and sit before that committee for their questions. What happened? I don't hold it against the honourable member from Peterborough, who spoke opposing the motion on that dark day in March. I don't hold it against him personally, because I do believe he is a fine gentleman. But make no mistake about it, he received his marching orders in spades: "This is what you will do and this is how you're going to do it." The five other Liberal members of that committee dutifully did their job, as they were told, and defeated that motion, thereby again subverting true democracy and giving the people a chance to see and hear what really happened.

I want to look at the speech from the throne, which again was to reflect the plans of this government for the next several years in Ontario. They talked about a new standard of integrity, a new standard of ethics. Again, the first challenge, the first opportunity to live up to those

standards has proven to be a dismal failure for this government. I quote the Premier: "Your new government understands it can only hold others to a higher standard if it subjects itself to the same standard." Those are tremendous words. It's a shame he's not going to live up to them.

It seems that Minister Sorbara is immune to those standards. Let me tell you this: I am absolutely certain of one thing, that I won't be judged necessarily on the standards someone else sets for me, but I will be, and should be, judged on the standards I set for myself. This government is no exception.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm very pleased to have the opportunity today to reaffirm the confidence I have in the Premier and in our government. Let me begin by addressing the concerns raised by the honourable member from Leeds-Grenville.

I have had an opportunity to speak about the conflict of interest allegations regarding the Minister of Finance before in this House. At that time, I stated that I wanted to make my points as simply as possible for the members opposite. Apparently, I did not make them simple enough, so allow me to try again.

On March 8, the Honourable Coulter Osborne reached a conclusion, and in his report the Integrity Commissioner clearly stated that Minister Sorbara took sufficient steps to ensure he was not in a conflict of interest, that Minister Sorbara acted with integrity and was never in a conflict of interest.

To adequately handle these allegations is to abide by the ruling and opinions of the Integrity Commissioner. "Adequately handling" these allegations is just what the Premier has done. In fact, the Premier has gone above and beyond adequately handling these allegations. The Premier has acted with integrity, with honesty and with full confidence of the ruling of the ethics commissioner. This government is not satisfied with "adequate;" this government holds a higher ethical standard than the last. The Premier made the right decision to stand behind the Minister of Finance, a minister of this government, who was at no time in a conflict of interest.

In case some of the members opposite missed what the Integrity Commissioner did rule on and still have questions, allow me to clarify once again in the simplest terms: Was the Minister of Finance in a conflict of interest? No. Did Minister Sorbara attempt to use any information to his personal advantage? No. Did the Integrity Commissioner rely on Minister Sorbara's version of the events? No. Was the Minister of Finance ever personally under investigation? No. Did the minister violate the Members' Integrity Act? No.

Now for the yeses. Has the Minister of Finance acted with the utmost integrity on this matter? Yes. Has the Premier acted adequately, as well as with the utmost integrity, on this matter? Yes. Did the Premier make it very clear, and did Minister Sorbara agree, that should he become the subject of an investigation, he would step aside from his ministerial responsibilities? Yes. And in so doing, in all of his actions, has the Premier followed the ethical standards outlined in his throne speech? Yes.

1620

Allow me to elaborate. The throne speech told Ontarians that our government has the integrity to tell Ontarians the truth about the challenges we face as a province, and we have done that. We have given the people the straight goods on the deficit. We have launched a public inquiry into Ipperwash.

The throne speech told Ontarians that their voices would be brought to Queen's Park. We have conducted extensive consultations on the budget. We have listened to the people of Ontario, and we are bringing their voices to Queen's Park each and every day. Not only are we bringing them to Queen's Park, but the Minister of Finance will be articulating them from Queen's Park, not a Magna auto plant.

The throne speech told Ontarians that the government would open up its agencies, making the public sector more transparent, more responsible. To the chagrin of the former government, we have done just that. We have made employees of Hydro One and OPG and their subsidiaries subject to the same salary disclosure rules as public servants. We have set up a health council that independently reports on the state of health care, and we have kept the inspection of our nuclear plants in public hands.

The throne speech told Ontarians that there would be a genuine commitment to bringing open, honest and transparent approaches to government. Not only have we done this, but our government has approached each issue with this understanding. We are raising the standards of ethics in this government, and the Premier is leading the way.

The delivery of real and meaningful changes to the people of Ontario under the ethical and honest leadership of the Premier has not only made Ontario better, but is making Ontario more confident in itself. Each and every day, this government continues to focus on what really matters to my constituents in Etobicoke-Lakeshore and to the people of this province. We're focusing on health care. We're focusing on improving education, on protecting our environment, on cleaning our air and protecting our water.

In my own community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, one that languished under the former government, the people are more confident. My constituents have had their voices heard in pre-budget consultations. They have the knowledge that their air will be cleaner with the closure of the Lakeview generating station. They have access to better, more accountable health care, knowing that their family members at the Etobicoke Trillium Health Centre are safe and secure. They have lower auto insurance rates. And the list goes on and on.

The reason for this optimism, the reason for these changes, has been the stalwart leadership of Premier McGuinty. As I conclude my speaking time on this want of confidence motion, I want to be sure that I am very clear: Confidence in the Premier and our government is not only found within this House but, as a result of choosing change and choosing the ethical, honest and

hard-working leadership of the Premier, many houses across our great province are more confident today because they know that this government is the right government to repair the damage left behind after eight long years—eight long, dark years—and bring Ontario back so that it will once again be the best place in which to live, work, learn and raise a family, a province which all Ontarians will be proud to leave to future generations.

That is why I am confident in this government, and I know I can say clearly that my own community, that of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, is confident in this government and confident in the Premier.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm pleased to join in debate this afternoon on the motion of non-confidence that's been put forward. To refresh the memory of those here, I'll read that motion. It says, "That, in the opinion of this House, since the Premier has not adequately handled the conflict of interest allegations involving the Minister of Finance, and has not followed the ethical standards promised in his throne speech, the government no longer has the confidence of this House." We'll be voting on that at 5:50 this afternoon, and I will be voting in support of that motion.

I'd like to refer to the throne speech, because that is what is referred to in this motion. This was the throne speech delivered just a short time ago:

"Your new government has made a commitment to bring an open, honest and transparent approach to government.... It will open up government and its agencies, bring the voices of Ontarians to Queen's Park, and make the entire public sector more transparent and responsible to Ontarians, because transparency and accountability are the best safeguards of public services.... It has given every government MPP a role on the powerful cabinet committees that help guide government policy. In the months ahead, this new government will give all members an opportunity to do more on behalf of their constituents."

That's what the government said in the throne speech, and those are pretty lofty goals. How has it played out in reality? I think the situation that the Minister of Finance finds himself in is a good case study, and the result should be a matter of serious concern.

The government has been given an opportunity to prove just how serious they are about open, honest and transparent government. I'll just briefly go through some of the details of that situation.

It was revealed recently that the Ontario Securities Commission, Revenue Canada and the RCMP are investigating the dealings of the Royal Group Technologies Ltd group of companies, of which Mr Sorbara was a director for 10 years and in fact was the chair of the audit committee.

It was also revealed that Mr Sorbara knew about this investigation back in December, when he was the Minister of Finance in charge of the OSC, and yet, for two months, didn't even tell the Premier, kept this to himself. When the Premier in fact learned about this, I think the prudent thing would have been to ask him to

step aside, at least while this is being investigated. It may prove that he has done nothing wrong, but it may not. So I think the prudent thing to do is to ask him to step aside. That is certainly what the media has been saying and—

Mr Wilson: Public opinion.

Mr Miller:—that is certainly the public opinion.

The member sitting beside me, when he was in cabinet, had a situation where one of his staff members did something that required him to step aside. He did the honourable thing, stepped aside, and when it proved to be of no consequence, he was back in cabinet. That's what should be happening now. That's a standard that was set back in our government. The standard is currently being lowered.

But what does the media say about this situation? Well, in the *Toronto Sun*: "Sorbara Must Step Down." In the *Toronto Star*: "Sorbara Must Quit Until Probe Over." In the *North Bay Nugget*: "Sorbara Should Step Down." In the *Kingston Whig-Standard*: "Sorbara Should Step Aside." In the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record*: "Sorbara should step aside as finance minister, at least until the investigation is complete." That was the common practice back in our government. In the *Windsor Star*: "Sorbara should immediately resign from cabinet based on the clear conflict of interest that is posed by investigations and his responsibilities as finance minister," and I think—

Mr Wilson: That's a Liberal paper, too.

Mr Miller: That's a paper that tends to have Liberal leanings.

In the two-month period when he knew he was being investigated—he was in charge of the OSC—he appointed a new vice-chair of the OSC in that time period. That vice-chair could in fact be his judge and jury if something comes up. If that's not a conflict or a perceived conflict, I don't know what is.

In the *St Catharines Standard*: "Sorbara Should Step Aside Until Investigation is Over." In the *Hamilton Spectator*: "McGuinty must insist that Sorbara leave cabinet until the investigation is completed."

How have they responded to this? They've lowered the ethical standard by stonewalling. After repeated questions in question period almost every day, they basically go to the Integrity Commissioner's letter and keep reading and rereading it. He has refused to answer any basic questions about this. He has refused to ask the minister to step aside. This is in marked contrast to the standard which Mr McGuinty, the Premier, used when he was in opposition.

I quote from just a short time ago, when he was questioning then-Premier Ernie Eves on a question of ethics. Premier McGuinty said, "You cannot fob this matter over to the Integrity Commissioner. It's about you, your judgment and your standards. At what point in time are you, as Premier, going to exercise some leadership, at least some modicum of leadership, and tell your caucus and cabinet ministers that in your government, there are some things that are right and there are some things that are wrong ... ?" That was Premier

McGuinty when he was in opposition. What happened to that standard?

1630

What about the way the government is controlling MPPs and their ability to look into this matter? There was a motion that was put forward at the general government committee by Ms Churley of the NDP. I'll read that motion. It said the notice of motion to the general government committee is "that the standing committee on general government convene to examine the propriety of actions taken, or not taken, by Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, political staff in Mr Sorbara's office, senior ministry staff and various officials at the Ontario Securities Commission on matters related to the OSC investigation of Royal Group Technologies."

What happened when this motion came to the committee? The government used its majority on the committee and more or less lined up all the government members and defeated this opportunity to look into the situation. So this is certainly a different standard than is being applied now.

I think what the government is doing and what it has done in the past election—they said one thing to get elected, and now that they're in government they're doing something very different. One of the things that concerns me most is the Premier's pledge to not increase taxes. He signed the taxpayers' protection promise to great fanfare. It was read out earlier this afternoon. I remember commercials that said, "I won't increase your taxes but I won't lower them either," lots of those commercials.

I'm looking at today's *Toronto Sun* talking about the proposed change in the tax structure for meals under \$4, so that meals under \$4 would now be taxed the 8% provincial sales tax. Is that not a tax increase? I would say that yes, it is a tax increase. That might be why the Premier is seeing some pretty poor ratings in the polls. In this article, and I'm quoting from Christina Blizzard in today's *Toronto Sun*, it says, "Big Brother Knows Best."

"In a Sun-Leger poll reported yesterday, McGuinty scored a pathetic 25% approval rating, compared to Fantino's whopping 65%. In fact, only 2% think McGuinty is doing an excellent job." I guess that's what happens when you say one thing to get elected and then do something very different after getting elected.

This tax they're talking about on meals under \$4: Did you realize—from this article again—that "95% of meals served in hospital cafeterias cost less than \$4; and 86% of meals in schools, colleges and universities are under \$4. The cost to restaurants is expected to be \$200 million in an industry where walk-in business was down 9% last year, due to SARS"? So this is a tax on university students. It's a tax on high school students. It's a tax on those who can least afford it. It's a new tax, when the government clearly ran in the election saying they weren't going to increase taxes. So that is one very significant broken promise.

What about the promise to balance the budget? We will find out in the next month whether they're planning

on balancing this year's budget. I would be very surprised, based on what they've been talking about, if they're going to balance the budget.

Spending has increased 9.7% in the last year. The spending for this past year was \$75.6 billion. Really, what this government has to deal with is its spending problem. It has great revenues and has forecast great revenues, I think, of \$81 billion next year. So it's going to have record revenue, but what it needs to do is control its spending. If it doesn't, if its solution to not having the willpower to say no and rein in its spending is to just keep increasing taxes, like they've increased corporate taxes, like they're looking at taking \$200 million from those who can least afford it, what is going to result from that is lost jobs, for one thing. We're seeing that already in the month of March, where we saw 25,000 jobs lost in the province of Ontario.

Mr Wilson: Biggest loss in eight years.

Mr Miller: I would like to point out that our record over the last eight years was a million new jobs created. This is the sort of thing that starts to happen as you start to tax small business, the engine of economic activity, the creator of the jobs in this province. That's the sort of thing that we're going to see start to happen.

So we've seen, clearly, many broken promises, I believe 19 at this point. And given the way they've handled the whole affair with the Minister of Finance it's very clear that I will be supporting this non-confidence motion, based on the fact that they haven't kept their promises and that they haven't handled this affair properly.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I see I have 23 minutes. I wondered how long I would have.

The Deputy Speaker: It's that seat change that's getting me.

Mr Prue: I have not moved myself.

This is a motion that I must confess I struggled with a little in determining what to say, how to say it and what position to take. This is a non-confidence motion, the first that has been brought forward on this new government. It is a non-confidence motion that has been brought forward before the first budget has been made. I am a politician, a Canadian and an Ontarian who believes that you have to let any new government have an opportunity to see—

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): A honeymoon.

Mr Prue: A honeymoon period, to see exactly what they are going to do and to determine whether or not they are living up to the promises they have made, whether they're acting in a way that is becoming of that particular government and the expectations they brought to the people at the time of the election.

So I have a great deal of difficulty standing here on what may be an appropriate motion—I would suggest probably is an appropriate motion—because I think it's about a month early. I would have much preferred to have stood here about a month from now, after the budget was delivered, so that we could know, and would know appropriately, whether this government was living

up to the commitments and the expectations of the people who had elected them.

However, I am struggling because the issue is before me today. I am struggling because the motion was made and because we are going to vote on it, at 10 minutes to 6. I have looked very carefully at what is being proposed. In a nutshell, the member has put forward that the Premier does not have the confidence of this House because he did not handle the conflict with the Minister of Finance in an appropriate manner and has not followed ethical standards.

We have all watched for the last couple of months as this saga has unfolded. We have watched when the press first brought to light the story of Royal Group. We have watched the machinations, we have watched what the Minister of Finance had to say on the first day, the second day, the third day, as this story unfolded. I have to tell you that this is both a serious and a complex affair. It is serious because the past actions of the minister with the corporation known as Royal Group have been murky. They have been difficult to understand for the average layperson, but we do know several things.

Number one, throughout much of the period, he was on the board of governors of Royal Group. Because he was on the board, he was in effect the management of that company. The board of directors can be nothing else other than the management of the company. He had a two-fold responsibility inasmuch as he was also the chair of the audit committee. That company had many branches. It was a parent group of many branches.

I have to tell the members present that although I did not see it on its original run, I had an opportunity to view recently a television program on TVOntario where they delved into one of the smaller companies that come under Royal.

Mr O'Toole: Union-busting.

Mr Prue: Yes. It was very serious and to me disheartening that Royal Group was involved in union busting, in threatening the death of members, of doing a great many things. When the union almost succeeded in establishing itself, Royal Group was able to yank the company away. All the people who were attempting to build better lives for themselves and their families through a union movement, their jobs were gone. So I have some very real difficulties knowing that the finance minister was in some way peripherally involved, as the parent company of this group, with a company that would hire goons and threaten death.

I also have some difficulty that the owner and principal of this company paid himself some \$6 million as a bonus. In fact, that is why this company is being investigated. It is being investigated by the Ontario Securities Commission, which is close to home for all of us, but also by two federal agencies, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Customs.

1640

It is a complex matter, as well as being a serious one, because people have a difficult time fathoming how the minister was involved and whether or not he stood to

personally gain. I'm going to come to the Integrity Commissioner later. It is a complex matter inasmuch as the actions all appear to have taken place prior to Mr Sorbara's becoming the Minister of Finance of Ontario. They are past actions over which he no longer has or should have direct control. They are complex because there have been changes to the reporting conditions brought about by the Premier to change the responsibilities for the Ontario Securities Commissioner from the Minister of Finance, where they have traditionally been for the last—I don't know how many years—probably 20 or 30 years, to the management of the treasury board. There are questions that need to be asked by all of us as to why this circumstance took place. I heard what the Premier had to say, that he's exercising caution, but I have to question whether they needed to take place if the Premier has that much confidence in the Minister of Finance and, in fact, taken in light of what the Integrity Commissioner had to say.

I also have to question the changes that have taken place in taking the Toronto Stock Exchange under the umbrella of the manager of treasury board. That, too, has been an untoward change that has never before, to the best of my knowledge, taken place to that particular minister by the province of Ontario under any of the machinations, under any of the governments that have been in power during this century.

We have some real difficulties, too, because of what the security rules had to say. The Minister of Finance's interpretations of the security rules are very much at odds with what other security practitioners, lawyers, people who are in the field, think they say. The Minister of Finance believes that he could not have told the Premier or anyone else of knowledge that he had around the investigation. Other securities experts beg to differ. A question needs to be asked—and I'm not sure that this forum is the appropriate one; perhaps a court of law is—as to how that law should be interpreted. Be that as it may, it's not very clear.

Into all this we have the weighing in of the Integrity Commissioner. I have watched with some dismay over the last number of weeks where the repeated questions of the official opposition to the Premier, to the Finance minister, to the manager of the treasury board and to others in the cabinet have all been met with the same response, which is, "The Integrity Commissioner says," and then a quotation is taken from that. With the greatest of respect to the Integrity Commissioner, and I have the highest respect for his abilities, his staff, his own personal integrity, and for everything that that office holds, my reading of what he had to say is that it followed a very, very narrow perspective. The narrowness of the perspective was that which was related to the Members' Integrity Act. And what is the issue before this Legislature, or what ought to be before this Legislature, is infinitely larger than the Members' Integrity Act. It involves parliamentary privilege. It involves history of this institution going back hundreds and hundreds of years, not only in this country but in Great Britain before it, and

throughout the Commonwealth, where the integrity of the House, the Legislature, and the responsibility of the executive branch must be of the highest standard, a standard which I would suggest transcends even the Members' Integrity Act.

We have the whole issue that we followed in the press. As has been alluded to by previous speakers, many of the newspapers in Ontario have called for the Minister of Finance to step aside for the purpose of the investigation and, I would suggest, for the purpose of allowing this government to get on with its business. Because as was said—and it was said by me, and I will admit to that—when this whole affair broke, the issue today is not so much what Mr Sorbara did or did not do when he was a member of the Royal Group. It is not even so much what is going to be discussed in a very important budget to this province and to this Legislature some weeks or months from now. What has become the issue is Mr Sorbara. Just as much as the issue in the previous budget and the previous government was where it was held, at Magna corporation, and how that was wrong, the issue now of this budget has come down to whether Mr Sorbara should be presenting it.

I watched as the weeks went on. Probably 50 or 60 or 70 questions were asked day after day after day by members of the Conservative Party, the official opposition, trying to get to the bottom of this issue. It was all to no avail, because the answer was always the same: "The Integrity Commissioner has stated," and then the same answer is given again. It's given no matter what the question is. It's given no matter what the parameters of the question are, or the inflection, or which member is asking it. It's always the same: "The Integrity Commissioner says...."

My colleague the member for Toronto-Danforth attempted to take it out of this Legislature and to find some decent and honest answers that went beyond what the Integrity Commissioner had to say. She wrote a letter on March 7, and she wrote it to the clerk of the standing committee on general government. She asked but six important questions, and I'd just like to go through those questions to show that we are watching very carefully and we are very concerned about this Legislature, the members in it, and we are trying to uphold the highest possible ethical standards. I believe that Mr Sorbara is an honest man, and I would like to believe and I would hope that if the investigation was actually conducted as it should have been conducted, he would be found the same by us and by this Legislature and by the investigating bodies as he was by the Integrity Commissioner. But we will never know, because those questions have never properly been put.

I'm going to go through each one of the questions that my colleague from Toronto-Danforth asked.

First, "In the vetting process (personal transition disclosure) that is required for all potential cabinet ministers, did Mr Sorbara reveal all aspects of his relationship (including all shares and options) with Royal Group Technologies and its subsidiaries?"

We do not know that fact, to this day. We do not know whether or not, in the vetting process, this information was made available. It would be a very easy thing to answer and it should have been answered. If in fact he made that information available, that should have been kudos to him. If he did not, then that should have set off alarm bells. We will never know whether in fact that took place, because the committee determined that it did not want to hear it. I'm going to get to the committee later.

The second question was, "Were all proper procedures followed in placing assets related to Royal Group in a 'blind' management trust, as required under the Members' Integrity Act? More specifically, why did it take until December 23, two months after Mr Sorbara was sworn in as Minister of Finance—and one day after he was alerted by the OSC of their investigation into Royal Group—to establish the trust?"

That is a very legitimate question, because we have a time period here of some 66 days in which he knew the allegations against him and could have taken some action, and it appears that the only time that he was prepared to take any action whatsoever was after it was revealed. It would have said a lot more to me, quite frankly, had he disposed of this blind trust the first time it was made known and available to him. In fact, it would have made even more sense had he disposed of the blind trust when he was sworn into cabinet as finance minister in the first place. That question will never be answered, and was certainly not answered by the Integrity Commissioner.

The third question that needed to be asked: "Perhaps most importantly, was Mr Sorbara in a conflict of interest for the 66 days between the time he was informed by the OSC of the investigation on December 22, 2003, and the time he was relieved of his responsibilities from the OSC on February 26? More specifically, if there are securities law-related restrictions on a finance minister's ability to inform the Premier of an OSC investigation that he has been informed of, what are they?"

We do not know. The Integrity Commissioner did not reveal this information. In fact, he had no obligation to investigate this information; he had no obligation to report on this information. That is important to this House, to this Legislature, and to all of the people who care that things are done in this Legislature in an ethical, honest, upright and transparent way.

1650

The fourth question: "How common a practice is it for the chair of the Ontario Securities Commission to give a 'heads up' to the Minister of Finance of the day of an ongoing OSC investigation? More importantly, is this appropriate behaviour on the part of the OSC chair?"

We do know from press reports, or believe it might reasonably have been the case, that Mr Sorbara was given the information by the OSC chair, and we really should know whether or not that was appropriate behaviour, not on the part of the finance minister, not on the part of the Premier, but on the part of a senior civil servant working at the Ontario Securities Commission.

We will never know, because that question was not allowed to be asked in the committee either.

Fifth, the question was asked: "The OSC and Mr Sorbara have made it clear that they assumed that Royal Group would issue a public release of the investigation within days of a December 22, 2003, OSC letter to Royal Group informing the company of the investigation. When the company refused to issue such a release, why didn't the OSC order the company to do so or go public itself? Aren't there provisions in the Ontario Securities Act that would allow the OSC to do so?"

Certainly the OSC's not acting as they should have, in my considerable opinion—or less than considerable opinion; I should put it that way. Should they have done what was necessary and correct in the circumstances of the case, they would probably have done Finance Minister Sorbara and the Premier a great deal of service, rather than sitting on this for a lengthy period of time. There will be no investigation of whether the Ontario Securities Commission acted in a proper way or whether they put the finance minister personally at risk.

Last but not least, the question was asked: "Mr McGuinty has said that were Mr Sorbara to come under investigation by the OSC, the RCMP, or Canada Customs, it would then be appropriate for him to resign. Mr Sorbara was a director and chair of the audit committee during the time under investigation. How does he know that he is not under investigation by one or more of these bodies?"

That question needs to be asked to this day. Nobody knows where these bodies are going with the investigation. Nobody knows what is happening, and the cloud continues to hang over a member of this Legislature, a member who is the finance minister and who will be coming down with a budget in about one month's time.

These are questions that should have been asked in committee. I was there in the committee with my colleague the member from Toronto-Danforth, two members of the Conservative caucus and six members of the Liberal Party, who sat on the other side. The questions were succinctly put. The argument was made that this was a better forum in which to deal with the allegations being made and the defences being made of Mr Sorbara than to bring it into the Legislature and, I would suggest, to bring it in the form of this non-confidence motion.

Instead, one of the members spoke on behalf of the committee. He used the words, and I quote, that he was "charged with the responsibility" of answering the allegations. We do not know to this day who charged him, because he said that was language he used in his other life as a municipal councillor. But as a municipal councillor for many years and as a former mayor, I do not remember anyone ever using the words "charged with the responsibility" unless they had been given that responsibility by a more senior person, whether that be someone in the bureaucracy or someone in the municipal government.

I would suggest that it just does not look good. It does not look good because the House leader had, some days

before that, made a statement on the radio in which he said the committee should not meet and should not hear the allegations. Of course, he rescinded that after it became general knowledge, and said it was not what he intended to say. But it is my belief that that was in fact what was intended, and that was in fact what the committee intended to do; that is, to kill this entire issue in committee.

But the issue itself will not go away. The issue cannot go away. The issue must not go away. The allegations have been made. The cloud hangs over a very capable and, I think, very personable member of this Legislature, one who is charged with the huge responsibility, in some four to six weeks' time, of bringing down a budget in extremely difficult circumstances, a budget that is going to have to find billions of dollars, a budget in which 230 promises are going to have to be met, as best those promises can be met, and a budget that is going to have to repair some of the wrongdoings of the party that was previously in power. But that is not what is going to happen on that day. He is going to be there and questions are going to continue to be asked, and will probably always be asked, about his relationship with Royal Group and the whole affair that led up to the non-confidence motion today.

I started by saying that this is a difficult circumstance I find myself in. I would suggest that the motion has perhaps been made prematurely. But it is the first opportunity of the official opposition party to raise it, and it has been raised. It is with some regret—I think I have tried to speak as cogently and dispassionately as I possibly could on this issue. The wrong decision has been made. The wrong decision that Mr Sorbara not step aside has been made by the Premier, by the committee, by colleagues in the Liberal Party and certainly by others who are supportive of that position.

This is not the parliamentary tradition we have come to expect. Even in the worst days of the Mike Harris government—and I want to tell you that there was probably no greater enemy of Mr Harris in this Legislature than me—his ministers, when called into question, were forced to resign. They were either exonerated and brought back in or not exonerated and kept out. In the short period of time I was here in the last Legislature with both Mr Harris and Mr Eves, I saw a number of ministers step aside. I saw Minister Runciman step aside, and I saw Minister Wilson step aside. I saw Mr Jackson leave, and he didn't come back. I saw Mr Gilchrist leave, and he did not come back. Mr. Hudak left and came back. They did what parliamentary tradition expected of them. In order to leave the government clean, in order to make sure that all the investigations were held and upheld, they stepped aside for the period of time that was necessary for the investigations to be conducted and for the honourable member to be cleared or not cleared.

As I said, I wish that had happened. I wish the finance minister had been cleared. I think he is honourable. He is certainly a gregarious and wonderful fellow. He's good fun, and I like him personally. But he should have

stepped aside. The Premier should have made him step aside.

This Legislature has the opportunity now. I am not naive. I know what the vote is going to be. But the members of the Liberal Party should do the right thing. If they're not going to vote for this, they should ask the Premier to reconsider and have him step aside for the good of this institution, for the good of this House and for the good of the people of Ontario.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): It really is a pleasure, believe me, to stand here today and respond to what the member from Beaches-East York, who just spoke, said was a premature resolution, at best.

I must say to the people who are watching that today is opposition day. This means that once a month the opposition gets a chance to determine the agenda for the afternoon, so they put forward a resolution in the hope of trying to embarrass the government. One of the functions of the opposition, of course, is to poke holes in policy weaknesses and one thing or another. But very often, if there's a negative mode, then it's to try to embarrass the government.

For the past three weeks, Mr Speaker, as you well know, relentlessly through question period every day—and I have to give the NDP some credit that they did get on to and address some other issues that are of concern to the people of Ontario—day in and day out, what did the Conservative opposition do? They hung on to this reed of desperation, trying to manufacture, theatrically—I'm sure the member from Nepean is taking acting lessons. I hope his mother gives him a little bit more money to continue taking them because it really isn't as effective as it might otherwise be.

It's clear that throughout that whole period nothing new came to light. The Premier's behaviour was totally appropriate. The ethics that ensued were transparent. They were confirmed by the Integrity Commissioner.

1700

Interjection: Twice.

Mr Patten: Twice, in two letters. The minister himself relinquished certain responsibilities to the Chair of Management Board and said, "If there's an investigation of me, I will step aside during that period of time." The member from Beaches-East York said, "Well, he should have stepped aside already. How do you know he's not being investigated?" It seems to me that if I were being investigated, somebody would talk to me and let me know, and suggest that they want to see some of my records or that they want to read my e-mails or whatever it was—but I'm keeping them in my pocket.

The investigation that is going on has to do with a company with which our Minister of Finance is no longer associated, and all of the ways in which he removed himself from any financial commitments and all of that the Integrity Commissioner confirms in a lengthy letter as to the procedures he followed and is satisfied he has done the right and appropriate thing.

I found it interesting that not many members talked extensively on the issue, because there really isn't all that

much to talk about, but they did want to talk about other issues, so I'd like to offer a few contrasting areas of what this government in a short six-month period has already done. I'll take on the words they use "in an ethical fashion" and I will explain myself.

For example, one of the ethical issues our government has dealt with: The Premier himself put this forward, actually as a private member's bill when he was in opposition, so it's long-standing in terms of the ethics of our Premier. We're talking of course about the self-promotional government advertising that was such an embarrassment to all of us on all sides of the House. I recall times when no matter where you were throughout Ontario, you would receive these mini-magazines that looked quite professionally done. As a matter of fact, they were very professionally done.

Interjection: Very expensive.

Mr Patten: And they were very expensive. Then there were surveys leading people to begin to think that serious crime has increased, even though in most categories of crime it's in fact on the decrease, leading into their next policy statement as to how you make sure you take kids off the streets, throw them in the clink and lock them up for a while—their particular approach to a lot of these things.

Legislation has gone in that prohibits that. That legislation would be able to be reviewed, decided upon and recommended by the auditor of the province. If the government of the day chose to proceed with advertising that was not deemed to be in the public interest, then that government party would have to pay the bill. I throw that out as a contrast to what was there before, the tens of millions of dollars that the Conservative Party, when they were in government, spent on something that was not in the public interest but was very self-serving.

I'll point to Ipperwash. An inquiry has been called. There are many questions about what happened that day and the role of the government in terms of what happened in the shooting of Dudley George. There's now an inquiry, an independent inquiry, I might add. The Attorney General has asked the commissioner to conduct a thorough and independent review. We want to get to the bottom of that. Many people from many parts of Ontario, let alone the family of Dudley George and friends, have written and asked that we look into this particular event and what the cause was of that.

We'll talk about another ethical event. This one is near and dear to my heart. It's when the government imposed on three school boards the supervisors who became dictators overnight, who replaced the duly-elected trustees from their particular communities—working for a measly \$5,000 a year, I might add, just to remind the people who may be following us—and replaced them with people who were very well provided for in terms of recompense, salaries, budgets for publicizing and promoting their particular views. They took unilateral decisions. That's not the Ontario way. This happened in Toronto, this happened in Hamilton and this happened in Ottawa, in the district boards.

Thank God for those trustees and those parents who hung in at those times, trying to save programs for their kids, when we know programs for kids with special needs were affected. We had to go to court in one particular area in our community, in Ottawa. The school board and the province lost—this was when the supervisor was there—in removing programs in order to maintain those. Congratulations to those trustees and parents who hung in there and fought for good-quality education and universal education across the board.

I am finished, my time is up, but I do want to say that I will be voting against this resolution. I am very proud to be on the side of Premier Dalton McGuinty and I'm very proud to be part of a team that includes our Treasurer, Mr Greg Sorbara, who is a very honourable man. This will all be disclosed and transparent, I hope, as soon as possible. When that day comes, I hope that some people will apologize for some of their remarks.

Mr O'Toole: It is my pleasure indeed to stand and discuss this confidence motion. Before I start, the member from Ottawa Centre is a very respectable member. Arguably, many on this side believe he was overlooked by Mr Sorbara when he appointed the cabinet, I believe, having been in cabinet, I think in 1985 to 1990. I think the whole issue here is clearly one of non-confidence, but more importantly, it is about integrity.

When I start to think of this whole debate, I really can't get over the election, to be honest. If I look at the election, I think of where the whole premise started here was the integrity of the 230 promises. I can tell you—I was a member of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs—and we were able to hunt out a secret document in which the Ministry of Finance staff costed the 230 promises. They refused, but we did pass a resolution. It's in the book. For those viewing, you can get that on the Ontario Web site. That shows that that resolution was voted down, and whipped down, I might say, by the Liberal members of the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

A broader issue, when I think of Liberals—I don't want to be highly critical and too volatile—I sort of start with the older partner in this relationship, their kissing cousins from Ottawa. I think of the GST and the free trade. They said they were going to cancel that stuff. They promised, but they didn't do their promises.

At that time my son had just graduated from the RMC and he was a Sea King helicopter flying officer. The Sea King helicopters were supposed to be replaced by the Cormorant—I think was the helicopter that was replacing them. In fact, I think my son, in his training, had been part of that, maybe in England. It was cancelled. I read in the paper the other day that that promise still lives on. They're still government. They haven't replaced them. In fact, it's going to be eight years from now before it's actually replaced.

1710

It's not just the broken promises federally; it raises concern—that has been mentioned earlier. It raises suspicion, dare I say, if this is a parliamentary term. It

raises cynicism. The point has been made earlier: what is the message to our youth?

I think Howard Hampton, the leader of the third party, the official third party, said it earlier in some of his responses—when you are really not being clear and straightforward with the people of Ontario, whether it is on the Oak Ridges moraine land deal or the 407 tax, all these promises you make? Some have other terms for these promises, what I call broken promises. I can't use those because it's not parliamentary, I've been told, but the people of Ontario know. Howard Hampton pointed it out, with all due respect, and he does that day after day, as our leader, Mr Eves, does as well. The message here to the youth isn't the right message.

In the election, they had 230 promises. At the latest count—I have a little barometer—I think we're up to 20 broken promises, as I said before.

For those listening, our party is going to go through a leadership review here shortly. I think it is a very important opportunity for the people to reassess not the member from Whitby-Ajax, Jim Flaherty, or the member from Oak Ridges, Frank Klees—and it could arguably be Mr Watson, the Minister of Consumer and Business Services, possibly John Tory. John Tory's name has been in the press. I can convince you there will be an open and honest debate on this question.

But I think the real issue here—I have not been that upset with Dalton. He seems to vacillate, look down, a bit timid, and in that respect I think he's a nice fellow. I really do. I will say that openly in the House here. But he is certainly not a leader. That's the difference. We need someone who is able to lead during tough and difficult times.

To the people of Ontario, we are elected here—as you know, Speaker; you've been here for a number of years—to make the difficult decisions. Obviously, the promises you made would be difficult decisions. You found that out with Bill 8, and on your second round of hearings you will find out again that these promises or these trial balloons—I think of some of them that have outraged my constituents in the riding of Durham. Auto insurance is one. They're just struggling, all insurance: motorcycle insurance, commercial insurance. There's the Ontario drug benefit plan. Seniors, people on fixed income, are outraged by these trial balloons, these failed or fake promises—the trailer tax on people who can least afford it, the soup and salad tax. I said earlier today, it is the death of the McHappy Meal. This is really what I hear from a government that promised optimism and hope.

The real issue, though, does come down to the secret control guy, Mr Sorbara.

Mr Qaadri: Is there some secret agent conspiracy thing happening here?

Mr O'Toole: I wouldn't go quite that far. The member from Etobicoke North used the word "conspiracy"; I didn't. I am just getting it on the record here for him. He's thinking potentially there's a conspiracy. He may indeed be right. The member from Etobicoke North may

indeed be right. It is very hard to pin down exactly what they're going to do next.

But when Mr Sorbara speaks—I go back to Mr Martin and then Mr Manley. They're finance ministers, and I think Mr Sorbara is somewhat like them. He's from a fairly regal background, fairly well connected. He has his ships registered off in some country. Greg Sorbara is running some casino in St Kitts. They're of a different layer. We're in your face sometimes. Conservatives are too honest and too straightforward. But I would say to you that I'm not—I'm just saying, I'm thinking that the Conservatives are held to higher standards, as has been mentioned here. Mr Jim Wilson, as a minister, had the highest level of integrity and commitment, and Mr Runciman the same. I think back that they've paid the price, but they had the dignity and the integrity to do the right thing. What they didn't do was hide behind some Integrity Commissioner's letter. I have a copy of it here. It's worn out because they've used it so much. It's dog-eared; it's tattered.

In fact, that letter from the Integrity Commissioner was asked for before much of the information was on the record. I think the members have made the point today—one of the members who has made the point most eloquently today is the member for Beaches-East York—unprompted. He said, "Mr Sorbara has not followed ethical standards. It's a wrong decision by not stepping aside. We don't do things that way."

This would be simple, this case of confidence wouldn't be before you, if Mr Sorbara would just step aside, even temporarily. We were criticized for having the off-site budget. You're going to have what I call the Greg Sorbara bogus budget, because a finance minister's main job is to do the economic forecasting and modelling. He is Chair of the audit committee, and he failed in that duty. In fact, he's failing in the duty here today. That leads me to have no confidence. I will be supporting this motion.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I guess the best way to approach this is in a very rational, calm and perhaps subtle way, because what's in front of us today is a motion, a want of confidence, that has been put forward by the member from Leeds-Grenville, Mr Runciman, "That, in the opinion of this House, since the Premier has not adequately handled the conflict-of-interest allegations involving the Minister of Finance and has not followed the ethical standards promised in his throne speech, the government no longer has the confidence of this House."

I can't support this at all. It flies in the face of everything that this government has done so far. What is very clear is that the Progressive Conservative Party is going through an anger phase. They're just angry that they've lost the election, and there is an element of denial as well in there. They still think they're the government, and they're not the government. On October 2, the people chose change. They chose to bring in a new government.

When I went and knocked on doors, people said to me, "Why are the Conservatives spending millions of dollars

putting your leader's face on the television screen and trying to make him look bad?" Instead of presenting their platform, they just attacked us. They hit below the belt, and they are continuing to hit below the belt. Again, not in an emotional way, but in a rational way, one would have to say, "Why are the Conservatives bringing forward this motion?" The only answer that I can understand—it's not that Ontarians want this motion or are truly upset at the Premier. Sure, there's a percentage that is going to be upset, and that's a small percentage. But the truth of the matter is, we've got a disorganized opposition group that is angry. They've been angry throughout the campaign. They've run a campaign of anger, a campaign of frustration, a campaign without any real policy or direction. Thank goodness they didn't get elected. If they had been elected, this province would be in a huge debt because they wouldn't be able to deliver on half the promises they put forward.

I can't support this motion today. It is extremely irrational. It is brought forward for no other reason, in my mind, than that there's a group of elected Progressive Conservatives who are angry, who can't find a real issue to discuss or debate, and who have decided to try to throw more dirt at the government and at the Premier. But at the end of the day, this dirt won't stay; the mud won't stick. The people will see through this, because ultimately what we're about and what governing is about is bringing forward policies, ideas, and implementing them.

1720

We've fulfilled a lot of our promises. The opposition has yet to acknowledge a single promise we've delivered on. Even the minimum wage one, which is so clearly in our platform and which we did, they won't admit to.

All they want to do is focus on half-truths and on emotional, angry responses, trying to embarrass the government instead of focusing on being a true opposition party that would provide proper criticism and proper opposition to this government. Instead they've taken the low road of taking shots at the government, and this is part of it. I can't support it. I hope it gets a real good hit today and is defeated very strongly. I cannot support it at all.

The Deputy Speaker: The member from Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury, no, Thunder Bay. I'm going to get the right part of the north. The honourable member from Thunder Bay-Superior—

Interjection: No, no.

The Deputy Speaker: Thunder Bay-Atikokan. It's been a long day, I'm sorry.

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr Speaker, at least you had a northern riding.

It's my pleasure to rise today to speak against this motion. It's a bit of a surprise, I suppose, from my perspective that you would expect the members of the official opposition would bring forward a motion like this. When you do something like this, bring forward a motion like this, it simply provides an opportunity for the members of the government to shine back on them and

refocus the people of Ontario on their history during their time in government—not a very flattering light, I would suggest.

It's an opportunity that, as you can see, the members of our party are more than happy to undertake and not let slide by—a litany of activity that you would think they would not be too proud of. I was discussing this just earlier today with my 17-year-old son. When I told him what this motion was all about, his first reaction was, "Gee, dad, how can they do that? Did they forget about the budget already?" So there are people out there who are clued in to what they did. I'm surprised they provide us with this opportunity to speak about their time in government, but I thank them very much for the opportunity.

When I was thinking about the best place to start in dealing with the motion today, I thought the best place might be the Taxpayer Protection Act. The fundamentals of their motion are about honesty and integrity and ethics. We have today an opportunity to speak to their motion. One of the vehicles I'd like to use is to remind the people of Ontario about the Taxpayer Protection Act.

What do we know about it? I think it's a very relevant place to begin. Clearly the members of the official opposition for many years used their time in government to try and create and carve out a reputation with the people of Ontario as great fiscal managers. If you were to ask people why they would support that party, and not support the Liberals or the New Democrats, they would probably tell you that they thought they were better fiscal managers than either of the other two parties. I don't mind saying that during their time in government, they were somewhat successful in creating that illusion. They did a pretty good job of it. What we have found out since October 2, 2003, is quite a different story.

So where do we begin? We begin with a \$5.6-billion deficit. Please don't take my word for it. We have a third party, an objective number that came from somebody pretty highly respected in the province, the former Provincial Auditor, who provided that number for us. When we're talking about honesty and ethics and integrity, we remember that during the campaign they never missed an opportunity to tell the people of Ontario that they once again had balanced the budget. Well, what happened—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The din is growing a little in here. I'd like to hear the speaker. The honourable member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan.

Mr Mauro: Mr Speaker, I loved how you used that opportunity to get the riding correct. I appreciate that very much, for the Hansard.

Mr Speaker, I'm not sure, I'm new in this place and I don't know if the rules allow me to acknowledge my sister from Germany, Jamie Ann Mauro, who is visiting me. She just came in from Germany because she thought this issue was important enough for her.

Interjection.

Mr Mauro: Yes. I'm happy you noticed, and I'm comfortable that you noticed.

Interjection: What's your sister's name?

Mr Mauro: Jamie Ann Mauro is here from Germany. I'm happy to have her here.

Interjection.

Mr Mauro: Yes, she just made it in time.

A \$5.6-billion deficit, irrefutable, put forward by the former Provincial Auditor of the province clearly speaks directly to their ability. The fundamentals of their motion talk about integrity, honesty and ethics. That's what they say it's here for. They said at every opportunity during the campaign that they had balanced the budget once again—Taxpayer Protection Act stuff. I think it took about one year for the former Premier, then finance minister, Ernie Eves to break the Taxpayer Protection Act. He broke it. So now we have found a \$5.6-billion deficit. They never missed an opportunity to debate it.

Now we often hear the members from the other side of the floor shouting at us on this side of the floor, "Roll up your sleeves, get to work and balance the budget." I think we need to think about that for just a second, because implicit in that comment is an acknowledgement by the members of the official opposition that, in fact, there is a deficit that this government has to deal with. Every time they say that, I sit over here and say to myself, "Don't they realize what they're saying?" Before October 2, they never missed an opportunity to say the budget was balanced. Now they're telling us to deal with the deficit. Clearly, I don't know how they can do that. We're talking ethics, we're talking honesty. It's an incredible thing. They in fact acknowledge it. It's a very interesting thing.

I think, flowing from that, we can now understand why the famous Magna budget happened. In fact, the Magna budget was found to be contemptible not only by the members of the official opposition party and the third party at the time, but by the Speaker of the House, who just so happened to be a member of their party.

Interjection: And who's also a Liberal candidate.

Mr Mauro: Yes. They found it in contempt. It's an amazing thing.

I'm getting a note here that I have to wrap up shortly. I would have liked to have spent a little bit more time talking about the total debt, \$20 billion to \$22 billion, that they added to. They don't argue about the debt. When the economy was humming, when the provincial treasury was flush, when they were selling assets, they still managed to add \$22 billion to the debt. So much for your reputation as good fiscal managers. It's over; you've imploded. It doesn't exist any more.

I'd love to spend more time talking about what we found out at public accounts: untendered contracts; \$100,000 awards for a court rehab in this municipality that started at around \$100,000 and has morphed into something in terms of multi-millions of dollars. It just goes on and on and on.

I have a question. I'll wrap up with this, because my time is up. If you say, as a government, that you're never going to close a hospital in 1995, and all the members of your party support that platform, and then you close 30,

is that one broken promise or 30 broken promises? And they're worried about our 231.

I think we're doing terrifically. I'm happy to vote against this motion. I thank them for the opportunity to shine a light back on their time as the government of the day. I look forward to the vote.

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): Actually, I don't even think this motion deserves any debate at all. It shouldn't be dignified by debate in this House because, quite frankly, it's a joke.

The member for Leeds-Grenville spent quite a bit of time earlier ranting to the point of turning purple over there, waving his arms like mad. Then he sits down and says, "That feels good. I haven't done that for years." He's right. For eight years, he didn't represent the people of Ontario with that much passion or interest or concern. That became very evident. Then the member for Leeds-Grenville says I should represent my constituents. That is why I'm here. I'm here representing my constituents because they turfed you guys out on your ear, because you deserved to be turfed out on your ear after the performance—so you can't even be taken seriously, quite frankly, listening to the conversation in this House this afternoon that we've heard from that side.

Ipperwash, Walkerton, millions in untendered contracts to Tory pals of Harris and Eves—today we hear them pretending to care about the poor. They talk about a non-existent tax on lunches under \$4. What was the tax on that \$680 lunch that Mike Harris and Deb Hutton enjoyed at Canoe at the expense of the public purse? I would like to know. They should have choked on that lunch, and they should choke on the words coming out of them today.

1730

Now, about the parroting of this little line, this little broken-promises line: I'm astonished by the simplicity, the simplistic thinking of the opposition, especially since both of them have been in government before, that you're going to walk in and produce, overnight, 230 promises. We did not run simply on promises; we ran on a vision, on a direction, on integrity and hope, something that demoralized teachers and students, nurses and doctors, seniors and children, workers and volunteers desperately needed. I repeat: You can't be taken seriously on this. You were turfed out, and deserved to be turfed out, by many long-time Tories, in fact, who said, "We can't vote for these guys. These aren't Progressive Conservatives. They're not the people of Bill Davis or Bob Welch. They're not progressive at all; they're destructive." Again—Ipperwash, Walkerton, hydro, health care, education—your legacy is going to take a long time to fix, but we're going to do it. We will fulfill our vision over the period of the next four years. Our mandate is four years, and we will fulfill our vision, a vision that will see us provide reliable, dependable public services in an accountable manner, and we will do it while breaking the cycle of tax cuts, spend, deficit, tax cuts, spend, deficit that seems to come before every election.

Provincial politics, as we all know in here, is about parties. There are three parties in here. There is one

which I would not want to be a part of right now, although I have great respect for the predecessors of this party, but I don't find this group at all Progressive Conservative. The other one: I have a tremendous amount of respect for the ideology, the members and the hard work they do. I particularly enjoy listening to the member for Beaches-East York. But I would choose no other team in this House to be a part of but the one of which I am a part now: the Liberal Party. Seventy-three of us were duly elected in October and we do have the passion, the commitment, the creativity and the integrity to do the job right. I would like to see this House start to work a little bit more as a team and spend a little less time on petulant motions such as this one.

Mr Wilkinson: For all the members: chutzpah. If you want to see an example of chutzpah, then all you have to do is take a look at this non-confidence motion that the former government members decided to introduce into this House. It takes a lot of gall to come in here and lecture our government about issues of integrity and fiscal probity. Out in rural Ontario, where I'm from, everybody knows that if you whistle, you can't suck and blow at the same time. They have an interesting position about my good friend the Minister of Finance. They decided that the problem here is that the Integrity Commissioner doesn't have enough integrity. Isn't that odd? They decided the Integrity Commissioner, whom they appointed, does not have enough integrity—but he's cleared the good member.

We have a very important choice today. In a question of confidence, if this vote were to fail, if the government were to lack confidence in what we're doing for Ontario and force an election and, heaven forbid, the people who were here before us came back, what would happen to Ontario? First of all, we'd know they'd go back and fire water inspectors, fire meat inspectors and go back to spending good, hard-earned money on self-promotional government advertising. They would take \$50 million that we've given to nurses and they would cancel that. They would cancel \$50 million for nurses. They would not have an independent public inquiry on Walkerton. They wouldn't have that at all. If the government lost the confidence of this Legislature and we went back to the bad old days, there would not be a Walkerton. No wonder they want this government to be defeated.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Ms Caroline Di Cocco): Order. I'd like to remind the members that there is a level of courtesy I would like to maintain in this chamber.

Again, the member for Perth-Middlesex.

Mr Wilkinson: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate your wise ruling.

I don't think this province wants to go back to seeing over \$100 million going to private schools. I don't think the province wants to see reckless corporate tax cuts reintroduced. I don't think the province wants us to get rid of the 17 new judges we've appointed in this province to get rid of a chronic backlog that we inherited. I don't think this province wants to see us go back to the days

when there weren't eight weeks of compassionate leave, which we've introduced so that people would have an opportunity to look after their loved ones. I don't think the good people of Ontario would want to see the minimum wage rolled back.

That's why I urge all my members to vote against this non-confidence motion.

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I did not plan to speak on this, but I don't have a choice after hearing the comments that some members, both from the PC Party and the NDP, have made in this House. Let me say that I am a proud MPP. Royal plastic in my area of Thornhill is a company that I believe employs about 6,000 employees all over the world.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order. There are a number of conversations going on simultaneously and they are really reaching a level where I am having a difficult time hearing the member. I would appreciate it if the conversations that are carried on are done so with courtesy to the speaker.

Mr Racco: Speaker, I thank you. I find it offensive that there are members elected in this House who are making statements that are potentially questionable, and instead of listening to other people's comments, they go and have their own meetings.

Let me say that this company, which employs about 6,000 employees worldwide, has a number of them in my area. Certainly I am a little concerned. When we have a company, Royal plastic, that exports worldwide and that has a head office in Ontario, I thought this House would be honourable enough to support such a company instead of undermining it.

Mr Yakabuski: —shut down the investigation.

Mr Racco: Speaker, the gentleman should listen. It's my turn now. When it's your turn, you may speak on the matter.

This company has billions of dollars in sales.

Interjections.

Mr Racco: If they allow me to speak, let me remind people that this company has billions of dollars every year in sales in Ontario. Those sales are made worldwide and the people of Ontario benefit with jobs and taxes. I am concerned that some of my constituents may lose their jobs because of the comments that are taking place.

I believe some members in this House are abusing the power this House has. If they believe what they are saying to be the truth, I would challenge them to go outside of the House and make those statements so that those people affected can take proper legal action.

I am at a loss that the NDP, which speaks about jobs, is in fact helping to potentially lose jobs in Ontario. I am also at a loss when the PCs, who have given billions of dollars that belong to the people of Ontario to corporations, now are potentially taking down an Ontario corporation with a head office in Ontario. I think it's disgraceful. I believe Ontario corporations should be promoted and should not be undermined. I believe that partisan politics are understood, but when we take down

an Ontario corporation, I think we are doing a disservice to all the people.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Racco: We were elected to represent Ontarians. This is not what we should do to represent Ontarians. The courts will make a decision, but this House should not abuse a corporation or a person who cannot defend himself.

1740

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I certainly agree with my colleague from Thornhill. The people of Ontario are worried—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: Excuse me. I'd really like to restore some order. It's difficult for me to hear the speaker. If there are conversations that are that important and have to reach a certain level, I would ask that members take them outside. Thank you.

Mr Colle: Again, I certainly concur with my colleague from Thornhill, who said the people of Ontario have sent us here to do their work, because there's much work to be done. The people of Ontario have said to us very clearly that they want their schools rebuilt and their hospitals and their health care system re-established. They want our cities to prosper again. They want small towns and small communities in rural Ontario to get their bridges fixed.

I know it doesn't sound too interesting to the opposition, but as we travelled across this province, over and over again we got, "You know, for eight years the previous government abandoned us. All they did was download all these services on us, and we can't even repair our bridges." This is what the people of Ontario, whether in Thornhill or East York or Thunder Bay-Atikokan, were telling us. They said, "Get in there, roll up your sleeves and improve this great province. Bring it back to the glory it once had."

You can see that they are depending on us to deliver a budget that's going to respond to those needs. They don't want us to waste our time and their time diverting attention from the job at hand. This motion is another attempt by the previous government, the members who are left, to divert attention from the work at hand. The work at hand is challenging, because we know they did not take care of bread-and-butter issues and they spent like drunken sailors.

Look at the OPG boondoggle. You want to talk about integrity in government, but I didn't hear one member of the opposition talk about the \$40-million bonus given to that dream team that came up from the States. Can you imagine what we could have done with that \$40 million in salaries by giving it to small communities in rural Ontario? Do you know what they did with the money instead? Seventeen million dollars was for a lump sum pension payout to one member of this dream team. Part of the team's job was to restore mothballed Pickering. They spent \$3 billion and Pickering is still not working. They went on and on.

One of the members of the dream team, Carl Andognini, received \$11.8 million in compensation—they still don't want to hear about it. They don't want this Parliament to talk about the OPG boondoggle of \$3 billion. They don't want us to talk about the mess they left in Walkerton. They don't want to talk about the fact that they stonewalled Ipperwash for eight years. Those are the things they don't want to talk about. They don't want to talk about what they did to our local hospitals and what they did to home care. They don't want that to be on the agenda. Instead, they want to divert attention to issues that the Integrity Commissioner has ruled on twice.

During the past eight years, when there were rulings by the Integrity Commissioner, we moved on. When Justice Coulter Osborne or other members of the Integrity Commission made rulings, we moved on to the business at hand. Instead, the opposition has no ideas, no vision, no proposals. They have nothing to offer so they want to divert attention to anything they're desperately thrashing around about, and that's what we have today. Instead of presenting a motion dealing with real bread-and-butter issues—What's happening to our agricultural communities? What's happening to property tax assessment? What's happening to auto insurance?—they don't want to talk about it. Look at the mess they created in auto insurance. For eight years they allowed auto insurance rates to go up 43%. They did nothing. They don't want to talk about auto insurance. They want to divert attention.

My colleagues, we have much work to do. The people of Ontario have said to us, "Fix auto insurance, fix the bridges, fix the hospitals, help people in nursing homes." They ignored the seniors in this province for eight years. They don't want to talk about the plight of our seniors.

We are committed to trying to undo the damage. The damage is deep and wide. The damage left by the previous government is seen in every community, whether it's in rural Ontario, Hamilton or Leamington.

The legacy of the OPG boondoggle, the dream-team solutions—we even paid these American consultants \$40 million to move back to the States. We even gave them pensions. They worked for two years and they got a \$1-million pension for working for two years. That's what they don't want to talk about. They don't want to talk about the secret contract they gave Paul Rhodes. They don't want us to mention that. They don't want to talk about the secret contract they signed with Tom Long, who got over \$1.4 million. Instead, they want to try to dig up something the Integrity Commissioner has already ruled on twice.

We on this side of the House do not underestimate the challenge. We know how much work there is to do. We know the deficit that was left behind. In fact, the former government doesn't even acknowledge there is a deficit. They still refuse to listen to the people of Ontario. In the last election they got thrown out because they didn't listen. They're still not listening. All they want to do is try to espouse the economic policies of a washed-up government. They're a washed-up group with washed-up ideas.

We on this side have some new ideas. We have some change to offer, we have hope to offer, but we can't do it in six months and we can't do it if they continue to try to obstruct the work of this government and this House. It's legitimate to debate, but it is not legitimate not to listen to the people of Ontario.

The people of Ontario said very clearly: "Take care of my job, take care of my city, take care of my hospital and my school." That's what they told us. We're not about phony Magna budgets, we're not about OPG boondoggles; we're about getting back to basics, fixing, mending and repairing this great province and making the people of this province feel once again that they're getting a good bang for their tax dollar. They don't want their tax dollars to go to some American consultant who gets a \$2-million pension to go back to the States. "Put the money into our local communities, put the money into our hospitals, not into these consultants who came up here and said, 'Boy, these people in Ontario are an easy mark.'" We're not going to be marks like you were.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke will come to order.

Mr Runciman has been moved that, in the opinion of this House, since the Premier has not adequately handled the conflict of interest allegations involving the Minister of Finance, and has not followed the ethical standards promised in his throne speech, the government no longer has the confidence of this House.

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 nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1750 to 1800.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will stand one at a time and be recognized by the Chair.

Ayes

Barrett, Toby
Chudleigh, Ted
Churley, Marilyn
Dunlop, Garfield
Eves, Ernie
Flaherty, Jim

Hudak, Tim
Kormos, Peter
Martel, Shelley
Martiniuk, Gerry
Miller, Norm
Murdoch, Bill

O'Toole, John
Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will stand one at a time and be recognized by the Chair.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne
Bartolucci, Rick
Bentley, Christopher
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brown, Michael A.
Brownell, Jim
Bryant, Michael
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Chambers, Mary Anne V.
Colle, Mike
Craitor, Kim
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Di Cocco, Caroline
Dombrowsky, Leona
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter

Gerretsen, John
Gravelle, Michael
Hoy, Pat
Jeffrey, Linda
Kennedy, Gerard
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Meilleur, Madeleine
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Mossop, Jennifer F.
Oraziotti, David
Parsons, Ernie
Patten, Richard

Peters, Steve
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra
Qaadri, Shafiq
Racco, Mario G.
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Smitherman, George
Sorbara, Greg
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wong, Tony C.
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 17; the nays are 64.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Before I adjourn the House, and after the vote, I want to express an opinion from the Chair. Something happened today that I haven't seen in 10 years in this place. I don't know who led it, but Mr Runciman, it was your motion. You know from all of your experience that this should not have happened. Any of you sitting with these T-shirts on who has an ounce of respect for this place wouldn't have worn them. The next time something like this happens—

Mr Wilson: We used to wear buttons all the time.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe-Grey, order. The next time something like this happens, the Chair will not see you.

This House stands adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1805.

CONTENTS

Wednesday 14 April 2004

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Taxation	
Mr Yakabuski	1475
Mr Hudak	1477
Anniversary of D-Day	
Mr Brownell	1475
Stan Darling	
Mr Miller	1475
Education	
Mr Berardinetti	1476
Kempton Howard	
Ms Churley	1476
Brampton Arts Council	
Mrs Jeffrey	1476
Hate crimes	
Mr Runciman	1476
Vaisakhi	
Mr Qadri	1477

MOTIONS

Private members' public business	
Mr Duncan	1477
Agreed to	1477

SECOND READINGS

Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, 2004, Bill 8, Mr Smitherman	
Agreed to	1478

ORAL QUESTIONS

Taxation	
Mr Flaherty	1478
Mr Smitherman	1478, 1479, 1480
Mr Klees	1479
Mr Prue	1480
Mr Hudak	1480
Hydro rates	
Mr Prue	1480
Mr Duncan	1480
Apprenticeship training	
Mr McNeely	1481
Mrs Chambers	1481, 1485
Mr Mauro	1481
Mr Marchese	1485
Interest rates	
Mr Flaherty	1481
Mr Phillips	1481

Workplace safety for students

Mrs Sandals	1482
Mr Bentley	1482

Water quality

Ms Churley	1482
Mrs Dombrowsky	1482, 1486
Mrs Mitchell	1486

Border security

Mr Runciman	1483
Mr Smitherman	1483

Lumber industry

Mr Oraziotti	1484
Mr Ramsay	1484

Reporting of gunshot wounds

Mr Dunlop	1484
Mr Smitherman	1484

Energy conservation

Mr Ruprecht	1485
Mr Phillips	1485

Landfill

Mr Barrett	1485
Mrs Dombrowsky	1486

Retroactive legislation

Mr Flaherty	1486
Mr Bryant	1487

PETITIONS

Taxation

Mr Barrett	1487
Mr O'Toole	1488

Immigrants' skills

Mr Levac	1487
Mr Craitor	1488

Ontario drug benefit program

Mr Murdoch	1487
Mr Hudak	1489, 1490

National child tax benefit supplement

Ms Martel	1488
-----------------	------

Ontario budget

Mr Ruprecht	1488
-------------------	------

Sewage sludge

Mr Wilson	1489
-----------------	------

Landfill

Mr Dunlop	1489, 1490
-----------------	------------

Historic vehicles

Mr O'Toole	1489
------------------	------

WANT OF CONFIDENCE MOTION

Mr Runciman	1490
Mrs Sandals	1492
Mr Flaherty	1494
Mr Qadri	1496
Mr Yakabuski	1497
Ms Broten	1498
Mr Miller	1499
Mr Prue	1501
Mr Patten	1504
Mr O'Toole	1505
Mr Berardinetti	1506
Mr Mauro	1507
Ms Mossop	1508
Mr Wilkinson	1509
Mr Racco	1509
Mr Colle	1510
Negatived	1511

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mercredi 14 avril 2004

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2004 sur l'engagement d'assurer l'avenir de l'assurance- santé, projet de loi 8, M. Smitherman	
Adoptée	1478

QUESTIONS ORALES

Formation par apprentissage	
M. McNeely	1481