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Jeudi 15 avril 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 15 April 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 15 avril 2004

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

ONTARIO FARMS

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I move that, in the opinion of this House, members of the Legislative Assembly should spend one day a year on a farm and report back on their experiences.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Leal has moved ballot item number 11. Pursuant to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes.

Mr Leal: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I'm happy to have the opportunity today to stand before you and speak to this resolution that I've brought forward. The Members' Back to the Farm Day resolution would encourage MPPs to spend one day a year on a farm in their riding. For those MPPs who represent strictly urban constituencies, I propose that they partner with an MPP from a rural riding to visit a farm for a day.

Earlier this year, a group of local farmers from Peterborough county approached me with the idea to do this. The premise is very similar in nature to our education minister's MPP back-to-school program. We've all been out of the school system for many years, and the experience allows us to see how schools have changed and adapted over the years. The same is true for farming.

This province was founded on the farms of our ancestors, who committed to back-breaking work to clear the land and to raise crops and livestock. This tradition is continued today. The province's agricultural industry and its related processing sector are worth \$22 billion and employ 600,000 Ontarians. However, population shifts have left many Ontarians leaving their family farms for urban centres. In today's world, children grow up in cities, rarely venturing into rural areas. Increasing pressures on farms have in part caused this exodus. Farming is an extremely tough livelihood. Changes in weather or a flare-up of disease can be devastating. Yet farmers must be optimistic and confident that growing conditions will co-operate.

Many city folk don't realize what farmers and the agricultural industry go through to get food to their tables. We need to return our attention to our rural roots. We need to get MPPs back on the farm so they can see

what farmers deal with on a daily basis. To further this experience, MPPs can then report back to the House and their constituents.

I can tell you I have had nothing but positive responses to this motion, which tells me of the need for recognition of the ag sector we have here. I have also had the support of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, which represents more than 39,000 farm families and more than 36 commodity organizations. Just yesterday I received a letter, and I want to read it in the record:

"The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is pleased to support your 'Back to the Farm Day' resolution encouraging members of the Ontario Legislative Assembly to spend one day a year on the farm and report back on their experiences.

"Although farmers are one of the top three most trusted professions in Canada, Ontario farmers have encountered confusion and ambivalence from governments, urban consumers and others due to their conflicting feelings and opinions about the romantic vision of the farmer and the practical realities of farming.

"The OFA is working hard to address this by communicating farmers' efforts at running efficient, technologically advanced, environmentally sound businesses that fill an important economic and social role in Ontario.

"Ontario depends on its farmers not just to grow and provide food, but also to work as the responsible caretakers of the largest part of this province's land base.

"Ontario's landscape is beautiful and reassures every person in Ontario that the land supports them. The outlook and independence of Ontario's residents rests on their knowledge that they have the freedom to make choices because the abundance of the farmland is supporting them. The new immigrant family in Toronto can think about their own business for next year, because they know they can afford to eat today. Most citizens of Ontario can enjoy their standard of living for the very same reasons.

"That Ontario farming has come this far is owing to the hard work, careful planning and care given to our bountiful resources. Farmers did not do this alone. In the past, farmers were supported by their governments, their customers and fellow citizens. As many people are now generations away from a family farm, we must work to ensure that the future of farming and farm families is guided by our successful past.

"I want to thank you for your resolution. The OFA is encouraged by the interest of the Legislative Assembly in farmers and farming. We would be pleased to facilitate

any such farm visits, and ask that MPPs to call on us for this.

“A farm visit will go a very long way to informing the important work legislators have in their decision-making and their policy development. This important work should never be done in a knowledge vacuum. The more our elected representatives know about the diversity, economic importance and community support provided by farmers, the more informed their policy development will be. There has never been a prosperous, stable and flourishing society that depended on others for its food.

“Once again, thank you.

“Sincerely,

“Ron Bonnett, President,” Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

Agriculture in Ontario is facing some tough times. Small family farm operations are facing tremendous pressure to expand while the costs and demands placed on farmers are continually growing. Increased costs associated with farming results in a lack of profit margins for our farmers and, at the same time, consumers are continuously insisting on low prices and high-quality products, with farmers ultimately bearing the burden.

Farmers are facing many issues today, including the enforcement and the related costs of the Nutrient Management Act, the increase of electricity costs, source water protection and BSE recovery. Farmers have worked hard to put together strategies to protect these interests.

Farmers rely on the environment for their livelihood. Environmental plans and nutrient management plans go a long way toward protecting farmers, the environment and consumers. In fact, more than 24,000 farms have used the environmental farm plans to identify on-farm risks to ground and surface water.

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However, it is getting increasingly difficult for farmers to manage their management plans, which can include on-farm food safety, medicated feed, pesticide management, traceability measures and animal welfare. Perhaps, as the OFA suggested, these plans could be streamlined for a more efficient approach to farm management.

Rural Ontarians have been proactive in their approach to innovative ideas for power generation as electricity costs rise. At a recent conference in my riding in Peterborough, the Ontario Rural Council hosted a forum on alternative energy sources. One of the ideas discussed involved wind turbines that could be placed in farmers' fields. Farm sources would be placed on the power grid. Farmers and Ontarians could benefit, and excess generation could also be sold to the province.

Even the issue of wildlife damage adversely affects farmers. Crop predation by animals such as birds, deer and raccoons results in significant losses for farmers. The OFA estimates that in 1988, wildlife damage resulted in the loss of about \$41 million for farmers. However, farmers are working with the Ministry of Natural Resources to develop policies for a manageable and controlled wildlife population.

But perhaps one of the toughest blows Ontario farmers have taken in the last year is the fallout of the discovery of BSE in Alberta. A subsequent drop in cattle prices has led to the loss of markets, destroying farm income for Ontario's 28,000 cattle producers and about 5,000 sheep, goat and deer producers. This has translated into a loss of about \$4.13 million for Ontario's cattle producers. Compensation programs introduced by our provincial government and previous governments, as well as the federal counterpart, have offset this loss by approximately \$3 million.

On March 23, in an open letter to all MPPs, OFA President Ron Bonnett wrote, “Recently, I visited with farmers across Ontario. In my years working with Ontario and Canadian farmers, I have never seen such a high level of frustration and anger among farmers as I see now. OFA's service and advocacy work on behalf of individual farmers and their families has increased tremendously since this time last year. Our offices are getting many desperate calls from desperate farm families.”

Bonnett adds, “For the first time in recorded history, the collective net farm income in Canada is negative! This means that all agricultural sectors are in serious trouble.”

I hosted a prebudget town hall meeting in Peterborough on March 25, and the priority that participants found sorely lacking was the support for rural Ontarians. Surprisingly, many of the town hall participants were city dwellers. It was refreshing to see that they recognized the need to help our farmers. However, I can say I'm fortunate to live in a unique riding. Peterborough is a blend of urban and rural. The city of Peterborough is a hub surrounded by small villages and farms. Time and time again, the resolve and spirit of the people within these farming communities amazes me.

To maintain our rural communities, small and new farming operations need to be preserved. It is my hope that this resolution will work toward that goal and bring much-deserved recognition to Ontario's farms. Many city folk don't realize what farmers and the agricultural industry go through to get food to the table.

The Deputy Speaker: The member's time has expired.

Mr Leal: We need to return to our roots, and I think this is the resolution to help us do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I am certainly pleased to rise today. Because I come from a mixed riding of urban and rural, in principle the member from Peterborough—I knew his predecessor very well: Gary Stewart, who was a very strong advocate of the farming community there. The resolution is to spend one day a year on a farm and report back on their experiences, and I think the intent and the spirit of what the member is trying to accomplish here is worthwhile. The Simcoe county agricultural federation in my riding has a day every year where they invite the members from Simcoe county—Jim Wilson, Garfield Dunlop and myself—I have been doing this since 1995—to attend and

visit a number of farms over the course of a day, whether it's a cattle farm, a dairy farm, a hog farm, a corn farm or whatever specialty they're in. We go there and visit each farm and deal with each of the farmers and the questions that they have for their specific area. Then we meet later at a host farm and have a barbecue and further discussions with the Simcoe county federation.

I can tell you, having done that for eight to nine years, that we are in touch with what's going on. That's something the federation puts on. I don't know what the definition of spending one day is, whether that's an overnight trip, whether it's 24 hours, or whatever the member is proposing here. We might want to be a little bit definitive, but certainly it is—

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): A spiritual day.

Mr Tascona: That's right. The member from Oak Ridges says "a spiritual day." I think a lot of the farmers out there are very strongly religious, because of the nature of the business they're in.

They have really been under pressure over the last few years. If it wasn't dealing with the difficulties we're having at the US border with cattle and the farmers who are now having difficulty out in British Columbia with respect to chickens, there were difficulties with respect to the weather conditions that farmers had been facing, especially in my riding, because we have a nice diverse mix of it.

Bradford West Gwillimbury, which is the southern part of my riding, has marsh farmers. Everyone knows about the Holland Marsh and the support we get from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture. The fruit growers have put on a number of events there with respect to bringing awareness to what they're doing in encouraging the fruit growers and the marsh farmers in terms of the work that has to be done to keep the soil productive, and also dealing with the phosphates, the issue that we have with Lake Simcoe. Lake Simcoe is a big issue in my riding. Certainly it's impacted significantly by the phosphates and what goes into Lake Simcoe through that area. Whether it's in Sutton or down in Bradford West Gwillimbury, the runoff has an impact. Those are issues that face the farmers in that area.

I have met with farmers in my riding over in Bond Head. Whether they're growing carrots or they're growing corn, they have issues. They had issues, certainly, with the Ministry of the Environment in terms of what their definition is of runoff. I know there were a number of disputes and discussions in terms of an understanding—not a sufficient understanding—by the Ministry of the Environment of what farmers do and what they have to face in terms of dealing with their product.

These are not just small farmers. The ones I met when we were dealing with issues with respect to crop protection are farmers with 800 to 900, minimum, acres—up to 2,000 acres in terms of their operation. They're big operations. Those are found throughout my riding, particularly in Innisfil, which is a very rural area but is coming under pressure with respect to development.

I've queried the Minister of Municipal Affairs on this moratorium in Bill 27 which is supposed to cover the

Golden Horseshoe. I have asked him directly whether that particular moratorium, which affects agricultural land—and the member from Peterborough may want to ask him the same question—impacts Simcoe county. His response—and I had read the bill—was, "No it doesn't impact it." In other words, it wouldn't be covered by the moratorium.

Having read the bill, I just don't know where the minister is getting that information, because he hasn't got any exemptions with respect to certain areas. So I'm a little bit confused, as are other people in my riding, as to whether the moratorium with respect to Bill 27 affects Simcoe county and whether agricultural land is frozen for a year in terms of whether it can be rezoned. I have not got an answer from the Minister of Municipal Affairs on that.

It's important, because there are farms being bought up in Innisfil with respect to potential residential development. Certainly, the area is going to grow. There is no doubt about it. But it's typical, in terms of the impact of urbanization, the location of Toronto and the GTA that will have on rural areas such as mine. I would say that Simcoe county is rural in nature. In particular, the member for Simcoe North, Oro-Medonte, is in a very strong cattle-raising, dairy farming area. Jim Wilson's area, which is in Simcoe-Grey, is a very vibrant rural area. In my riding in Cookstown there is a cattle auction which has done very well since it was opened; I think it was in the latter part of the 1980s or the early 1990s when it opened and to service the area. The rural nature of my area, when you have a mixed area—I know the member for Peterborough would, because Peterborough is a city, and with the rural area around that there is a real mix in terms of issues that you face from an urban area versus a rural area and trying to balance that off, especially when you have a fast-growing area such as mine, in Barrie, which is almost built out with respect to development, and areas such as Innisfil and Bradford West Gwillimbury that are growing.

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There are interesting developments that are happening there. There is one situation in Bond Head where there is a development proposal. I think the population of Bradford West Gwillimbury is around 14,000 people and there's a development proposal there for almost 50,000 people just outside Bond Head. I don't know how that will ever happen when you consider that there is only water to service about 37,000 people. Those are the challenges the government is going to face.

I can tell you that if they're looking at Bill 27 in terms of stabilizing urbanized growth, those are the challenges they're going to have with respect to farms as we go through this growth phase. We also have that in development projects not only in Innisfil, but the project that's slated for 3,200 units off Big Bay Point, which is subject to a very large meeting this week. We had, in Oro-Medonte, a large public meeting with respect to another development that is being proposed out there.

The challenge for the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Municipal Affairs is how they are going to

balance the interests of their rural members with their urban members, looking at a balance of growth and a balance with respect to maintaining agriculture. If the member for Peterborough really believes what he says, then he'll have to have some input into his government's plans with respect to growth. The growth that's going to happen out there is only to come at the backs and at the acreage of the family farm; there's no doubt about that. There are challenges for that member there, because essentially the Liberal Party in government is very urbanized into large urban centres, as opposed to our caucus which is much more into rural areas. But respecting that—I think you have to look at it—there is a balance.

Interjection.

Mr Tascona: The member from Ancaster is trying to offer me a few tidbits. Maybe he'll stand up and speak on this bill. We'll be looking for them. Maybe the member from Peterborough will offer him the opportunity, since he wants to interrupt me while I debate.

I would say that the member's intent is important because of the issues facing family farms in terms of nutrient management, source water, the phosphates that come off the farm, the Ministry of the Environment in terms of what they're going to deal with, but also the impact of urbanization as it infringes on the family farm in terms of doing business, and they're saying, "We don't want you to do your business because it is affecting how we live in an urbanized centre." That really becomes a major issue. Certainly this is similar, in a way, to the Minister of Education's always espousing, "Go to a classroom and visit school for a day and then report back on your experiences." The member from Peterborough is bringing that little lesson to the rural area about spending a day on a farm—and we still haven't determined whether it's a day visit or a nighttime visit or whatever—and then reporting back on our experiences. I don't know how he wants us to report back on our experiences, whether he wants a report to the House or a report to him.

When the Minister of Education was in opposition, he always wanted to make sure we were going to the schools. I have four children in school and I didn't really need any lessons from him in terms of what was going on in the schools, but I can tell you that it is important. If you're a good member, you'll want to visit the places that you think are important. Obviously, going to a school and understanding how it operates is important. Going to a farm and understanding how it operates, and their issues, is important. What the member is saying here is that it's important that we understand that farmers have issues. We have to face those issues. If you're not in a rural area, you have greater challenges because you're going to have to get out there to understand what they're going through as opposed to just going with what you're facing in an urban area.

That's all I have to say on this. I wish the member well.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Thank you. I want to—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. There is a rotation here, so I'll try to keep to it. The member for Perth-Middlesex.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'm delighted to speak to this motion and I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Peterborough for bringing this forward today. This is of vital interest to so many members from all parties in this House.

The thing that I've said to farmers in my riding—I might preface it by saying that Perth-Middlesex, my riding, is the most productive agricultural riding in the Dominion. There may be other rural members here who would dispute that, but I have been told many times by our friends from the Perth County Federation of Agriculture and from Middlesex that we're very productive. I'm quite proud of that and I'm always willing to stand in this House and be proud of that fact.

As we all recall, 100 years ago Ontario was a rural province. It was dominated by members who came here from rural Ontario because the province itself was rural, but now it isn't. Now the province is primarily urban. That's why it is so important that urban members take one day of the year to get out to what is the second-largest industry in this province: agricultural and agri-food.

For farmers there are two things: There's pride and there's pain. There is pride in being a farmer. Farming is not a job, farming not a profession; farming is a vocation. I truly believe that to be a farmer you are called to it. You are called to it because of family tradition in many instances, but you have it in your heart. You wouldn't farm because you thought it was a job; you have to have it in your bones. It's bred into your bones, and it's a vocation that we have to cherish in this province.

I come from a long and illustrious line of pen-pushers. Though I am the representative for Perth-Middlesex, my grandfather was a trust officer, my father is a chartered accountant and I'm a certified financial planner. I'm one of four boys and I grew up in Trenton, which is a small town in the heart of rural eastern Ontario. There was no way that my father was going to allow his four sons to be lounging around all summer with nothing to do. Being a chartered accountant, of course he knew many farmers, and so off we'd go to dutifully spend some time on the farm.

My very first job, when I was 14 years old, was on a cattle farm, the farm of Roger and Pat Laferty, and I must admit it was wonderful for me. It gave me an appreciation of a life I had heard of but hadn't experienced. I remember distinctly that there were three things I learned. I showed up on the first day, 14 years old, all full of vim and vitality, and it was a rainy day, so we were out in the implement barn and the chaps were sitting around: Roger Laferty, who owned the farm, and two of his hired hands. Being personable even at that early age, I started by saying that farming must be a great job because you have the winters off.

My, my, they decided that I had to learn a few lessons about farming, that it wasn't a just a summer job. We

built a hay wagon that day because it was raining, and they had me do the hammering. So dutifully I got on to the wagon and started hammering away. Of course, I didn't want to hurt myself. I thought they would find it quite amusing if I were to actually smash my thumb, so I worked diligently and made sure that I would not hurt myself. After about five minutes, my arm was ready to fall off. After they figured that I had done enough time in purgatory, one of the farmers, Roger, came over to me. He gave the nail a little tap, lifted up and let the hammer fall. He did that twice, and the nail was done. He explained to me something that I learned then and I've always known from then on: You let the hammer do the work.

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The other thing that I learned was, because it was a cattle farm—and being from town, we would go on about cows. I would call all these cattle “cows.” They explained to me that they weren't cows; they were steers. Being 14, of course I referred to them as bulls. They explained to me that, no, they were steers. Being a neophyte, I said, “What's the difference?” For a 14-year-old young teenage boy, that was an eye-opening experience to find out about the difference between a bull and steer. I think that will always stick with me.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): What is it? Tell us what it is.

Mr Wilkinson: I tell the member for Toronto-Danforth that it had to do with an elastic band, and these things just fall off after a time.

The other thing I want to mention is that I was meeting with the Perth Federation of Agriculture and we were having a discussion about how this is an urban province and it's incumbent on those of us in the minority in rural ridings to reach out to urban members. I know that my own federations have agreed to have a day, which we're working on, where all the urban members will be invited out to Perth-Middlesex. We're going to have a day on the farm. We want you to bring your families; we'll have a barbecue and we're going to allow our members to drive the great big tractors and combines, and get a real feel for what we do out in Perth-Middlesex. I look forward to that day and the support that I've received.

I am proud to support the member for Peterborough and his insightful resolution. I think it will go a long way to moving the interests of rural Ontario to the forefront of this place.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Northumberland.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It's an honour to—

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, no. It's early in the morning. Could the member take his seat? I'll see if I can recognize the members in rotation first. It's your turn, member for Toronto-Danforth.

Ms Churley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I do think it's important that an urban member speak to this resolution. I don't know if many others are. I have the Riverdale Farm in my community of Toronto-Danforth, and that is,

in fact, the only opportunity for some children growing up in the city to actually get a little experience of seeing baby lambs and baby pigs being born and all of those kinds of things. It really enriches our city.

I just have to say that I support this resolution. I think it's really important. All of the members here who were elected from rural areas come to live in the city, at least part of the time, and you get an opportunity to see what the problems are in the city and what works in the city, and you have an idea when we urban members stand up and start calling for more money for public transportation and all of those kinds of things. But the opposite doesn't happen. The urban members really don't get the opportunity to go out to the rural areas or a farm and see first-hand how it all works and what the problems are there. I can tell you that, even though I represent an urban area, some of you know that I come from Newfoundland and Labrador. I grew up in Labrador—I come from a fishing family in Newfoundland—and witnessed over time—although I'd left home by then—the demise of the fishing industry in Newfoundland. I saw some of my relatives there just devastated. To some extent, I see similar things happening now with the family farm, with all of the issues that other members talked about and are facing today, with all of the new things we've learned about the environment and all of the problems that farmers have to face, all the things they are expected to take care of and fix.

Often they are abandoned. We bring in new laws. For instance, the previous government brought in, after the Walkerton incident—and let me say here that from time to time it sounds as though people may be blaming the farmer on whose farm that well was situated, which ended up being discussed at the Justice O'Connor inquiry. I just want to make it clear again that, if anybody still believes that it was that farmer's fault, I disavow them completely of that. Justice O'Connor was very clear in his report that the farmer—and it was a small farm—had done everything right. He in fact had his environmental plan and all of the other plans but, as we found out from the inquiry, it was a failure of both the municipal government and the Koebel brothers involved in that, plus the existing government. There were a whole bunch of reasons that came together, a whole bunch of circumstances that caused that. It wasn't the farmer's fault. It's really important that we remind people that on the whole farmers are doing their very best to keep up with all of the new environmental laws and standards and things that are thrown at them, and they understand essentially how important those are. We are in that situation now.

I'm sure every member here received an open letter from the Ontario farmers, from Mr Ron Bonnett, the president. I think it's a very polite letter. We get less polite letters when people are looking to government for help and assistance, but if you read that letter, it's very clear that they find themselves “in dire situations,” as he puts it, “due to BSE, the high Canadian dollar and the general disregard for the harsh realities of today's farm

business issues by elected officials and consumers alike.” He talks about the desperation that particularly the small family farms—I believe he’s referring to—are feeling. He’s saying:

“For the first time in recorded history, the collective net farm income in Canada is negative! This means that all agricultural sectors are in serious trouble.”

I believe it is easy for us to sit around here and discuss all kinds of new legislation and all kinds of new regulations and rules that have a big impact on farmers without really recognizing and understanding their day-to-day lives and the implications of what these new laws can mean to them. That’s why I think this is a good resolution. I don’t know what the punishment will be if people don’t make it to the farm—and I don’t know if Riverdale Farm in my riding will count—but I do believe that it is really important, particularly for urban members, to get out to the farm and see how it works.

It reminds me of when I first became, before I came to this place, a city councillor. At the time, there were lots of discussions, as there are now, about infrastructure deficits and problems. I got on the works committee, as it was known then. People made fun of me a little bit, but one of the first things I did was I got suited up and went down into the sewers. Yes, I went down into the sewers—and I won’t talk about this place in that context. I went down and had a really good look around and saw for myself. I talked to the workers who were trying to maintain that aging system and saw what was really going on there. It certainly helped me, when we had further discussions about what needed to be done, to understand what those issues really were.

I would suggest that that’s something we all do as well. Of course, we could add on a number of things. We should go and see how cars are made and go down into the sewer systems and see what the real problems are. I guess that could take up too much of our time, but I think it’s really important for politicians, elected officials to actually see first-hand. That, I believe, will enhance our role and make us more understanding when we stand in this place and talk about and discuss new legislation and pass legislation.

1040

I know that the member knows, and he mentioned it himself, that there are all kinds of issues about some of the new environmental laws, many of which are a result of what happened in Walkerton. We also know that the farmers want to comply with that legislation, but they do need some help. When I asked the Minister of the Environment yesterday about, for instance, helping small municipalities with the new water regulations and those kinds of things, the answer seemed to imply—at least the first part of her answer—that a new law that was brought in by the previous government would mean they would have to cover all those costs themselves. That is a really serious issue.

I know the member for Peterborough mentioned the Nutrient Management Act. All of those kinds of things—that one in particular, but the Source Protection Act as

well—will have a huge impact on those farmers, small and big. It may be easier for what we refer to as factory farms or whatever you choose to call them, the larger industrial farms, to comply, but for the small family farm it can be an overwhelming burden. We know it is an overwhelming burden. They need the assistance of the government, to make sure they bring in those laws. They can’t be abandoned to try to find that money themselves, because in many cases we are going to lose, as I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks.

I believe, from everything I’m hearing, that the family farm in particular is in crisis and it absolutely needs some government support. They’re seeing their driver’s insurance go way, way up. They’re seeing, of course, higher electricity prices now because the cap has been taken off by new Liberal government. If you start looking at all of the costs they have to face on top of their regular costs, and because of some of things I’ve mentioned, they really could be in very serious crisis.

I applaud the member for bringing this forward. I certainly will participate, and would be happy to, and hope that other members, particularly urban members, will take up the challenge.

Mr Yakabuski: I’m pleased to be able to speak on this motion today, returning to the farm for a day to learn some things. I certainly hope all of the urban members will take advantage of that. I myself am not a farmer and was not raised on a farm, but alluding to the presentation by the member from Perth-Middlesex, in the words of Jimmy Dickens, “I got my education out behind the barn.”

I had the opportunity to visit farms quite often, because many of my boyhood friends did come from farms. I got a little understanding of how hard they worked, not only their families but they themselves. After they would return from school, they would have chores to do, and before they’d go to school, they would have chores to do. So there’s certainly a great deal to be learned by spending some time with a farmer. I know farming has changed over the last 40 years or so since I would have been visiting those places as a young boy, but the workload is still very, very significant for people in those occupations.

It’s kind of ironic that we would be having a day to return to the farm. We have been speaking about going back to schools, and I have had the opportunity to visit many schools in my riding in the last few months. I have children in school as well, but it still has been a very worthwhile experience for me to see how the education system is working and how it’s relating to children of other families, not just my own. That has been positive for me, and I’m sure the visits to the farm will be positive as well. I intend to take advantage of that, as suggested by the member from Peterborough.

But I also remember, during my campaign, visiting sawmills—because a big issue in my riding is how the Ministry of the Environment is treating sawmills—and I made a commitment to a sawmill operator that I would spend a day working in his sawmill. Now, I have to

inform the House that I have yet to fulfill that commitment, but I fully intend to do that sometime this summer. I want to spend a day working in that sawmill and understanding the work they have to do, so it's easier for us to understand the trials and tribulations they face on daily basis and the frustration they sometimes feel when government regulations make it more difficult for them to do their job.

On the subject of farms, I certainly want to say that I will be supporting it and also taking advantage of the visit. My riding has a large farming component. It's the second-largest cattle-producing county in the province. With the exception of the towns of Renfrew, Arnprior and Deep River and the city of Pembroke, each of my municipalities has a farming component and they have had a difficult time of it, particularly last year with the finding of BSE in a cow. It has had a terrible impact on farmers not only in my riding but throughout the country. So we want to stand by our farmers and support them and make sure they understand that we do sense some of their pain and we're working to try to mitigate some of that. One way of understanding that better would certainly be if we got out to those places and lived how they live for a day.

Many of the farmers in my riding are not full-time farmers any more, because they can't make a living at farming. So they must work outside the home, have a full-time job and return to those beloved pieces of land that may have been in the family for generations and that they simply will not give up on, because farmers are a proud, hard-working group of people. Their day just never seems to end, because before they start their day's work and after they've completed their day's work outside the farm, they must see to it that all the necessary tasks that can't be completed during the daylight hours are completed after they return from work.

They're a group to be revered and respected because of the hard-working type of people they are. They're not a boisterous, loud, complaining type of people; they simply go along. They understand there are problems to be faced, and they face them and work hard every day, hoping that tomorrow will bring solutions to those problems. I certainly support the resolution and hope other members of my party will.

Mr Rinaldi: It's an honour for me to stand in this House today and support the back-to-the-farm day resolution of my colleague from Peterborough. I believe that we, as leaders in this province, need to be supportive of our farming industry, more so now than ever, and education is a very important component of that.

Let me elaborate a little on how important education about farming is in the beautiful rolling hills of Northumberland county. The local federation a few years back started a Rural Ramble farm tour, and I'd like to give a little detail about what this entails. It's all about education, about the future, about kids and about farming.

Each year, the agricultural community of Northumberland county invites urbanites to get out of town and come to farms to see what life in the country is all about. Rural

Ramble is a two-day driving tour of working farms and associated agri-businesses in the community. Today many children, going back at least a couple of generations, have no idea where products that nourish us every day come from. A lot of them probably think they come from the local Sobeys food counter.

As I said, Rural Ramble originated with the Northumberland Federation of Agriculture a few years back, and they thought that the first time around they might get 500 or 600 people visiting the farms of farmers who opened their doors voluntarily. Much to their surprise, they got over 2,000 people the very first year. These people came not only from our community and from Ontario but even from outside Ontario. In 2003, even through the hardships our farming communities suffered, they drew close to 4,000 people.

1050

This event appeals to families, to children. I know I've taken part every year at some level. It's interesting to see how grandparents bring their grandkids and parents bring their kids and interact with the actual life on the farm for the day. This year the Rural Ramble committee, which is made up of the Northumberland Federation of Agriculture, has scheduled the weekend of August 21 and 22.

These visits encompass a variety of farms and activities, such as dairy, beef, horse, crop, sheep, bison, trout farms, honeybee, maple syrup, apple and vegetable. There are also stops planned at retail markets, where they'll have quilts. They'll have woodlot demonstrations and machinery displays on some of these farms. Of course, there will be all sorts of educational displays to show how a crop goes from point A to point B.

There's a whole array of people who make this happen, all volunteers. They tell me that close to 1,000 volunteers participate to make this happen on those two days. Some of the profits are turned back to charity in those communities, so it's a win-win situation.

I urge members of this House to mark August 21 and 22 on their calendars to visit the beautiful rolling hills of Northumberland county, just east of Toronto. I'll leave you with a last thought before I share my time with my colleagues: that we remind ourselves each morning when we wake that we have to thank a farmer.

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It is my pleasure to speak today in support of this resolution and to add my sincere appreciation to the member from Peterborough for his support of our agricultural community. I can say, coming from the most rural riding in the province of Ontario, and I might add—

Interjections.

Mrs Mitchell: I just want to set the record straight that my riding produces more agricultural product than many provinces within this wonderful country of Canada.

Ontario's farms, which number 57,000, are the first link in an agri-food chain. They generate billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of jobs. They contribute to the health of every person in the province by producing safe, high-quality food.

The families who own these farms are committed stewards of the environment. They know that by caring

for their environment today, they will protect our resources: soil, water and air. They are making an investment in our future. These men and women are some of most productive and innovative people you will ever meet. That's because every day they rise to the challenges of the global marketplace, the demands of consumers and the whims of nature.

More than 200 different commodities are produced in Ontario. Our agricultural industry is the nation's most diverse. We export more than \$8 billion worth of agricultural and food products. Our industry accounts for fully one quarter of Canada's total agri-food exports.

We can learn a tremendous amount from Ontario's farmers. Any member of this House who makes time for an annual visit will benefit greatly from the first-hand experience of agriculture in Ontario. Coming from a rural riding, I can only stress how important it is to make the time for that visit. It can only help in our decision-making to have first-hand knowledge on the farm. I would remind the members of this House to conduct those visits with care and respect. The biosecurity measures that farmers have put in place to protect their livestock and livelihood must be respected.

I support this resolution and the minister supports this resolution. I urge every member in the House to do the same.

I will be sharing my time with a fellow rural member, from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell.

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I commend the member for Peterborough for coming up with this type of bill this morning.

In 2001, I put together a program, A Day on the Farm, for MPPs, and quite a few members of this assembly participated. The way it was organized, the member had to come in the day before and had to get up at 4:30 in the morning to learn about the farming community. The benefit we got out of this—I remember that the member for York West, Mario Sergio, went down to the Pierre Bercier farm, who was the president of l'Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens. He went to a farm at Ste-Rose-de-Prescott. The Scarborough-Rouge River member, Alvin Curling, worked a full day on Tony Van Munsteren's farm in Cumberland. When CJOH (CTV) went down to look at how he was working, he came out saying, "In Toronto, we work from 9 to 5. When you get down on the farm, you have to work from 5 to 9, not 9 to 5." The member for Windsor West, Minister Sandra Pupatello, went down to work on a farm in Clarence, Muller farms. I went myself to the John Kirby farms in Chute-à-Blondeau. The Premier of today offered to send his children to work on a farm. The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound made an offer that he wanted to come down to Glengarry.

Let me tell you what those people learned: the importance of knowing how farmers work. They cannot afford to be sick for even one day. It is seven days a week that they have to be there, and it is from 5 to 9 at night and very often right up to midnight.

The benefit of this program that is going to be put together by the member for Peterborough—and I hope

that, like the back-to-school program we have for the members, a lot of our members will benefit from this day on the farm. You will see the difference when you meet in caucus. Every time Sandra Pupatello was asked what she learned on the farm, she said, "Before I went to work on a farm, I asked Jean-Marc, 'What do you want me to do over there? Everything is automatic now.'" I said, "Sandra, you will learn when you get there." She got there the night of 9/11 in 2001. The night of 9/11, she got to Orléans, Ontario, and I picked her up to take her down to the farm. The farmers explained to her what she had to do and what she could expect. I remember driving around at noon time and I saw Sandra on the farm, at the barn.

The Deputy Speaker: As long as the story isn't too long. Your time has expired.

Mr Lalonde: She came to me and said, "Jean-Marc, can I have a rest on your back seat?" I said, "Sandra, you told me you were going to work a full day. The full workday is from 5 to 9."

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

Mr Leal: I certainly appreciate the comments this morning, the insight from my colleagues: the members from Huron-Bruce, Perth-Middlesex, Northumberland, Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, and the fine riding of Toronto-Danforth.

One of the reasons that I think this is so important is that there's a very serious trade issue going on right now in Geneva. The World Trade Organization is having ongoing discussion in Geneva. One of the issues that will be part of those trade negotiations that directly impacts, or potentially has a significant impact on farming operations here in Ontario, is the whole question of supply management. One of the great opportunities of going back to the farm is for these MPPs who predominantly come from urban ridings to really get an understanding of what supply management is all about. Supply management in Ontario has been the principal foundation for many family farms.

1100

There's been great pressure over the last decade by the Americans and Europeans for Canada to abandon a supply management system. The supply management system has worked extremely well in providing reasonable prices and return for people in the farming community and guaranteeing to our consumers a reasonable price for products, particularly in the area of dairy, chickens, turkeys and eggs. When you think about it, when you go into Reid's milk store and pay \$4.39 for three bags of 1% milk, stand back for a moment and think what a bargain it really is when you compare to similar prices for the same product throughout the world. One of the reasons that I think MPPs must have a thorough understanding of what this is all about—collectively, supply management is a non-partisan issue—is so we can constantly inform our ag ministers in Ontario and in Ottawa that we need to keep this as part of the family farm operation.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): On a point of order, Speaker: As a farmer, I would like to extend an invitation to all members of this House to come and visit my farm. This would be a good time, as cows are now having their calves. So if you'd like to come, just let me know at your convenience. I'd love to have you there.

The Deputy Speaker: That's not a point of order, but we'd sure like to go.

ROADSIDE MEMORIAL

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Transportation should work with MADD Canada, where initiated by MADD, to enter into an agreement to allow the construction of a roadside sign, or other appropriate memorial on highway property, to commemorate an individual or individuals killed by a drunk driver.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): The member for York North has moved ballot item number 12. Pursuant to standing order 96, the member has 10 minutes.

Mrs Munro: I'd like to begin by first welcoming guests to the gallery here today. We are joined by constituents of mine, Alex and Rim Van Hemert from Newmarket. I certainly appreciate your being here. As well, we are joined by Carolyn Swinson, co-president of the Toronto chapter of MADD and former national vice-president. Welcome to the Legislature.

Every year in Canada, at least 1,200 people are killed in motor vehicle crashes caused by impaired driving. This represents about 40% of all deaths in car accidents. More than three people die every day in Canada, 365 days a year, because of the thoughtlessness of drunk drivers. This must stop. Over 70,000 people a year are injured because of impaired driving in Canada—almost 195 people every day. The estimated cost of drunk driving crashes is in the billions. We all know that drunk driving is a serious problem, and I am proud that our government in office took serious steps to fight drunk driving and reduce the carnage on our roads. Some of the important measures we took include establishing a 90-day administrative driver's licence suspension, increasing fines for driving while suspended, doubling dedicated funding for the RIDE program, putting in place mandatory remedial measures, lengthening the period of time for considering previous Criminal Code of Canada convictions, impounding the vehicles of those who drive while suspended for more Criminal Code convictions, increasing driver's licence suspension periods for repeat offenders, and introducing the interlock ignition program contained in a private member's bill from my colleague Garfield Dunlop.

I know all members of the House support these tough measures taken to fight drunk driving and I am certain they will continue.

Legal measures are important for stopping drunk driving, but the families and friends of victims and many

ordinary Ontarians want to do their part. MADD Canada is perhaps the single most important grassroots organization committed to stopping impaired driving and supporting the victims of the violent crime that is drunk driving. I am very proud to have worked with them in the past and look forward to working with them in the future, in the hope that one day drunk driving will only be a memory.

When I first thought of introducing a resolution on roadside memorials, I knew that MADD Canada would have to be involved. MADD has the respect of victims' families, the police, government and citizens, and any plan for memorials will only succeed with their support and wisdom. Roadside memorials are first and foremost for the victims of drunk drivers and MADD is their representative. I'm very proud that MADD Canada is supporting my resolution, and I commit to their members that if this resolution is passed by the House today, I will work diligently to ensure it comes into effect in Ontario.

Roadside memorials serve two important purposes. The first is indeed to provide the families and survivors of drunk-driving crashes the opportunity to honour a loved one who has died in a crash, allowing them to heal and remember someone they cared for, remembering a life and demonstrating to all who pass the spot that their loved one's life was important and was taken away for no good reason.

Memorials also act as a poignant reminder to passing drivers that too many lives are lost every year to drunk driving. Seeing a memorial with the name of an actual person killed by a drunk driver would be a far stronger symbol of the cost of drunk driving than any statistic or message we could give. Families of victims may be able to take some solace from knowing that their memorial to their son or daughter, brother or sister, father or mother, is not only a remembrance of that loved one, but is also a warning that may save a life. If only one life is saved by a memorial sign, then it is a success.

Several other provinces and states allow for memorials of various kinds. Saskatchewan and British Columbia have policies that allow for the construction of memorials. Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have no formal policies, but informally permit memorials. Ontario's Ministry of Transportation has a guideline for memorial displays that permits displays and suggests sensitivity, but it specifically suggests that "...individuals should be sensitively advised of the potential for driver distraction and discouraged from installing any display. If the individual insists, the officer shall meet with the individual in the field and negotiate a short-term display without safety concerns."

I recognize that safety on the roads must remain MTO's first priority, and I commend that ministry for the news that our roads in 2002 were the safest in Canada. As a former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, I take some pride in this accomplishment. MTO, though, is not doing enough to permit memorials. They should be more than just tolerated; they should be promoted as a positive good. MADD Canada and MTO

working together to develop a common policy will ensure that memorials can be constructed, while ensuring that drivers and pedestrians alike are safe.

Our roads are bordered by signs of all kinds, including tourist signs in many rural areas. Roadside memorial signs could easily fit into our sign system. A memorial sign could use the language “Don’t drink and drive, In memory of,” a clear, consistent and simple message that, in my opinion, would be the best way for memorial signs to act as a warning to drivers.

1110

MADD Canada can work with MTO to develop a sensible policy, as has already been done in the province of Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia’s Department of Transportation and Public Works and MADD Canada work together to provide for roadside memorials through the memorial white cross program. The Nova Scotia system provides for site location, installation, dedication ceremonies and visitation assistance. MADD Canada works with the ministry to create a fair and understandable system that is in place to provide for memorials, while ensuring that no memorial is a detriment to public safety on the roads. Their system recognizes that some locations are not appropriate for signs, but these locations are spelled out specifically in the guidelines. If Nova Scotia can set up a balanced system that works well, there is no reason that Ontario could not do the same. We should build on Nova Scotia’s expertise to develop memorials in Ontario.

I have received many letters of support for this resolution, many of them from MADD chapters and the families of victims. I would just like to name a few of those that I have received: Lesley Read from MADD’s chapter in Thunder Bay; Debbie White, founder of MADD Lanark county; Betty Kreidl, treasurer of MADD Hamilton; Betty and John Cochran from the North Bay chapter; Carolyn Swinson, already introduced to us as the co-president of the Toronto chapter; and Linda and John MacDonald from Goderich, Ontario, who sent me the names of 70 friends and family members who support this resolution.

Many of those who have contacted me have shared with me their personal stories of a loved one who was killed by a drunk driver. Their stories of loss are heart-wrenching, and I could spend this whole debate speaking of them. They are individuals, not numbers, not statistics, and we should honour their memories. I ask you to support this resolution, both to honour them and to act as a warning to drunk drivers that their actions kill, that cars crashed by drunk drivers are not accidents. Every one of us makes a choice, and we are all responsible to make choices that respect the lives of others.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): As always, I’m honoured to rise in this House to speak. Today, I’ve been asked to talk about this resolution. I think it’s a great idea to talk about, especially after I went to the Internet and researched this topic. I went to the MADD Web site and I discovered the horrible story of the accidents caused by drivers who drink and drive. I went

to the research and found that 1,680 people are killed and 74,000 injured each year in alcohol-related crashes. That’s from Health Canada, 1997.

I think it’s very important to talk about this issue, especially because it costs lot of money and a lot of lives. Also, it’s our duty as members of this House. We put ourselves in this position to defend the people of this province—and the people who drive in the province. I think it’s a good idea to be discussed in this place, especially now that we have the president of the Toronto chapter with us. I think it’s a very, very important idea.

I just have some questions. If we try to place memorial signs across the highway, I’m wondering about the safety and the importance of those signs. I think that to raise awareness and talk about it in the media, talk to the MTO and talk to the Minister of Transportation is always a good idea. It is always important to co-operate between MADD and the MTO, MADD’s institutional associations with the Ministry of Transportation.

I’m a person who drives at least once or twice every week from London to Toronto to be in this place. It’s very important to have safe drivers driving the highway along with me, because I want to protect myself and my family. I also care about being here, and I care about having safe roads. All the time on my way to this place I see memorial signs along the highway, both ways, from London to Toronto and from Toronto to London. When I’m driving, I cannot see those signs. They’re not visible enough. The Ministry of Transportation also places signs along the highway from Toronto to Windsor, talking about drinking and driving and what drinking and driving causes, and trying to raise awareness among drivers not to drink and drive.

I wonder if those memorial signs will cause some kind of safety problem, because maybe the families of the people who got killed due to drinking and driving want to visit those spots and could perhaps create some kind of safety issue for other drivers.

I would recommend that all the chapters of MADD across the province work with the Ministry of Transportation on ads in the paper and ads on TV and work with the ministry to enhance the signs we have, if they wish. I also think it’s a good idea, especially after I went on the Internet and found that the people who get killed due to driving and drinking are between 25 and 34 years of age—so I’m talking about a younger generation. We could launch a campaign, go to the malls, go to TV, go to the newspapers and try to talk to that segment of the population to create awareness.

I understand that this resolution is very important to everyone in this House and in this province in order to create awareness, because every one of us is subject to the danger caused by people who drink and drive.

Also, I learned that our Ministry of Transportation already has in place tough measures for people who drink and drive by losing their driver’s licence and not being allowed to drive. The police in every city and every municipality in the province have checkpoints every Friday and Saturday night to check many drivers to see if

they are drinking and driving. I wonder if that measure will decrease the number of incidents or eliminate the death toll caused by drinking and driving.

In principle, I support the idea of the resolution. Hopefully, the member from York North will detail it more in order to make it effective and workable for all the people in this province.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm really pleased to join in the debate in support of my colleague and advocate with respect to ridding our roads of those who drink and drive, the member from York North.

Certainly I support her resolution, which reads, "In the opinion of this House, the Ministry of Transportation should work with MADD Canada, where initiated by MADD, to enter into an agreement to allow the construction of a roadside sign, or other appropriate memorial on highway property, to commemorate an individual or individuals killed by a drunk driver."

As I was driving down from Barrie today, on certain parts of the highway you see where people have been killed, families commemorating and recognizing where that accident happened, whether it's on a steel fence with flowers, or at the side of the highway with flowers and rocks and the significance of a grave. Let's face it, we have had more than our share of traffic accidents that have struck individuals needlessly on the highways with respect to drinking and driving.

1120

I can remember that when I first ran back in 1995, I was at the McDonald's in Bradford West Gwillimbury, which is on Highway 88, that runs right through Bradford and into Julia's riding in Newmarket. At the time we were in a provincial election. I was with the Premier-to-be, Harris. We met with a group from MADD Canada with respect to making sure and promising and keeping a commitment to MADD Canada with respect to bringing in drinking and driving legislation. In fact through the Attorney General, Charles Harnick, and the Minister of Transportation at that time, Al Palladini, we did bring in the toughest drinking and driving legislation in the country.

I think that was through the efforts of MADD Canada in terms of trying to deal with this problem. It is a problem that is not going to go away. No matter how hard we try, with human nature as it is, you take away licences and you take away other privileges and it still happens.

I would also like to think this resolution goes as far as to apply to accidents that occur off the GO Transit entrances. We don't have too many of them, but we've had a few. It should apply not only to highway property, but also to GO Transit entrances as we move through the GTA.

I know the member has done a lot of research on this. Certainly she has support for this resolution from third-party groups. I'm looking through the research she did on behalf of this legislation and I notice that the province of Nova Scotia has a white cross memorial program in a

partnership between the Department of Transportation and Public Works and MADD Canada. MADD has to go through the ministry for an approval process and to observe strict guidelines before they are permitted to place a cross. MADD is also responsible for soliciting permission from adjacent property owners. Locations for memorial crosses cannot pose a safety hazard and the placing of memorials on certain highways is prohibited.

The white cross memorial program in Nova Scotia is in conjunction with the Department of Transportation and MADD Canada. This is something the member is proposing. I think it brings some respect and process to those families who have had victims die from drunk drivers. As the member says in her letter to me, "Too many Ontarians die every year because of the thoughtlessness of those who drink and drive. Roadside memorials would allow families to honour their loved ones, and would also act as a warning to those who might be tempted to drink and drive that their actions can result in injury or death for other drivers, pedestrians and cyclists."

I think the symbolic message the member is putting forth, not only in terms of community education but also as a warning to people that their actions can affect other individuals, is something that has to be respected. I think it's very important. I understand from the member that MADD Canada supports roadside memorials, and there's a letter from the executive director showing that they support this with respect to the resolution that's before us today.

The member from York North, former parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, did a lot of work with respect to making sure that the roads in my area, which is Bradford West Gwillimbury, and around her area too in Newmarket—you'd have Highway 88, the 400, Highway 9 all coming together in a very, very populated area.

I can tell you that it's no small issue, because we have had, on Canal Road—and the member would be familiar with that. As you drive, you can get to Canal Road off Highway 400, which is essentially a road that was designed for farmers in the area to access the 400 or move around the marsh areas. It goes right into Bradford West Gwillimbury. They have had many, many bad accidents. I can't cite the number of deaths that have happened over the years off Canal Road, because it's only a two-lane road. It's surrounded on one side by the marsh farms and on the other side by the canal. They have had too many tragedies.

I know that the council for Bradford West Gwillimbury has met and spoken with the Ministry of Transportation with respect to what to do with that road. The current position of the council, through a resolution, is to close off access from Highway 400 to Canal Road. That's a tough issue because of the growth that's going on with Bradford West Gwillimbury and the number of people that actually use that as a commuter road, though it was never designed for that. It's a winding road. It's for the marsh farmers, in terms of them getting to move around with their crops and their huge machinery.

That's an example, whether it was drinking and driving or just bad driving. But there have been more than enough tragedies in that area with respect to Canal Road. So it's something that's being looked at right now.

But certainly the member, with respect to dealing with this particular agreement, I think goes one step forward with respect to public education and a recognition. You can have the tough laws and ensure that they're enforced by the Ontario Provincial Police or your local police force, but you do need a public education program, if you want to call it that. But you have to also have some respect for those who have died. I think what is going on here is almost twofold: the public education to make sure drivers are aware of their conduct and what the consequences are, but also respect for the families who have lost someone needlessly through someone that has chosen to drink and drive, something that you just can't believe is still happening in this society.

I support this, and certainly I'll give up my time to the member from Halton.

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion. I want to personally congratulate the member from York North for bringing it forward.

My first involvement with drunk driving—it's something I've never forgotten; it's stuck with me through all my political years on city council and will through all the years I stay here at Queen's Park—was losing a close friend when I was 16 to a drunk driver on the 406 in St Catharines.

I've always been pleased to see all the different initiatives taken by MADD to bring forth the concerns about people on the road who are drinking and driving and to ensure that, first, the public is educated about the dangers of it and, more importantly, to take appropriate actions against those who have been caught drinking and driving.

I also wanted to share with the House that while I was on city council for 13 years, one of the committees that I made an overture to chair—and I was fortunate to do so—was the city's parking and traffic committee. Again, that goes back to the young friend of mine who was killed by a drunk driver. That committee dealt with making the roads safer in the city of Niagara Falls. During the six years that I was on that committee and worked with a good group of people from the public, there were a lot of things that we initiated to try to make our roads safer. I learned about the importance of stop signs and the warrants that are involved, stoplights. I learned about traffic calming, chicanes, speed humps, parking signs, all types of things that we initiated within our own community to try to make our roads safer for the residents who live there.

1130

I was also pleased, when I was doing my research on this, to see that the previous government—and I'll certainly give them congratulations for it—initiated some things to deal with drunk drivers. The 90-day driver's licence suspension, the mandatory back-on-track remedial measures program, which I'm familiar with—not

on a personal level, but I'm certainly familiar with it—the vehicle impoundment program and the ignition interlock are all very positive things, and I congratulate the previous government for initiating those.

For the 13 years I was on council, we would always have a presentation by Mothers Against Drunk Driving. In most cases it was done by a local high school, the one in particular that always came to city council to ask us to pass a resolution dealing with that matter, and also to provide the community and our own city employees the red ribbon to put on their vehicles, again to educate the public about the dangers of drinking and driving.

I can tell you some of the things that we changed even within city hall: If a community group wanted to use one of our facilities for some event, say our arena or our baseball diamond, and it involved the selling of alcohol, we made it mandatory that any of the groups that were using it had to have Smart Serve certification so that we could ensure that those people who were serving alcohol had some expertise in knowing who should or shouldn't receive it.

There's one other story I'm going to share, and again it's a passion that I believe in. I can remember four or five years ago a group of people came to me within the city of Niagara Falls who wanted to have a stoplight put up at an intersection. It didn't meet the warrants, so the regional traffic committee decided they wouldn't put it up. Sad to say, about four months later, after that situation occurred and it was turned down, we had a fatality at that intersection. In fact, it was someone I knew personally. I had been to their 30th anniversary and in fact had given them a plaque from the city of Niagara Falls congratulating them. The lady was killed at that intersection.

The point I'm making is, again you realize that you'd rather put up appropriate things, such as what's being suggested, because they're positive things. I have seen the signs down in the States. I think it can be done. It can fit within MTO. I know there are some regulations we have in place. Working together, I think we can come up with a solution and we could put those types of things up.

The final comment I'm going to make is another personal comment. We had a death about a year ago in Niagara Falls—a young boy was killed. I'm not going to say it was related to drunk driving but, to this day, as you make the curve on Stanley Avenue or Thorold Stone Road, there is still a memorial of flowers sitting on the fence. I pass that every day on my way to work. I always look at it and think of that situation.

The resolution that's being put forward is a good resolution. I think it's something that can be worked with the ministry. I'm going to tell the House that it's one I am going to support because it's one that I personally believe in. I congratulate the member from York North for bringing that forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I rise in support of this resolution from Julia Munro, the

member for York North. As we know, it's a resolution to allow roadside memorials for drunk driving victims.

I wish to cut to the chase. I ask everyone present to pass this resolution before we walk out through those doors this morning. Just think of the message that we would send across the Ontario. I say across Ontario—we have been doing this program down in Norfolk county since 1993. I can't tell you how many white crosses we've pounded into the ground—dozens and dozens—and I sure couldn't tell you how many young people are dead in our area because of drunk driving. I represent a rural area, and this has been a long, ongoing problem in my area, the drinking-driving rate. It's about three times the provincial average.

The member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford made mention of the white cross program in Nova Scotia. Again, there's another example of a pilot project that I understand, as in Norfolk county, is working well. It is getting people's attention. I have had the good fortune, before being elected, to work for the Ontario Addiction Research Foundation for 20 years and I can tell you that in situations like this, prevention and raising awareness with a memorial program like this is a lot easier than having to deal with the aftermath.

I think of one program we worked on and we implemented: the RIDE program. At that time, RIDE stood for Reduce Impaired Driving in Etobicoke, a pilot project. A year later it became Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere. I would like to see a similar track with this particular initiative, partly to commemorate, but more to raise awareness. It's hard to gather evidence on whether an awareness or prevention program like this works. Then, again, we don't keep track of the crosses down in Norfolk. We know they're there. We know that people do see them, perhaps unconsciously, and we like to think that they act accordingly.

As I mentioned, our area has an impaired driving rate three times the provincial average. Oftentimes, we're second only to areas like Manitoulin in having the worst drinking-driving incidence in the province, and in the early 1980s so many people were not only sick and tired of the danger on the roads and the worry about drinking and driving, the worry about young people, but many people, including my family, stopped going out on the roads. I would not take my family out on a Friday or Saturday night, certainly after 10 or 11 o'clock, when people were coming out of the hotels. I knew the statistics. The average person was purposely not going out on the roads because of what was coming the other way.

For that reason, we had an initiative. We set up a group called Citizens Against Drinking and Driving. I put an ad in the paper, and the first person to call me was a woman named Shirley George, and much of the white cross initiative came from Bruce and Shirley George from Delhi. Sadly, the Georges were personally touched by the hazardous impact of drunk driving, and I wish to quote from a letter that I received yesterday from Mrs George: "My interest is not academic, but personal, as we lost a daughter and two parents to an impaired driver who

killed five others in the same accident. That driver had a blood-alcohol level of 0.26%."

I have attended many, many high school presentations with Mrs George. She tells her story. I think of a presentation she did in the assembly of Delhi High School, describing the story of eight people killed that evening. It was Christmas Eve. As we know, she lost her daughter and both her parents. I've never seen anything like this in a group of high school kids. The gym was full, she finished her presentation, and a guy over in the back stood up and started clapping, another guy over here, and one by one the whole audience stood up and gave her a standing ovation, not orchestrated.

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Again, I'm speaking partly on behalf of the George family and because of that tragedy Christmas Eve. If we have the will, perhaps we will see a major initiative in place by next Christmas. There's the traditional time for us to think ahead, if we can do some positive stuff on this.

Mrs George got the idea for roadside crosses in Montana. I've seen them in Spain. She wrote a letter to the Attorney General's office and asked for a plan to ensure that lives lost were not forgotten, again just asking for a reminder. Unfortunately, Mrs George was told that the AG's office was not in favour of this. Partly, I think it's because we used white crosses. The AG's office indicated it would offend the sensibilities of non-Christians, so the government was not interested at that time. I can see in part that argument, although I point out the flag of Ontario has more than one cross on it, certainly the cross of St George.

I do mention that MTO has guidelines with respect to roadside memorials. However, those guidelines discourage individuals from erecting memorials, based largely on safety reasons. I'd like to think that much of our initiative here would be for those reasons. After Mrs George's being turned down by the Attorney General's office, they travelled in Japan and saw crosses there. This is a country that I would suspect is, by and large, more Buddhist than Christian.

She brought her proposal to our group, Citizens Against Drinking and Driving. We immediately embraced the proposal. We made some arrangements with a local welding shop, and on the May 24 weekend in 1993, with the former mayor of the town of Delhi we erected two crosses. We've put up dozens of crosses since then.

Very simply, we make arrangements with the police. We make a point of putting them on private land because we're not allowed to put them on the side of the road. As we erect these crosses, just to avoid any hassles with government, we first have to see police reports to determine that the death truly was alcohol-related. Then we very simply seek permission from the landowner to erect the cross.

We've been doing this for 10 years. It is doable. Consider that a pilot project. I would hope we could move forward with this.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I'm sure this is going to be unanimous in this House. I know that

all members of the New Democratic Party who will be here at the time of the vote, and I'm not sure how many that will be, will be supporting this motion. We thank the member from York North for bringing this forward. All of us in this House either have been involved or know of people who have lost loved ones due to drunk drivers.

It struck my own extended family many years ago when a young second cousin, a lad of only 18 years old, was killed by a drunk driver. I still remember the sadness in our extended family of losing someone so young, someone who had just started university, someone who had his whole life in front of him.

Members of Legislature will remember the sadness when Bob Rae's mother-in-law and father-in-law were killed during his time as a member in this Legislature, again by a drunk driver. It has touched all of us. We ought not ever to forget that it could happen to any one of us, on any day that we're crossing the street, on any day that we're in our car, that someone who is impaired could run into us.

I've heard stories today about other provinces and other countries. I have to tell you that if you travel extensively, you will see that literally almost every country in the world has memorials at the side of the road to those who have died, not necessarily from drunk drivers but from a lot of traffic accidents. You will see them throughout Europe; you will see them in Spain, France, Italy and you will particularly see them in Greece, if you ever have a chance to visit that storied land, particularly on some of the winding mountain roads. You will see memorials throughout the country to people who have died on the roads, either by drunk drivers or occasionally by other accidents. You will see in South America, through most of the countries, little roadside memorials to those who have died.

Certainly the idea, although new to Canada, is an old, old idea and one that I think we should emulate and follow. We need to remind drivers over and over again of the pitfalls of drunk driving. To see a roadside memorial is to remind them constantly of the error, the huge consequences of drinking and driving.

MADD Canada has done a tremendous job over the years. You see little red ribbons on many, many arials on cars around this province. But we need to do more, because a red ribbon is a symbol on the car itself that you should not drink and drive. People need to see the consequences on the sides of the roads.

I've looked at the proposed bill and it has much merit. I do have some questions, and they're made by friendly—I know this is going to pass, so when it goes to committee and is further debated, there are a number of aspects that need to be dealt with. The bill itself talks about either signs or roadside memorials. I would ask that the member push for memorials. There are enough signs, of course, on our highways, our roads. They often become quite confusing to drivers. You can see literally dozens of signs within a space of a couple of hundred metres, and to have another sign, usually in congested areas, I think will add more confusion. To have a memor-

ial that is separate and apart and is not confused with a sign will further enhance safety. It will also, to my mind, be far more poignant. So I would ask, when this comes to committee, that the memorial be the aspect that we put forward—the memorial to those who have lost their lives, but also the memorial to remind those who might drink and drive that they ought not to do so.

I've heard what the member and other speakers had to say about placement. That was not contained within the bill. But I think emulating and following what is done in Nova Scotia is a good start. The memorials should be placed in areas and locations that are agreed to by the Ministry of Transportation and that will not cause any problems with sightlines and may not in fact end up causing an accident themselves. Certainly that would be the last thing we would want to do.

There is a further question which I know cannot be contained in a private member's bill because only the government can do it, and that is the costs. This obviously is going to cost money. It's going to cost the government money; it's going to cost MADD Canada money; it's going to cost the bereaved families money. It's going to cost somebody, somewhere, somehow money. There cannot be a provision in a private member's bill because only the government can bring forward a bill that has costs involved if the government is going to actually pay. When I look at the resources of MADD Canada, they are not great. MADD Canada operates on a shoestring; I think that's a fair comment.

I cannot help but be saddened by what I saw in the Toronto Star just a couple of days ago. It was a letter. If one does have the occasional beer and goes into the Beer Store, they will see that there's a little box with a red ribbon on it from MADD Canada. At least you used to see that, because on March 31 those were all taken out of the Beer Stores. From 1991 to 2004, MADD Canada received, on average, between \$25,000 and \$40,000 a year in donations from people who bought beer and put their change in the little box. On March 31, all that stopped.

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The Toronto Star article says, and I'm only going to quote one or two paragraphs from it, "According to the Beer Store, the outlets dropped MADD as a sponsor and are now limiting their social policy donations to just one group, the Ontario Community Council on Impaired Driving. The Beer Store claims the move was not about politics, but about corporate efficiency."

It goes on to say in the next paragraph:

"We were very open with MADD that we were looking at streamlining our charities," Taylor said. She said the release was the first official response from MADD following a conversation informing the charity of the store's decision March 31."

Finally, in the last paragraph, there's a quote from MADD:

"What does she expect us to do?" Murie responded. "They're hiding under a smokescreen to hide from being the bad guys that they are."

I suggest that if MADD is involved and if MADD is expected to pay, or if MADD is expected to contribute or to assist the families in contributing, they need to have the revenues to do it. If we are intent upon this bill, then we have to equally, as a government and as a Legislature, tell the Beer Store that they have to put the box back. The Beer Store has, I would suggest, an obligation. It's called externalities, a rather strange word, that you have to pay for the problems you create. They put boxes in beer stores and liquor stores and other locations so that people who imbibe will know that there are consequences of their imbibing and they will have a responsibility to pay something toward it. I suggest that needs to be done.

MADD has done a terrific job over the years. Its primary job has been, not the roadside memorials, as good an idea as this is, but in imposing the idea upon various governments at all levels of the need to make this the criminal offence it is, that increasing sentences is the way to go. MADD has done a terrific job in showing that our court systems, our Legislatures and everyone involved cannot any longer take this to be a minor offence. It needs to be considered a serious offence and the penalties must flow from that.

I commend the member from York North for her bill. We will be supporting it. Please make it as strong as you can in the end.

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I'm pleased today—or not pleased—to speak on this issue that was raised by the member from York North. It's a sad issue that we have here to talk about in private members' legislation.

I wanted to remind us of the resolution we're talking about. It's to work with MADD Canada and/or its individual chapters, where initiated, "to enter into an agreement to allow the construction of a roadside sign, or other appropriate memorial on highway property, to commemorate an individual or individuals killed by a drunk driver."

When I read this resolution, it reminded me of some of the debate and the difficulty I had as a municipal councillor when we had the loss of life on municipal rights of way, how we struggled with the commemorative flowers and plaques that people wanted to put on their roadway and how difficult a time we had dealing with family members who wanted to honour members who had been taken from them tragically.

Although today we are focusing on the good work that MADD Canada does—and they do do good work, unsung heroes' work, and I support the work they do; in fact, I have a red ribbon on my antenna out in my driveway—my experience is that we have difficulty differentiating the work MADD does from the deaths that occur from so many other causes. I support the idea in principle of commemorating those losses, but again we have no idea, most of the time, how those losses occurred.

In my case, I had the unfortunate opportunity to attend a funeral last summer, during the blackout, actually. I came back from Nova Scotia to attend a funeral for a

young man who lost his life in a tragic accident. He was 16 years old. I don't wish that on anybody: to go to a funeral, to watch all the young people, all his friends, attend a funeral for a 16-year-old. And it had nothing to do with drinking and driving. It was an inexperienced driver; it was youthful exuberance that caused the accident.

There are so many accidents on our roadways that are due to inattention, inexperience, driver error and weather conditions. If we are to commemorate all those losses on our roadways, untimely as they are, we have to ensure that the commemorative placement of flowers or plaques is done in a safe way and that we work with the Ministry of Transportation on whatever we place on roadways to commemorate that loss of life. I believe that not only do we not need a formal agreement but also that the ministry is flexible enough to work within the existing process to allow MADD or any other group to commemorate a special person who is lost in an untimely way.

In the case of Brampton, we tried to work with our works and transportation department to deal with each issue on a case-by-case basis, because I think every accident brings a different kind of issue with it. It's not always drinking and driving. Sometimes it's an accident that's related, as I said, to youthful exuberance, driver inattention or weather conditions—they all play a part. Although today we're dealing with provincial roadways, I think municipalities look to us for guidance and direction; they are also struggling with this issue. It comes up on an annual basis, and in Brampton we finally put together a motion to this effect.

Today we heard from a number of very thoughtful speakers who tried to bring a different aspect to this private member's legislation. We all support the idea, the intention, and we want to support the good work that MADD does. In this House we have to know that the ideas we bring have to cover all the different groups that would want the ability to work with our Ministry of Transportation and our roadways to ensure they are safe. It's important to commemorate an individual or individuals killed by a drunk driver, but we also need to examine the fact that we lose lots of individuals on our roadways for reasons other than drinking and driving.

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

Mrs Munro: Thank you to all the members who have taken the time today to speak on this resolution. I really appreciate the support and the comments that have been made. In the few moments I have, I'd like to respond to a couple of issues that have been raised.

One of the most important things in the resolution, from my perspective, in regard some of the concern over details that members have raised, has been that it says "to enter into an agreement," and that is my purpose. I made that wording very clear to allow people to work on some of the intricacies and difficulties and things like that.

Obviously the details—whether it's a memorial or a sign, or the distribution of costs—are negotiated issues. I think it's important to recognize that, as legislators, we

have a responsibility to set policy. It is then through our appropriate ministry that we look to provide the details of making that policy work. I appreciate the many comments that have been made with regard to some of the complexities that are inherent in a decision like this.

Our commitment to this resolution is political will. If we pass this resolution today, we will demonstrate the political will to move forward in recognizing the importance not only of an individual loss but of a social message. The member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant recognized that it's always difficult to measure a social message, but that's one we have to work on.

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

ONTARIO FARMS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will deal first with ballot item number 11, standing in the name of Mr Leal.

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

ROADSIDE MEMORIAL

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot item number 12, standing in the name of Mrs Munro.

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

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1201 to 1206.

The Deputy Speaker: Mrs Munro has moved ballot item number 12.

All those in favour will please rise.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Hoy, Pat	Patten, Richard
Barrett, Toby	Hudak, Tim	Peters, Steve
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Prue, Michael
Brown, Mike	Klees, Frank	Pupatello, Sandra
Bryant, Michael	Kormos, Peter	Racco, Mario
Caplan, David	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Rinaldi, Lou
Craitor, Kim	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Delaney, Bob	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Dombrowsky, Leona	McMeekin, Ted	Tascona, Joseph N.
Duguid, Brad	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Dunlop, Garfield	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Flaherty, Jim	Mossop, Jennifer	Wynne, Kathleen
Gerretsen, John	Munro, Julia	Yakabuski, John
Hardeman, Ernie	Murdoch, Bill	

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please rise.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 44; the nays are zero.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

This House will stand adjourned until 1:30 pm of the clock.

The House recessed from 1209 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION ROUND TABLES

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I'm pleased to announce to this House that in my role as education critic for the official opposition, I will be hosting the first of my party's education round-table consultations, Partnerships for Parents and Students, this Saturday, April 17, here at Queen's Park.

Six weeks ago, the Minister of Education held what he called an education partnership table. When I first heard of this event, I thought it was a very good idea. However, I was disappointed to learn that the Minister of Education had excluded the voices of many parents and students in our province. In fact, some groups were specifically told they were not welcome to participate in his so-called partnership.

This strikes me as typical of what we have seen from this government: a cynical, arrogant approach to governing. This Liberal government makes promises they know they cannot keep and thinks they do not need to answer legitimate questions. Now we see they won't even listen to the hard-working Ontarians who put them in office. This is unacceptable.

To help remedy this problem, I am issuing an open invitation to all the people of Ontario who are interested in education to join me in my partnerships for parents and students. These round tables will be inclusive and thorough, and we will even listen to those with whom we may well disagree.

We welcome all to our Queen's Park consultations, and any who wish to have input but can't get to Queen's Park may do so through my Web site, www.jimflaherty.com.

MICHAEL CAHILL

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to highlight the activities of an impressive youth in my riding of Niagara Falls. Michael Cahill will graduate from high school this June with over 1,600 accumulated volunteer hours. It is particularly impressive for a young teen to devote so much time to our community, and I commend him for his dedication.

Next week, we'll celebrate Volunteer Week in the province of Ontario. I believe Michael Cahill is a wonderful example of the spirit of volunteerism that makes Ontario such a great place. Michael has been involved in a number of theatrical productions at both his school, St Michael High School, and in several theatrical companies that Niagara Falls is known for. Not only has Michael played acting roles in a number of productions in Niagara, but he has also given of his time and effort in Niagara Falls by participating in the Niagara Falls Santa Claus parade and the Casino Niagara marathon.

I want to tell you that Ontario is a great place to live in, and volunteering makes it stronger. I urge all mem-

bers of this House to take advantage of Volunteer Week next week to recognize all those who give of their time to serve all our communities to make them better places for all of us to live in.

HOME CONSTRUCTION

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I rise to bring to the attention of the Liberal government once again an important issue affecting a number of my constituents in the township of Essa.

Donna Rushton, Patti Hazlett and Jane Stewart have lived on Parkside Drive in the community of Angus for just under five years. Ever since they moved into their houses, they've watched them deteriorate to the point where they no longer feel safe in their own homes. In fact, the homes are sinking into the ground and shifting off their foundations. The walls are cracking and the homes are almost impossible to heat. This extensive damage has been caused by poor workmanship when the homes were built, and my constituents have had a very difficult time getting the Ontario new home warranty program to resolve this situation in a speedy and satisfactory manner.

Mrs Hazlett and I have both written to the government previously on this issue, and I'm asking again today for the help of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. I ask that the ministers pick up the phone today and call my constituents, who can provide you once again with their information, a CD with photos of the houses and comments from the township of Essa, which has been monitoring this situation. Really, we need your help. Please do your jobs. Do the right thing and help these people with their homes that are falling apart through no fault of their own, but because of shoddy workmanship in the village of Angus. The developers should be gone after. We've tried to do that, but we need the power of government to come to some satisfactory answer here.

DAN OFFORD

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Today I'd like to pay tribute to a great man, Dr David (Dan) Offord, who passed away last Saturday in Ottawa.

Dr Offord loved children and devoted his life and career to helping disadvantaged and at-risk kids. Dr Offord was one of Canada's most distinguished child psychiatrists, a world leader in increasing understanding of children's mental health and a pioneer of evidence-based psychiatry.

During his illustrious career, Dr Offord was head of the division of child psychiatry at McMaster University and research director of the Chedoke Child and Family Centre. At McMaster he started research in child epidemiology, an area in which both McMaster and Dr Offord are now internationally respected.

The Ontario Child Health Study, which he led, is today widely recognized as the most important population-based study of children's mental health in the world during the last 30 years. This study has helped with social policy development here in Canada and across the world.

Dr Offord is known nationally and internationally as the founding director of the Offord Centre for Child Studies. The centre is dedicated to improving the life quality and life opportunities of children through research, policy development and training. The centre is a lasting legacy of his valuable work.

Every summer for the last 40 years, Dr Dan, as he was affectionately called by those of us who had the privilege of knowing him, served as the director of the Christie Lake Camp in Ottawa, offering programs for disadvantaged and troubled youth.

In 2001, Dr Offord was inducted as a member of the Order of Canada. In accepting Canada's highest honour, Dr Offord expressed his hope that Canadians from coast to coast would do their part to improve the quality and life chances of children, stating, "It is our collective responsibility to ensure bright futures for today's children so that tomorrow's society will benefit."

The professional community has lost a giant, a mentor to many of us health professionals. Our children have lost a champion and friend. Today we give thanks for his life and offer our sincere condolences to his family and his professional colleagues.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Complaints around property assessment have climbed to the top 10 of issues that occupy our staff in our constituency offices and, I'm confident, of the constituency office of every one of the 102-plus members of this Legislative Assembly.

Look, the Tories privatized and created the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. It has been a fiasco. Run like a for-profit operation, it slashed jobs from 2,100 down to 1,300. That's at least a 40% cut in the number of people working there. We've seen an explosion of \$100,000-plus jobs, inevitably among the brass and the people who are exploiting the profits of this so-called not-for-profit corporation.

The profit motive rules. The information technology consultants are making out like bandits. I'm told by insiders from MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, that there is a computer scandal brewing that is going to, in and of itself, explode, leaving an incredible mess behind.

Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals promised—they promised so many things, they promised anything they had to to get elected, during the course of the election campaign—to rebuild public services. Well, I say it's time for McGuinty and the Liberals to keep at least one promise and restore property assessment back to the public sector, restore it back to public ownership and public control, restore it back to a true non-profit oper-

ation so that professional and qualified civil servants, workers in the public sector, can serve homeowners, can serve municipalities, can serve this province, rather than the interests of private and corporate profit.

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YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): In the last provincial election, less than 25% of young people between the ages of 18 to 24 turned out to vote. Investing in our province's future is important, not only in health and education, but also in the democratic process. By engaging young people today, we are preparing for the future and, most important, we're taking advantage of a great opportunity to access an untapped source of knowledge. Today, I want to share with this House what I am doing to learn from and to speak to the young people in our province and in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Most recently, I was thrilled to launch the Lakeshore Scholars Program in Etobicoke-Lakeshore, which will see young people in local area high schools participate directly in local issues and learn through experience about the political process by working directly with me on issues that matter most to them. I have also hosted pre-budget town halls with students in grades 9, 10 and 12. Their contributions to the process were not only extremely helpful, but definitely offered a unique and important perspective on the fiscal situation our province faces. It's so important for all of us to become involved in engaging young people in the political process.

Next Wednesday, I will continue to work toward this goal by addressing young women at the Women in Politics and Government Career Learning Day for young women in high school.

I encourage all members to work toward making a direct impact on the lives of young people, and share with them the values and goals that make public service so rewarding and important.

TAXATION

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "I will not raise your taxes." Do you know who said that? It was Dalton McGuinty. It wasn't Greg Sorbara; it was Dalton McGuinty, and he said that to the province, and I think some people think that was another broken Liberal promise. Just think, ladies and gentlemen, now the Minister of Finance is saying that the "I will not raise your taxes" statement only applied to personal income taxes.

Apparently, Mr Sorbara and Mr McGuinty have forgotten two very important facts: While in opposition, Team McGuinty opposed every tax cut made by the Harris-Eves government. The Taxpayer Protection Act signing by Dalton McGuinty during the election campaign became a shameful ploy, filled with deceit and now another broken promise.

What have we seen recently? We've seen the possible reintroduction of the NDP tax grab—photo radar. We've

seen the political spin by the trial balloon soup-and-salad tax. We've seen the assault on small businesses with the lifting of the municipal property tax cap rate.

But I want to read something, Mr Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

Mr Dunlop: We'll do that a little later on.

WILDFIRE PREVENTION WEEK

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I rise today to inform the members of the Legislature that next week, the week of April 18 to 24, is being declared Wildfire Prevention Week.

This is the first time that the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ontario fire marshal's office have made such a declaration. It is only fitting that it should take place this year, as 2004 marks the 60th anniversary of Smokey the Bear's efforts to promote fire prevention.

The fire marshal and MNR have asked fire departments across the province to urge communities that could be affected by wildfire to be "FireSmart." A fire safety package—with the theme of FireSmart—is being sent to Ontario's fire departments. It has been prepared in consultation with the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs and professional educators. The province's fire departments will be sharing messages that focus on safeguarding homes, cottages and other structures that are adjacent to potentially dangerous, combustible wildland vegetation.

Wildfires in British Columbia and across the United States in recent years have highlighted the serious impacts of wildfire, the tremendous threat to life and property that can occur.

Our goal is to make communities safer by highlighting the many ways that people can prevent wildfires and safeguard their homes and families. During this week, and throughout the summer, Ontario's fire services will be trying to reach all members of their communities with a fire prevention message. People of all ages, from primary schoolchildren to adults, can help make a difference.

People who are interested in getting involved in Wildfire Prevention Week or who want copies of the fire safety educational materials can contact their local fire department, the office of the fire marshal or the Ministry of Natural Resources.

TAXATION

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): From 1985 to 1990, Ontario paid the price for electing a Liberal government. During that period, the Peterson Liberals increased taxes 33 times and almost doubled government spending.

Fast forward to 2004, and as Yogi Berra would say, "It looks like déjà vu all over again." We've witnessed the McGuinty Liberals rescinding tax relief measures, including one for seniors, and go on a \$3-billion spending binge, all in less than six months. Now they're planning to strike again, with a soup, salad and sandwich tax that hits Ontarians who can least afford it.

In my riding of Leeds-Grenville, this tax grab will hurt far and wide. In Brockville, it will hit the coffee club at King's, the seniors at Burger King and the folks grabbing toast and coffee at Jon's or George's restaurants at Tincap. It will also penalize seniors having a coffee at Lockett's Tim Hortons in Prescott, the Maple Leaf in Gananoque or the Rapid Valley at Lansdowne.

This fat-cat Liberal tax will only serve to feed the insatiable spending appetite of the Ontario Liberals. It must be stopped, and the Ontario Conservative Party will do everything possible to make that happen.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): In the east members' gallery, former member Doug Reycraft, from the 33rd and 34th Parliaments, is here from Middlesex. Will we all welcome him here, please?

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 14, 2004, of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier, who has yet to shut down the soup-and-sandwich tax trial balloon.

When Mrs Smith, who lives in Ottawa South and works at the hospital, buys her lunch at the local cafeteria in that hospital the day before your next budget, that price will be at one level; the day after your budget, in which you bring in this proposed soup-and-sandwich tax, she's going to pay more.

Here's the problem: You promised not to increase personal income taxes, but you also promised not to increase any other taxes. I'd like to know, Premier, how you will explain to your constituent why, the day after your budget and the day after this tax on a soup-and-sandwich meal, she has to pay more. If it's not as a result of your tax, what is it?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to thank the member for his representation made on behalf of my constituent. I can say this: that never have so many strange bedfellows

come to the assistance of Ontario's vulnerable. We have the restaurateurs and multinational corporations, who have the most vulnerable at heart, I'm sure, when they make their representations in connection with this issue; and we have the Conservatives, of course, who have risen to become our new champions of the dispossessed and the vulnerable in the province of Ontario.

I am pleased to hear from my constituent through the member opposite, and we will take that advice, and so much more advice, when it comes to the preparation of our budget.

Mr Klees: I'm sure Mrs Smith, your constituent, listened to that response and is probably amongst the 75% of the people in this province who have lost confidence in you, sir, for that kind of response, because it's arrogant. It's arrogant because you're not addressing the issue that we're dealing with.

Yesterday your finance minister emerged from under his cloud to argue that an affordable meals tax wouldn't be a tax increase at all, but rather just the cancellation of a tax exemption. And after he unwound himself out of this pretzel that he wound himself into, the rest of us were left wondering, what does a Liberal define today as a tax increase? I'm going to ask the Premier one more time: After Mrs Smith pays more for her meal the day after this budget imposes that tax, how will you explain why that meal cost more the day after the budget than it did the day before?

1350

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm sure that the member opposite would want to provide the truth and reassurance to Mrs Smith that no decisions have been made with respect to this particular issue. I can say that, given the considerable deficit that we have been left as a result of the mismanagement on the part of my Conservative colleagues, we'll be bringing a balanced approach to the management of the government's finances. We will be looking for new ways to generate revenues; I want to make that perfectly clear. We will also be finding some savings, which should have been found a long time ago. We will no longer be spending money on partisan political advertising projects. I was informed the other day that on another matter, as a result of hiring 100 consultants on a full-time basis in the government, in the public service, we are now going to save \$5 million every year. Those are just some examples of the steps we are taking to save Ontarians money.

Mr Klees: To the Premier: If he is going to save all of this money, then why would he tax the most vulnerable in our province? Why would he go out of his way to put taxes on seniors and on students who eat in their cafeteria? If he's doing all of that, why can he not stand up in his place today and say, "Yes, you know what? The trial balloon was wrong. My finance minister was wrong for even letting it fly. I'm going to stand up now in my place and I'm going to say, 'Yes, on the one hand I agree it would be a tax increase, and it won't happen.'" We're going to need a fictionary to figure out what these Liberals mean by the various terminologies they're bringing forward in this House.

Will you stand in your place today and will you commit, after all of those savings that you've just told us you found and will continue to find, that you will not implement this regressive tax on the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me say this unequivocally and with as much possible assurance and reassurance that I can provide to Mrs Smith and others who may be as concerned as she is: Our very first budget will provide greater assistance to the dispossessed and the vulnerable in one budget alone than this government brought in eight and a half years. I guarantee that.

You can look at our track record thus far: We have increased the minimum wage; we have put into place a rent bank; we are back into the business of affordable housing; we put in place a tuition freeze for two years; and we have only just begun when it comes to ensuring that our most vulnerable have every opportunity they need in this province to succeed.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question?

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for Premier McGuinty—not the real Premier, the Minister of Finance. We have an important question here and it's about integrity. He made a very solemn promise to the people of Ontario, the taxpayer protection promise, which he signed and which said, "I, Dalton McGuinty" will "not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters." That was unqualified. And then yesterday we had the putative Premier, the Minister of Finance, saying, "We said during the campaign that we're not going to raise personal income taxes, and we will keep our word on that."

My question to you is a request that you stand in your place now and come clean with the people of Ontario on what you're going to keep your word on. Is it on no tax increases or is it, as the real Premier says, only personal income taxes?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can assure the member opposite that we will not do as his party did previous to the last election, when he provided every reassurance to Ontario voters that they had a balanced budget. We discovered, as you well know—this is now part of history and folklore in Ontario. The former Provincial Auditor, Erik Peters, took a very close look at the books, a long and solemn look at the books, and discovered a \$5.6-billion deficit, in addition to another \$2.2 billion in very real risks. That is the true story when it comes to a broken commitment in the province of Ontario.

Mr Flaherty: I'm sure the people of Ontario will take that as another, perhaps the most fundamental, example of a basic promise broken by this government. And it gets worse. Now there are the games with language. We read in the paper this morning that the Grits are saying things about this soup-and-salad tax, that it's not a tax increase; it's a loophole that they're going to close. This is an attempt to avoid responsibility. Even the Toronto Star figured it out. Even the Toronto Star said—

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Not the Globe?

Mr Flaherty: No, no, this is the Toronto Star today. It says, "This is a tax increase, pure and simple. Its purpose

is to raise an estimated \$200 million in new revenues." Premier, will you agree that your proposed tax on soup and salad is a tax increase and the purpose is a cash grab from the poor people of Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Well, I guess there's nothing—this is a little bit beyond the pale to have the member opposite rising to the defence as well, joining the legions of Conservatives around the province who are rising to the defence of the most vulnerable.

I know there's tremendous interest in this budget, and we face some significant challenges. There's no doubt about that whatsoever. We've got a massive deficit, which we've got to climb out of together. At the same time, we've got to be able to find ways to invest in better health care and in better education. We've got to enlist people in the cause of helping us to conserve energy, for example. Those are all important objectives, which we intend to meet through our budget.

Mr Flaherty: The people of Ontario know that, as the Carter commission on taxation said many years ago, "a buck is a buck is a buck." They also know that a tax is a tax is a tax, and that "RST" stands for "retail sales tax." It's not a loophole; it's not an exemption. It's a tax increase that you intend to impose on the people of Ontario. In fact, the retail sales tax is the second-largest source of revenue for the province. I urge you, Premier, and I ask you, whether you'd make sure—because I know you think you're doing the right thing—that MPP Toby Barrett's petition against this soup-and-salad tax is distributed in every coffee shop in your riding. Will you do that for us, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I've been reduced to a quivering mass. I don't know what to say.

Again, we intend to bring a balanced approach to our management of government finances. We intend to put forward a plan that will see us live up to our objectives of providing the people of Ontario better health care and better education. We intend to ensure that we have a plan in place that will get us out of this deficit hole dug by the previous government. We do not intend to gut public services, and we do intend to come to the assistance of our most vulnerable.

1400

HYDRO RATES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Last year about this time, you were very critical of the Conservatives for announcing their budget at the Magna auto parts factory. You said it was undemocratic.

What a difference a year makes. Today, your own Minister of Energy announces the future of Ontario's hydroelectricity system, not before the people, not in the Legislature, but at a private Bay Street club where the public isn't welcome.

Premier, it's the people of Ontario who pay the hydro bill. It's the people of Ontario who own the electricity system. Why is your government, which talks about

democracy, only interested in the views of the profit-takers, the fee-takers and the commission-takers of Bay Street when it comes to hydroelectricity?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I can only say that the member must not be familiar with the contents of the announcement that was made today in the documentation by way of background or the like that was made available to everyone, because what this plan is going to do—and I would tell you that the minister has worked very hard on this.

It is thoughtful, it is methodical, it is responsible and it will ensure that homeowners and small businesses alike can participate in a stable, predictable rate regime that will be part of a broader plan to build more generation in Ontario, to incent more conservation and to ensure that we can, over the long term, have in place a reliable, sustainable supply of clean electricity in Ontario.

Mr Hampton: Premier, the question was, why is the future of Ontario's hydroelectricity system, why is the announcement not being made here in the Legislature, not to the public of Ontario but to the profit-takers, the fee-takers and the commission-takers of Bay Street?

I think I know why, because the announcement is all about private power. The announcement is all about saying to the investors, the profit-takers, the fee-takers on Bay Street, "Oh, under the Liberal plan you'll be able to make a lot of money," but what that equally means is that the hydro bill of the average person in this province is going to go up and up. The Toronto Star told us today that it's going to go up by 20% under the changes you've already introduced.

My question is, under what the minister announced at Bay Street, that it's a wide-open welcome to the investors there, how much more are you going to push up people's hydro bills?

Hon Mr McGuinty: It's no surprise that I take issue with the member's characterization of our announcement today. I think the member would do well to remember that the largest expansion of private generation that took place in the history of this province came under the NDP government, and that was through non-utility generation. I'll tell you why the NDP government moved in that direction: because they thought it would be more cost-effective and would be better for the environment. I think they were right in both cases.

What we intend to do is preserve the public assets through OPG and to invite the private sector to join us in creating the necessary generation. I just don't think any objective, reasonable observer would say to OPG, "Yes, we trust you to generate the necessary 22,000 or 23,000 additional megawatts we're going to need between now and 2020. We think the appropriate thing to do is to issue a call for all hands on deck. We will do our part in the public sector and we will invite the private sector to join us.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Hampton: Premier, you should read your own minister's speech, because what's very clear from the

speech, which he wouldn't give in public but gave to the profit-takers and the fee-takers, is that in terms of your government, all of the supply in the future will be by the profit-driven people: the Brascans, the remnants of the Enrons. That's very clear.

It's also very clear, because the people of Ontario have had experience with this under the Conservatives' failed experience, that that means higher hydro bills. So I think, since you gave the speech at Bay Street to a private club, an exclusive club, you owe it to the people of Ontario who have to pay the bill, how much is their hydro bill going to go up now that you've crawled in bed with the same people the Conservatives were so in love with, all the people who want to push up the hydro bill, who want the Eleanor Clitheroe style salaries, who want the expense account, the yacht, the limousine and the 15% profit.

How much is this going to push up the average person's hydro bill? What's it going to do to small business? You at least owe them to tell them that today.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think when it comes to the debate over hydro, we should bring a little less religion and a little bit more math. The Conservatives have all kinds of faith in the markets, and we know the painful lessons that we were able to draw from that recent experience, where people, homeowners in particular, were exposed to the vagaries of the spot market. The leader of the NDP would have Ontarians run back and cling to the apron strings of old Mother Hydro.

We think there's a better, more responsible approach, and that's the one that we are taking. We are preserving a regulated market for homeowners and small business people. They will have stable, fixed prices that will not be set by us in government. Frankly, what we've done, and I'm talking about all political stripes here in the past, is that we've shied away from doing the responsible thing and we left a multi-billion-dollar debt. An independent party will now set those prices on an annual basis, and homeowners and small businesses in particular will have fixed, stable pricing.

Mr Hampton: Premier, I'd be careful when you cast aspersions at the Conservatives. Remember, you voted for that policy too. You were out there saying, "Deregulation, privatization is the answer."

Let me tell you the position you've put people in now. When the Conservative experiment has failed—and it has clearly failed—it means that we are in the vulnerable position that California was in. California, after the market failed, went out and signed long-term, expensive private contracts for power, and they'll be paying through the nose for the next 20 or 30 years. That's exactly what you've set up here—exactly what you've set up.

You're not closing the market. You've said to your friends on Bay Street, "You build the power plants. We'll sign the expensive contracts. You'll make lots of money. And oh, by the way, we'll keep a price cap in place for a while to hide it from the average Ontarian. When they find out down the road, they won't like it, but then it will be too late."

You made the announcement today on Bay Street. Stand up and tell the people of Ontario today: How much is profit-driven power? How much are the Brascans, the Enrons, the Eleanor Clitheroes going to make, and how much is it going to cost the average person, the average small business person on their hydro bill?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I thank the member for the question, but I want to remind him and people who have a real interest in this matter that the largest expansion of private power generation in the history of this province came under the NDP government. I also want to remind people that power rates went up by some 40% under the NDP government.

What we are doing is bringing a responsible, pragmatic approach to the management of our hydro needs, our electricity needs in the province of Ontario. We have been told that we're going to be short some 25,000 megawatts by the year 2020 unless we begin to move forward. No real generation was built under the watch of the previous government, and very little under the NDP government before that. We are finally taking the bull by the horns, bringing a responsible approach. We are providing an assurance to homeowners and small business in particular that they will have fixed, stable pricing.

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: Mr Premier, I'm very curious about your finance minister's rather Clintonesque description of when a tax hike is really a tax hike. According to your new definitions, is harmonizing the PST with the GST a tax hike?

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

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'm still pondering the "Clintonesque" reference.

Let's begin by clarifying what we're talking about here. The member is fuelling speculation on the possibility of removing the exemption on prepared meals under \$4. Now, the opposition members are all invited to fuel speculation to the extent that they want. My responsibility is to make sure that when we bring in a budget, we achieve the objectives that we have set out from the moment we were elected. The first thing is to set a new foundation for a new generation of economic growth, and in order to do that, we are going to have to clean up some of the horrible messes of mismanagement, the fictions and the fantasies that were the underpinning of that previous administration. We're going to do all of that, sir.

1410

Mr Hudak: It was a simple yes or no question. Thank God I didn't ask what the definition of "is" is. The new McGuinty meal tax effectively harmonizes the GST and the PST on food products under \$4. I think we all know that GST and PST harmonization would result in new taxes on children's clothing, newspapers, farm imple-

ments and across the board in the service sector. In fact, it would be a whopping \$1-billion tax hike.

Mr Premier, your Minister of Children and Youth Services effectively slipped up in a radio interview last fall. She said, "We will harmonize it. We believe in the long run that it will be in the best interests of taxpayers." Mr Premier, just say "yes" or "no." Are you going to harmonize the PST and the GST?

Interjection.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend the Minister of Education reminds me of a great nursery rhyme about the cow jumping over the moon. I want to say to my friend from Erie-Lincoln that when we bring forward a budget, it will take a number of very significant steps to start to put this province on a stronger financial footing. I hesitate to go back to the Magna budget, but that budget represented some of the most fanciful budget-making in the history of this province, including—

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): The country.

Hon Mr Sorbara: "The country," says my friend the Minister of Education—\$2 billion in phantom asset sales, \$800 million in so-called cuts that were not identified, not even in a general sense.

Those folks, over the course of eight years, worshipped at the altar of tax cuts and left this province, after eight years of economic expansion, in a horrible financial mess. We are going to begin to fix that.

AVIAN INFLUENZA

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Minister, the avian influenza outbreak in British Columbia has been devastating for the producers, the processors and the suppliers of that province. It sent shock waves across this country throughout the agri-food industry. Yesterday and today, poultry producers have been meeting in London at this province's largest poultry trade show. When I spoke with my husband last night, first he told me about the piece of equipment that he wants to buy for the barns, but then he told me about the conversation that he'd been having with fellow producers, processors and suppliers, and the need to guard against an outbreak of avian influenza in this province.

Minister, on behalf of the producers in this province, I would like to ask you, what safeguards do we have in place to prevent such a catastrophe in Ontario?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I want to thank the honourable member for her question, because it is a very important question. First and foremost, we need to recognize that this is an animal health issue. This is not a food safety issue. Poultry products are safe to eat.

I think it's important to say, as well, that we have recognized very clearly that through the Commissioner of Public Security, we need to play a very active, proactive role. We have in place an avian influenza working group. That working group consists of members of the Ministry

of Agriculture and Food. The Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Environment are part of that.

As well, we're working very closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, because they are the ultimate lead in this issue. Most importantly, we're working and maintaining very close ties with the poultry industry. It's important that we continue to work with them and ensure that we can keep the health of our flock safe. Biosecurity is the key.

Mrs Van Bommel: Poultry producers are very proud of their farms. They're very proud of the hard work they've done in building their flocks and maintaining their infrastructure for marketing. They've work hard on biosecurity and on the on-farm food safety programs which are audited by third parties. At the conference yesterday, participants were required to walk across disinfectant mats as they entered and left the conference. Yet during question period yesterday, the member for Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant asked the Minister of the Environment about the dumping of dead chickens in landfills. He seemed to imply that we are going to have an outbreak of avian influenza in this province. Minister, how can we assure the public that everything is being done by farmers to protect Ontario's supply of turkey, chicken and eggs?

Hon Mr Peters: I thank the member for the question. I think it is very unfortunate that we are fearmongering in this province. We have a poultry industry that is very much committed to ensuring the safety and the health and welfare of its flock. We have a poultry industry as well that is coming to the assistance of our producers in British Columbia and the challenges they face. We're going to ensure that there are no shortages of chicken, turkey and eggs in this country. We need to all work together, and that's one of the advantages of supply management.

We're very proud of the on-farm food safety program that the poultry industry has put in place, because they recognize that they need to be leaders. We encourage the industry to continue to do what it can to promote the biosecurity of their farms. We, as well, through our Web site at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, have advice to help ensure that proper biosecurity measures are in place. We are proactive in this province, and I think it is inappropriate for anyone to fearmonger about the situation that's out there.

TAXATION

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. Last year, Ontario's tourism industry faced some difficult challenges. The rising Canadian dollar, mad cow and the power blackout continue to haunt an industry that was already devastated from the impact of SARS. The struggles of the tourism sector are documented in a report by KPMG which indicates that the Ontario tourism sector declined by over \$1 billion in 2003. In light of this, Minister, how can your government even hint at this 8%

soup-and-salad tax that will place an additional \$214-million burden on this industry in the first year alone?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): I was wondering when that question would finally come. I thought the strategy of the opposition, if the House leader had developed a strategy, would be to start asking different ministers to speculate on what must be in the budget. Of course, as I remember my friends on the government side, whenever we asked questions about the budget when we were in opposition, Mr Flaherty, sitting across from me, would always say it would be improper to speculate on what might be in the budget. And I agree entirely. I agree entirely with former Premier Eves and former Minister Flaherty that it would be improper to speculate on what might be in the budget. All these pieces of speculation out there are only speculation, and I know the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke would not want me to engage in idle speculation.

Mr Yakabuski: Just as the minister was expecting that question, I was pretty much expecting that answer.

Minister, in its first six months, your government has done nothing but choke the life out of this industry. You've raised the property taxes of small businesses and working families; you've increased their hydro rates, breaking yet another promise; you've increased labour costs; and you've floated an endless list of hurtful trial balloons. This past month alone, your government lost 25,000 jobs in this province. Instead of promoting job creation, you persist in kicking this industry in the stomach with yet another tax increase. I want to tell you that this new tax is mean-spirited; it is flat-out wrong. You know it, and the people of Ontario know it. Will you urge your Premier to drop this ridiculous idea now?

Hon Mr Bradley: I say to the member that it's very difficult to ask any member of the government to drop anything that just happens to be idle speculation that I see out there. Having been a member of opposition, I understand what your role is. I understand that fully, and I don't resent it. I don't become angry with you people over this. I've seen it happen before, I must say, with other oppositions and other governments. I want to say to the member that that's idle speculation.

But I want to tell him that people in the tourism industry are exceedingly pleased with the amount of support that they're getting from this government. In fact, I had the opportunity to announce, in these difficult times, an additional investment of some \$30 million in the tourism revitalization program for the first six months of this year.

We have a number of things that are happening that are very positive. If you have another question, I'd be pleased to elaborate on those a little later on in question period.

1420

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Minister, the automotive sector has become an integral part of the Brampton community. The DaimlerChrysler Brampton assembly plant is the largest private sector employer in the city. DaimlerChrysler has called Brampton home since 1960 and employs over 3,600 highly skilled individuals.

Brampton is also host to a number of auto parts manufacturing and distribution companies. Some of the employers include Massiv Die-Form, Matcor Automotive and a Ford parts distribution centre. Many industry players have taken advantage of our skilled workforce, proximity to markets and infrastructure to build their companies.

As you can see, my community depends on this industry for their economic prosperity. Minister, what will the program you announced yesterday do to encourage more auto industry players to locate and remain in Brampton?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I want to thank the member for a very important question. Yesterday, I had the privilege of joining the Premier in announcing Ontario's new auto investment strategy.

Applause.

Hon Mr Cordiano: Yes, thank you.

The strategy entails a \$500-million investment in the auto sector, which will be leveraged to have up to about \$5 billion worth of investments in the auto sector. This will enable the industry to become far more competitive, be at the cutting edge of technology, and the program is designed to be far more flexible.

This is what Buzz Hargrove of the CAW said: "This strategy was something Premier McGuinty talked about during the election. He has listened to us, and this strategy is going to be good for Ontarians...This is a positive and welcome change from previous governments who took our sector for granted when other jurisdictions were stepping up to attract investment and jobs that we want for Ontario."

This strategy is going to work. This strategy is going to bring new investment to Ontario, and I'm very proud of it.

Mrs Jeffrey: Minister, thank you for your comments. Although my community has a foundation for a very successful auto industry, I do have some concerns about the future of the auto industry in Ontario. The auto sector employs thousands of Ontarians and creates massive economic spinoffs. I understand that places like Alabama and Mississippi are aggressively trying to get this kind of investment. We hear stories about offers for direct subsidies to lure investment. Minister, how could communities in Ontario, like Brampton, compete in this kind of global marketplace?

Hon Mr Cordiano: It's very important to recognize that what we're doing here is investing in our people, our greatest asset in this province. We're going to make our workforce, which is already highly skilled and very capable and very productive, even that much better with the investment that we're making. It will enable us to

attract, as I say, additional R&D to the auto sector, making the industry far more innovative and far more able to compete with jurisdictions around the world.

There are 1,200 other jurisdictions that are seeking the same type of investment that we have right here in Ontario, and we are poised to be very competitive when this strategy is put in place. I have every assurance that this is going to be a big success for the province.

TAXATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): A question for the Premier: Yesterday, at Rankin's restaurant on Hamilton's main street, I launched the NDP'S petition campaign against your outrageous 8% soup and salad tax. Most of the folks who come to Rankin's restaurant for the \$3.99 breakfast special are seniors living on a fixed income. They're some of the 1.5 million people across Ontario who purchase a meal for under \$4 each day. Do you know what they all have in common? They don't have much money.

Your tax is going to hit all those folks who struggle on a low or modest income. That's who you're going after. It's a direct attack on them. So I ask you today: Stand up and categorically tell those people who struggle on low and modest incomes that you're not going to tax their \$3.99 breakfast special.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The members of the opposition can raise these issues on a kind of ad hoc, one-off basis as frequently as they like. But as they would have said when they enjoyed the privilege of serving on this side of the House, it is not responsible for us to comment on whether specific initiatives are going to be in or out of the budget. I appreciate the advice that has been offered, and continues to be offered, with respect to the budget, and we very much look forward to delivering it.

Mr Hampton: The people who have been ad hoc, have been, for example, your health minister, who was out promoting this, or your education minister, who was out promoting this tax. The document you sent around to the so-called pre-budget town halls specifically said that the provincial sales tax should be expanded to include meals that cost under \$3.99. So it's you and your ministers—your government—who have been promoting this idea.

I'm simply asking you now, if it's not on the books, if it's not part of the budget, to stand up and say categorically to those low-income and modest-income people, who are already struggling, that it's not on. You're the one promoting it. If you want to kill the idea, say so now and say it clearly.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think it's wrong to frighten seniors. The member opposite would have seniors believe that this is now part of the budget. No such decision has, in fact, been made. It was raised as part of our consultations with the people of Ontario. We raised the question and said we would listen to Ontarians, and I want to assure you, Mr Speaker, that we are listening.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. As you know, farmers in Ontario have a tough time making ends meet because of things that are well beyond their control, like BSE and bird flu. Now you're proposing to tax meals under \$4. These are meals that often consist of soup and salads made of fresh produce grown locally in your community and mine. Taxing these products will hurt a revenue stream that is still available to our farmers. This is something you can control. Will you support Ontario's farmers and tell your Premier not to impose this tax on the poor and on our farmers?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I think our Premier has demonstrated unequivocal support for the farmers of this province when he announced \$64 million in transition funding. I think we're all very proud of the work our farmers do in ensuring that safe, healthy, nutritious meals, from the farm gate to your plate, turn up there on a regular basis. I think it's very important that we do everything we can to stand behind the agriculture industry.

We do want people to eat healthier in this province. If people eat healthier, it helps us save money in health care costs. We need to ensure that people are buying Ontario products. So support the Ontario dairy industry, fruit industry, vegetable industry and grain and oilseed industry. That can help us. I think the honourable member knows it's not appropriate for me to speculate on any issue that's going to be in the budget.

Mr Hardeman: I've heard every minister on the opposite side, when asked this question, refer to speculation and that somehow we are creating this speculation. I have here a sheet of paper that was passed out by the Liberal government at their town hall meetings, and there are some suggestions in here that they should talk about.

1430

When it comes to tax incentives, one of the government recommendations, for example, is that they "do not tax prepared meals that cost less than \$4, therefore creating an incentive to purchase fast food. The government loses \$200 million every year by not collecting this tax." The key required to implement this is, "The government could eliminate this exemption and recover the lost revenue by charging retail sales tax on prepared meals that cost less than \$4." That's what they're saying.

I'm also very concerned when the Minister of Agriculture suggests that eliminating the ability of people to buy these cheaper meals that farmers produce from fresh food will make the food healthier for the people consuming it. I just find that incomprehensible that the Minister of Agriculture would say that when I buy local produce at a local produce shop it's not healthy.

Hon Mr Peters: It's very unfortunate that the former minister forgot a very important part of this ministry, the food ministry. It's very unfortunate that the former agriculture minister forgot that.

We're very proud of the work that the 58,000 farmers do in this province in making sure that we have safe,

healthy, nutritious, clean food, and the 200 commodities produced in this province. I challenge that member on the other side, and quite honestly I challenge every one of us in this House, to make a conscious decision when we go to the grocery store to buy Ontario, to support Ontario farmers, to support Ontario products. We need to do that.

I think it's extremely important that we recognize the important role the farmers play in ensuring that if we do eat the proper products, if we do enjoy a healthy lifestyle, we can save this health care system a great deal of money.

Once again, I think it's very inappropriate for a member to speculate on what's going to be contained in the Minister of Finance's budget.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): My question today is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. Minister, I would like to ask you about the announcement you made yesterday in Hamilton. The announcement was great news for my riding of Oakville, which is the home of a Ford assembly plant and the head office of Ford of Canada.

Ford employees and the people of my riding have concerns. Ford has said it would like to invest \$1 billion into the community and the plant to turn it into a flex plant and ensure its viability over the coming decades. The company has been very vocal in saying that it would need the government to become a partner in this investment. Minister, what does this announcement mean to Ford, the Oakville assembly plant and the town of Oakville?

Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I want to thank the member for a very important question. I want to say to the member that yesterday's announcement will help not only Ford and Oakville but the entire province. There isn't a part of this province that isn't affected by the auto sector, and this initiative will be a significant boost to the Ontario economy right across this province.

The strategy calls for a \$300-million investment that will create or retain 300 jobs. It will enable Ford Motor to bring about their flex plant at Oakville, and we're looking forward to additional proposals. It will make them far more innovative. We've identified five categories for investment opportunities.

I say that the last 100 years have been a proud achievement for the province of Ontario, for Ford Motor, and we want to make the next 100 years as successful as the last 100 years in the automotive sector.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Minister, I have another question just to follow up on my colleague from Oakville. In my community of London, the auto industry is the largest industry. We are home for many different automotive industries, like Ford, GM and Sterling. In December, TransForm Automotive announced an investment of \$15 million in London. It would

employ about 150 and can expand to 450. What's your strategy to help maintain the growth and hire more people in London?

Hon Mr Cordiano: As I say, the auto industry is a very important industry to all parts of the province, London included. There are 400 auto parts manufacturers that employ 93,000 people in this province. That's significant. There are 14 different auto assembly plants, and 47,000 people are employed directly in assembly. The sector accounts for 20% of the manufacturing output of this province, 45% of the exports and 4% of GDP. It is a huge business.

This new investment strategy is going to make the industry far more competitive. It's going to make it more innovative. It's going to make our workforce far more skilled. In fact, I expect that we will receive up to \$5 billion worth of new investment in this province in the auto sector, which will create thousands of new jobs and provide an additional boost to the Ontario economy.

TAXATION

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Minister of Education. I think he's here somewhere. This is with respect to food in the schools. There are students here today who use cafeterias, I'm sure, in their schools. In fact, over 80% of the meals sold in school cafeterias in Ontario, we're told, are less than \$4. They are free of retail sales tax presently. The government proposes, apparently—so it is said in the papers—to impose a retail sales tax of 8%, which would be 32 cents more on each one of those meals every day for these students here in the province of Ontario. At the same time, the minister is talking about healthier food in our elementary schools. This is a case of, "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you. I'm going to give you something with one hand, and I'm going to charge you 32 cents more every time you come to the cafeteria."

Will the minister stand in his place and assure the students and the parents of the province of Ontario that his government is not going to charge them 32 cents extra every time they buy a meal in a cafeteria?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): It is interesting, of course. I was more hopeful, with the introduction of the question, that the member would be talking about the health and well-being of kids, that he wouldn't be trying a stunt on their behalf. We have yet to have one question from the critic in the opposition about the health and well-being of kids in public schools.

He makes a joke about the government being there to help you. This is a government that let kids lose, year over year, more of their access to physical education, more of their access to things that would keep them healthy. I thought that might be the member's interest. I thought that might be what he would stand up on today.

I thought I might hear as well some kind of apology when it comes to tax matters. Rather than talking about something that is speculative, I thought the member might be standing in his place to apologize for trying to

give away tax revenues to private schools, at the direct expense of our kids and public education. That's all the member opposite is known for, and I would be happy to hear in a supplementary what he would like to do—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Flaherty: This is the way the Liberal government thinks. He sees nothing wrong with making food more expensive to the parents and children every day in the schools of the province of Ontario. He doesn't answer the question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Could you allow the member to ask his question? A lot of shouting is coming from this side.

Mr Flaherty: He stands up and doesn't answer the question. He says, in effect, "Yes, we're going to do this." So does the Minister of Finance; so does the Premier. They can say no, but they've chosen day after day in this House not to say no, as we said no when that same tax was proposed.

Stand in your place and say you won't impose that cost, 32 cents a day on parents and children in the province of Ontario. This is the way they think: They're going to lose \$200 million. That's the way it was in their speaking notes. It's not their money. The money belongs to the people of Ontario. The government doesn't have the right to take more money from them; they're already paying enough taxes in this province.

1440

Hon Mr Kennedy: I wish the member opposite no ill will, but I think there's a special political purgatory for people who stand in this House after cutting the incomes of the poorest people in this province and then purport, for their political advantage, to have some concern for their welfare and well-being. This is coming from the member who was the Chair of the education committee of cabinet that cut in half the amount of money to help poor kids in this province learn, who took the dollars away that boards across this province had targeted for kids who had learning challenges. We have, in this province, one of the saddest legacies, one of the highest dropout rates in years, because year after year those kids could not be heard by the members opposite, could not be heard by that government. I can tell you, as much as we don't like the line of questioning from the member opposite, those kids have got a hearing with this government. We've got our priorities straight, and they're going to get help and a future—

The Speaker: Thank you.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): My question is for the Minister of Finance. For a number of years now, people across Ontario have been hurt by skyrocketing rates for auto insurance. During the election, our party promised to enact reforms that would reduce auto insurance rates by an average of 10%. What is the status of the government's commitment to lower auto insurance?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): As the Premier was just saying, very good news indeed. In fact, this very day, the superintendent of financial services has issued his report on auto insurance rate filings that arose as a result of Bill 5, our act to lower auto insurance rates. I can tell the House that in that report, some 55% of the auto insurance market has reported and has had new rates approved. I am happy to report to this House that that report shows an average rate reduction of 10.15%.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. These standing ovations are taking away time from the opposition to ask questions. I would ask you to refrain from doing that.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Just to be clear, as a result of these new filings, drivers who are signing new policies will be able to take advantage of these rates right away. For drivers who are renewing their policies, these new rates will bring them, on average, rate reductions of some 10%.

Ms Di Cocco: Your ministry certainly is to be commended for the work you've done over the last six months since we've come to office to bring about these reductions in rates. What else are we doing to improve consumer protection in this area?

Hon Mr Sorbara: Just to give credit where credit is due, I want to pay tribute to my parliamentary assistant, Mike Colle, who did most of the work on this matter.

Our work is far from done. This represents the completion of phase 1. We will be monitoring very closely the balance of the filings that will be sent in to the Financial Services Commission over the course of the next month or so.

The next package of reforms will include enhanced consumer protection, a very important initiative; increased competition within the market, which will have a further downward pressure on rates; and the improvement in availability of services to those injured in auto accidents.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Health. On March 31, I urged you to provide additional funding to the Northeast Mental Health Centre to stop budget cuts and protect programs and staff, and to my knowledge, no additional funding has been allocated. I ask you today, are you going to provide additional funding to the centre, and when?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The member asks about a serious issue, and I acknowledge it. The issue of mental health support for mental health services in our province, I've mentioned in this House before, is one of those which is chronically underfunded. I say to the member that the government is currently developing its plans for the future fiscal year, and we hope to be in a position to make announcements with respect to that soon. I would tell the member that I have not made any announcement

around that to date, but we're working on this within the ministry on a priority basis with my colleagues who are delivering these services to children and youth. When we're in a position to move forward, we will.

Ms Martel: Minister, I can't stress enough to you how critical this situation is. The board has a \$2.3-million deficit. They are making cuts now to try and balance their budget. The first round of cuts very negatively impacts on children. Those cuts were made on March 26. The second round of cuts is due tomorrow and will impact adults and community mental health services. This centre provides critical mental health services for children and adults right across northeastern Ontario. They need to have additional funding now.

Minister, I would ask you again, in light of the board meeting tomorrow where additional cuts are going to be made, will you announce funding now so that the Northeast Mental Health Centre can save its programs, its services, its staff and the services it provides to people who suffer from mental illness in northeastern Ontario?

Hon Mr Smitherman: As in my earlier answer, I acknowledge the challenges these programs are under, and that program in particular. We're working on trying to come up with priority funding for a variety of mental health programs across Ontario. I would just repeat to the member that when we're in a position to make an announcement, we will.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Joining us in the Speaker's gallery today are Representatives Joseph Rivet, Bill Huizenga and Daniel Acciavatti from the House of Representatives of Michigan. Please join me in warmly welcoming them here.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I also want to take this opportunity to remind members that it is the last day here for our pages. I know you all want to join me in thanking, in the most disciplined manner that we can have, these wonderful pages who have served us so well.

PETITIONS

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;

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

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

1450

ONTARIO BUDGET

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

“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, 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.”

I sign my name to it, as I agree with it.

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here signed by a great number of my constituents and constituents from surrounding ridings. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital has asked for ministerial consent to make capital changes to its facilities to accommodate the placement of a satellite dialysis unit; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has already given approval for the unit and committed operational dollars to it; and

“Whereas the community has already raised the funds for the equipment needed;

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

“That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care give his final approval of the capital request change from the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital immediately so those who are in need of these life-sustaining dialysis services can receive them locally, thereby enjoying a better quality of life without further delay.”

I affix my name to the petition.

OAK RIDGES MORAINÉ

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I have a petition here from the residents of Vaughan that says:

“Whereas the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act is intended to protect and secure sensitive lands for the good of the people of Ontario; and

“Whereas the council of the city of Vaughan enacted conformity documents on June 23, 2003, to advance those goals; and

“Whereas the Minister of Municipal Affairs, despite requests in July 2003 from the region of York, the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority and the city of Vaughan has yet to issue the order pursuant to section 18 of the act to amend the official plans and zoning bylaw of the city of Vaughan to conform to the Oak Ridges moraine conservation plan;

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

“That the minister immediately approve the conformity documents of the city of Vaughan and without reference to a council resolution of March 8, 2004.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I have a petition that concerns the Ontario drug benefit program, and I want to thank Norma Penny of Wasaga Beach. Ms Penney took a great deal of time to go around and get hundreds of signatures for this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

“To cancel any plans to raise costs for prescription drugs for our seniors and to embark on making vital medication more affordable for all Ontarians.”

I’ve signed this petition.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I have a petition. Some 6,000 names will be coming in on this petition, worked up by Joan Faria and her volunteer colleagues, including an 84-year-old blind man who went door to door to gather these signatures. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

RECREATIONAL TRAILERS

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I have a petition here. It's from all over Ontario, and it's from the campground people.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas recreational trailers kept at parks and campgrounds in Ontario are being assessed by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, MPAC, and are subject to property taxes; and

“Whereas owners of these trailers are seasonal and occasional residents who contribute to the local tourism economy without requiring significant municipal services; and

“Whereas the added burden of this taxation will make it impossible for many families of modest income to afford their holiday sites at parks and campgrounds;

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

“That these seasonal trailers not be subject to retroactive taxation for the year 2003; and that the tax not be imposed in 2004; and that no such tax be introduced without consultation with owners of the trailers and trailer parks, municipal governments, businesses, the tourism sector and other stakeholders.”

I'm pleased to support this on behalf of the thousands of campers in the province of Ontario.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by a number of students, to which I will affix my own signature. It says:

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

“Whereas newcomers to Canada who choose to settle in Ontario find frequent and unnecessary obstacles that prevent skilled tradespeople, professional and managerial talent from practising the professions, trades and

occupations for which they have been trained in their country of origin; and

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

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

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

I am pleased to add my signature to this petition.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition that's been signed by people from all over—Owen Sound, Meaford, Allenford, Hanover, Walkerton, even from people from Sydenham township. There are a lot of students and teachers here today from Sydenham township. The petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

“To halt the consideration of imposing an income test, delisting drugs for coverage under the Ontario drug benefit plan or putting in place user fees for seniors, and to maintain the present drug benefit plan for seniors to cover medication.”

I have also signed this.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I want to welcome the young folks from Sydenham township too, because the member, Mr Murdoch, was actually the reeve of that township at one time, I think. This petition reads:

“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 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 source water protection which is a final and key recommendation to be implemented by Justice Dennis O’Connor’s report on the Walkerton inquiry; and

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign this and I present this to Brendon.

LCBO OUTLET

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I have a petition for an LCBO agency store in Baxter.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

I agree with this petition and I’ve signed it.

1500

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I’d like to read the same petition into the record, into Hansard again.

“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’m pleased to sign my name.

SEWAGE SLUDGE

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I have a petition 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 freshwater beach in the world, and other sensitive areas, there exists a threat to the environment and the public’s health. The 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 agree we this petition and I’ve signed it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Before I get to orders of the day, I rise, pursuant to standing order 55, to give the Legislature the

business of the House for next week: Monday, April 19, 2004, second reading of Bill 18, the Audit Statute Law Amendment Act; Tuesday, April 20, second reading of Bill 49, the Adams Mine Lake Act; Wednesday, April 21, second reading of Bill 56, Employment Standards Amendment Act; and Thursday, April 22, second reading of Bill 49, Adams Mine Lake Act.

On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice respecting the proceedings for consideration of Bill 42, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to freeze the salaries of members of the Assembly until the end of fiscal year 2004-2005.

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

Hon Mr Caplan: I move that, upon completion of consideration of the motion for second reading of Bill 42, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to freeze the salaries of members of the Assembly until the end of fiscal year 2004-2005, the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called immediately, whereupon the Speaker shall put the question on the motion for third reading without debate or amendment.

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

MPP SALARY FREEZE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE GEL DES TRAITEMENTS DES DÉPUTÉS

Ms Broten moved, on behalf of Mr McGuinty, second reading of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to freeze the salaries of members of the Assembly until the end of fiscal year 2004-2005 / Projet de loi 42, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative en vue de geler les traitements des députés à l'Assemblée jusqu'à la fin de l'exercice 2004-2005.

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): It's a pleasure to rise today to speak before the Legislature on Bill 42, the MPP Salary Freeze Act. Bill 42 is a bill of principle. It is a bill that exemplifies leadership through the exercise of responsibility in public service. This bill, if passed, would freeze MPP salaries until April 1, 2005.

As MPPs we are here because of our commitment to public service: our commitment to our constituents, our commitment to the people of this province and our desire to build a better Ontario. We are here to contribute in the way we are best able, in the way that we find our skills best suited. We are here because we believe in Ontario and its people, and believe that our efforts can make it the best place to live, learn, work and build a better life for our families. We are all here, I hope, in common camaraderie, although perhaps some days this camaraderie is less obvious than others. We are here engaged in the common pursuit of wanting to make Ontario a better province.

Bill 42 is, at its heart, about serving the public, spending responsibly, being accountable and reaching back to the fundamentals of governance at a time when fundamentals are most needed.

This bill is about voluntary restraint. In this time of significant fiscal challenges, shattered by a debt left by our predecessors, a debt which is a great burden on all people of Ontario, it is imperative that we not only talk the talk but that we walk the walk. The hard-working people in all of our communities across Ontario expect no less. We all need to recognize the fiscal reality in which our province finds itself. This bill does just that.

It is important to clarify again what this bill is and what it is not. First, Bill 42 is not a signal; it's not a sign or a precursor to our fellow partners in civil service regarding any intention to legislate wage settlements.

Second, it's not a signal to MPPs that their work is not valued or important; quite the contrary. It is the value of being an MPP that comes from the contributions that we make each and every day to ensure that the government makes decisions in the public interest. That value is not 1% or 2.7% or 25%; that value is measured in the good that comes from the public service, the feeling you get when you help a constituent with a problem, support legislation that helps protect our air and our water for future generations, and the list goes on. That feeling is priceless.

Third, it is not a signal to the Integrity Commissioner, who has the arduous task of setting MPPs' pay, that his role will forever be removed. It is simply an acknowledgement that at this time, in this fiscal environment, we as legislators must lead by example.

Our profession is unique in many ways. One way in which it is unique is that it allows for the self-restraint of wages. To vote against this bill is to ignore the need to develop and implement a collective solution to the fiscal situation in our province.

1510

In voting for this bill, we recognize the most fundamental element of governance: making decisions and acting in the public good. MPPs, irrespective of party affiliation, personal beliefs or personality differences, are all here, I believe, because we are dedicated to this province. As colleagues, supporting this bill gives us the opportunity to demonstrate a united commitment to the public good at a time when our province faces such significant challenges.

I urge all MPPs to support Bill 42 and to demonstrate their leadership through the exercise of responsibility and public service. Simply put, saying no to a pay raise at this time is in the public good.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Questions and comments?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I suspect it is going to be a remarkably short debate this afternoon. I suspect that relatively few members of the government caucus are going to want to speak to this bill. I suspect that the carefully drafted speech of the member who spoke—for whom I have regard; I have to tell you, I like

her—could be the sum total of the government members' participation in this debate.

I find it remarkable that, just as Liberals didn't want to speak to a bill which would give them a 25% salary increase and, in fact, condemned and scourged New Democrats who spoke to it to the final member and did everything they could to delay, obstruct and, indeed, defeat the 25% increase, that just as Liberals were disinclined and disinterested—they wanted to grease it up like a greased pig and slide it through in the dark of night when the press gallery was absent. They wanted their 25% salary increase and they condemned New Democrats for daring to want to debate it, for daring to try to obstruct it and for daring to try to defeat it.

Well, New Democrats were successful in defeating it, make no mistake about it, because the New Democrat exposé of the agreement, the accord, reached between the Conservatives and the Liberals to give themselves a 25% salary increase soon became a matter of public focus. Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals were successful at concealing their agreement, and the Criminal Code has terms for that agreement, which I'm loath to use because you, as a lawyer, might find them unparliamentary—but, by God, if you could read my mind, you'd know what I am thinking.

We will be speaking to this in around 10 more minutes' time. I invite people to stay tuned. Howard Hampton and I will be addressing this bill, utilizing and exhausting all of the time available to us.

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I heard the member speak, and I noticed that the Liberal government chose one of their new members to stand and speak to this bill. They obviously don't want one of their former members up speaking, one of the members who was here when they voted themselves a process of a 25% pay increase. But that is the history of this.

The Liberal government, when they were in opposition, conspired, were complicit in a strategy with the Conservatives to give themselves a 25% pay increase, and they thought that was perfectly acceptable.

In fact, while the wages of the lowest-paid, those who work for minimum wage, were frozen, the Liberals were going to give themselves a 25% pay increase. While those who are unfortunate and have to rely on the Ontario disability support plan, which hasn't been improved now in 10 years, would have had their incomes frozen, the Liberals conspired to vote a 25% pay increase for themselves. While those people who were so unfortunate as to have to deal with Ontario Works had their incomes cut and then frozen, and were harassed on an almost daily basis, Liberals were prepared to participate in a process that would give them a 25% pay increase.

I can see that the reason this member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore was chosen to give this speech is because she wasn't among that rabid bunch. She is someone new. But history is still there, and history—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): In all fairness to the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, she is the

parliamentary assistant to the Premier. I had that title under Ernie Eves, and I was very honoured to have it. I can tell you that whenever the Premier introduces a bill into the House, the lead-off is normally done by the parliamentary assistant.

I just wanted to make that correction. I hope you don't mind that.

The Acting Speaker: Response by the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore?

Ms Broten: I'm pleased to take a few moments to speak to this legislation and to the comments my friends opposite have made. I guess the best remark we can make at this point about the difference between the members on this side of the House and those opposite is the fact that we want to talk about the future and not the past. We want to talk about how Ontario can and should be in the years to come. We want to be part of a government that has increased the minimum wage for the first time in many years, that is committed to remedying the flaws and problems with our ODSP and OW systems, and that is going to lead by example. That is what this legislation is about. It's about being part of a government that is going to be responsible, that is going to take the appropriate steps, that understands what public service is all about and clearly understands why we are all here.

We are all here to build a brighter future for the children in this province, to make sure that the elderly in this province have a hospital to go to when they need it, and to make sure that we are a caring and compassionate province. We have to lead by example in order to do that, and that's what this legislation is all about. I am pleased to be moving it on behalf of the Premier as his parliamentary assistant. I look forward to seeing this legislation pass and building a brighter future for the next generations in the province in the years and months to come.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'm going to be sharing my time with the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I just have a few comments that I would like to get on the record.

I will begin my remarks on behalf of our party by indicating that we will be supporting this legislation, and then I would like to put some facts on the record. I've been here since 1990 and I can tell you that this issue of pay increases has been a bone of contention for the entire time that I've been here. I suspect it has always been an issue that's contentious. It has been very difficult for members to vote themselves an increase and to take a look realistically at the value of the work they do.

I would just remind the members here that, under Bob Rae, everyone in the House between 1990 and 1995 did take a 5% reduction in their salary. I would also like to let people in the House know that when Premier Harris took over in 1995, there was actually a further 5% reduction in the salary level. So this is certainly not unheard of, and I would say to some of the members of the governing party, be prepared for more, because it is

very difficult, once you start down that slippery slope, to stop the slide.

I would also like you to know that when our government came into office in 1995, in order to further reduce expenditures, we reduced the number of MPPs from 130 to 103. You might ask, "Why did you reduce it to 103?" We made the decision that we wanted to have the same geographical boundaries as the federal members of Parliament. So again, that was a cost saving because we had fewer MPPs in Ontario, and of course less money needed to be invested in changing boundaries.

But I would like to put on the record that although today we, the 103 MPPs, represent the same geographical areas as our colleagues in the federal government, our pay today is \$85,240, and I understand that the salary of a federal member for dealing with the same constituents as we do is \$139,200. I think it's important to put that, because you know what? I personally don't believe that our duties and responsibilities are any different than the federal members'. I think we have to carefully consider whether or not we are going to continue to undervalue the work we do.

1520

I know one of the issues I'm working on today on behalf of my constituents is a very important issue. We deal in this House with issues that really matter to people: educational issues, environmental issues, safety issues, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board issues, people who are desperate to get health care. I know each member of this House works hard.

I just want to mention one of the responsibilities I am currently involved in. I have people in my community, I have people in this province who are looking to us to provide support for Fabrazyme. These are people who suffer from Fabry's disease. As of April 25 they will no longer have access to Fabrazyme, to the therapy they are going to need to stay alive. So I am hoping and I am optimistic that the Minister of Health will follow the compassion that has been demonstrated by the Minister of Health in the province of Alberta, and will recognize and announce that these individuals will receive access to Fabrazyme. I hope he will do this on compassionate grounds until such time that a final decision on approval of ERT is made.

These are the issues we deal with in this House, issues that really matter to people. Yes, we have a very important job and we work hard to do the job in the best way we possibly can.

I would also like to indicate that when our government was in power after 1995, we also eliminated the per diem. At one time members, when they sat on committees, received a per diem. We got rid of that. We no longer get that money. So this is not first time decisions are being made that we believe are responsible and in the best interests of the people in Ontario.

Another decision we made was to scrap what some people liked to refer to as the gold-plated pension plan. But do you know what's frustrating? No one in this province realizes that we don't have a pension plan. In

fact, I want to read from the North Bay Nugget of March 30, 2004, which says, "Holding back MPP wages is symbolic for McGuinty, but hiking them would have caused backlash from taxpayers who already cringe at the gold-plated pension plans available to elected members."

Here is a leading newspaper in the province of Ontario that in the year 2004 still does not know that there is no pension plan for members of provincial Parliament.

So despite any of the changes that have been made, I just want to tell you, we've tried to make these decisions in the best interests of the people in the province, but if the media can't even articulate and accurately convey what has been done, it's just a little bit difficult.

There's not a lot more that I want to say. I do want to comment on the article today by Jim Coyle in the Toronto Star. He makes some comments here about politicians, "Pity the Underpaid Politician—No, Seriously." He says here:

"Whether I liked them or not, there were some things they tended to have in common." He's talking about politicians, having been in the press gallery for 25 years. "As a species, they had the courage to put their views on the record and their names on the line. They were generally competitive, committed, hard-working, idealistic (at least in the beginning), determined to make a difference, and as conscious of the honour and duties and of their position as they were its privileges.

"I can't think of many who got into it to get rich or as a ticket to easy street."

Then he goes on to say, "And I can't think of many ordinary citizens ... who could have been endured the intrusions, abuse and spotlight elected office brings." It's interesting to hear that comment from a journalist.

Then we hear from Bob Rae, who writes in his memoirs—and I think we should all remember this: "Politics is about values and power, courage and service ... leadership and compromise. Above all, politics is necessary...."

I would just remind the members in this House that the work we do is honourable work. We are certainly entrusted with tremendous responsibility. Each day we try to do the best job we can, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to move forward and represent our constituents throughout this province to the best of our ability.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I know you were sort of looking for me to be here.

Interjection.

Mr Murdoch: I had a school here from my riding and I wanted to talk to the kids. They've seen how we perform in here, and I had to remind them that maybe they shouldn't do the same at school as they saw people doing here. I wanted to make sure they knew that.

Interjections.

Mr Murdoch: All parties. This is nothing new to here.

I want to speak on this bill today and not so much about our salaries and what we do as about the procedure

we have in this House. Quite frankly, I don't think we should be here today debating this. We should be debating something like health care, education or agriculture. That's what we're supposed to be doing.

That's why some time ago our salaries were put on to the Integrity Commissioner, whom your government and we over here feel is a very responsible person. This was what we did some time ago. I remember I was part of that, I introduced my own private member's bill, and that happened. A year later, our government took it and, with the help of the Liberals, I might say—I don't believe the NDP voted for it, but I do believe the Liberals voted for it when it came up—our salaries would be put to the Integrity Commissioner. The Integrity Commissioner would look at what we make and come up with some recommendations. Each year, the Integrity Commissioner would look at that and recommend to this House what we should be paid.

Well, we ran afoul somewhere. We had an election about year ago, and I must say that our leaders over here and leaders over on the Liberal side wimped out. They were afraid to take on the NDP on this issue. There's no doubt we were as bad as the Liberals. They didn't want this. The Integrity Commissioner at the time had looked at things and looked at our salaries, compared what we do to what the federal members do and compared to what other members do across this nation. They at that point recommended—and when they recommend to the Chair or to the Speaker, it's law—that there be a 25% increase for MPPs. That was after the Integrity Commissioner looked at this problem. He looked at what the federal people made. They have the same ridings as we do, and he recommended that. As I say again, our leader, who was the Premier at the time—and I'm not making excuses for us—and the Liberals—no doubt McGuinty was in on the deal—said, “We can't run an election with that. The NDP will tear us apart. They didn't vote for this. They will say they won't take their raises.” So somehow, through this system that we thought we'd get out of, they convinced the Integrity Commissioner to come up with no increases at this time and that we would look at it again in the fall, which he did—or I guess we're in the spring now—and recommended for this year, starting April 1, that MPPs get a raise of 2.7% or something like that, the cost of living.

1530

All of a sudden our friends on the other side, and I'm sure some of our leaders here, got all excited again. “We can't do that. Gee whiz, this is awful.” Well, we had a system here, folks. If some of you had been in municipal politics you'd understand that one of the hardest things was setting our own wages. When I came here, I thought we'd be different. We weren't any different—same thing. We'd argue here, like today. Maybe some of you might say I'm wasting your time, but whatever. We could be debating health, education, our farm issues. We could be debating that which is important.

Here we are today, debating a bill that takes away, again, the powers of the Integrity Commissioner which

we had handed over to him. Most municipalities are way ahead of us now. They've set up committees or boards to look after their wages, and they have to take it whether it's an increase, the same or a decrease. That's what municipalities are doing; they're starting to do that now, so they're way ahead of us here in this House. What we did is that we put it over there, and then every time he comes back, whether it's our government or your government, we wimp out. We've got no guts. We're afraid of the NDP, that they're going to go out there and say, “We shouldn't get a raise because this didn't go up and that didn't go up,” or whatever.

If this bill would say that we're freezing wages right across the public sector—like teachers, doctors, civil servants—then it would be more comfortable to deal with, because I would say everybody is taking a hit. But no, with this bill, we've got to be self-righteous here and say, “Oh no, this is just for us.”

We had a system, as I said, and we've wimped out. We had a chance to leave it alone, but unfortunately—and this isn't just the Liberals; it's our side too. Both sides are wimping out on this. We're going to have a voice vote, as I understand—no recorded votes. You wouldn't want anybody at home thinking you voted for a raise or something. You wouldn't want somebody at home to bring that up, would you? And I know some of my friends on the other side agree with me, but they won't be able to vote for it because there's no recorded vote. We're going to voice-vote this and let it go.

I'm very disturbed that this is a trend. We might as well not have wasted the time of putting it over to the Integrity Commissioner's job. It's strange, though; it's really strange, that it's coming from the Liberals. I have sat here for probably the last month listening to the questions from our side to the Premier about Mr Sorbara and his problems. Now, I'm not one to judge Mr Sorbara. He's always been a nice person to me, and I have no idea if he's in trouble or if he isn't in trouble. But I have heard this Premier say, day in and day out, “The Integrity Commissioner has cleared him. He must be OK.” Well, all of a sudden, they say the Integrity Commissioner said that a 2.7% increase would be fine for the wages, but that's no good. So you use him when you want him and you throw him aside when you don't want him. What is wrong?

But it's here, and it's not just your Premier who's doing it. It's our leaders. It's all of us. We are gutless. We are afraid to go up. The only ones who will stand on their principles on this are the NDP. I don't agree with them, but they have said, “No, we shouldn't,” and they've stood that way. We've all agreed. Some of these guys over here won't understand this, but we don't have pensions. We put that little, paltry part—what?—about 5% away. We had good pensions. I'll tell you right now, it was Mike Harris who took them away. We didn't have the guts to stop him, and it happened. Of course, the Liberals at that time agreed, and we went on and took the pensions away.

Now we have some integrity officer who's going to put in our salaries and we won't even let him do that.

What has become of this place? There's no democracy around here any more. Representative democracy is gone from this province. You guys didn't take it away; it was gone long before you got into government. But your not doing anything about it is the problem. I see day after day that you stand up and vote and you stand and clap like the trained seals we were. You're doing the same thing. You did campaign that you would change it, but this bill is not changing it, folks. Unfortunately, you're not changing it.

I want to read something the Premier said in the House: "The Integrity Commissioner himself has reviewed this particular matter"—the deal with Mr Sorbara—"The Minister of Finance has acted appropriately and responsibly in the circumstances, and I believe that ends the matter." Then we should be leaving other things—if you want to sit there, day after day, and put your case that he is right, I'm not disagreeing with that. But then we had this deal where we were going to send it there and he would do our pay increases or decreases or whatever.

It's nothing about what we make. We may be paid quite fine. The fact is that we agreed in this House a couple of years ago that that's where it should be. An independent person should set our wages. We should not be doing that. We haven't done that, folks, and now we've gone to another pattern. What's going to happen next year when he comes back and says, "Maybe they should be catching up"?

You've got to realize that you fellows do the same ridings as your MPs, the same ones. You probably do twice as much work as they do. You're here more often; you're closer to your people. They make approximately \$60,000 more a year than you, and they have a great pension. They have a pension. After two terms there, they can retire at more than teachers get in pensions.

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Gold-plated pensions.

Mr Murdoch: Yes, gold-plated pensions. Look at this little thing. As I say, it was this 2.7% cost of living, and we messed that up. Where are we going, folks? You guys are going to have to start thinking. You are the government now, and you've got four years to go with this. I've been through it. I was there for eight years, and I was in opposition five years with the NDP, so I understand what's going on. Let me tell you: Start making rules like this and you're going down a slippery slope.

I don't know how much time we have, but all I know—

Interjections.

Mr Murdoch: Do you want me to quit?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): Let's have another by-election.

Mr Murdoch: You want to have a by-election? You've called one.

If you want to get into by-elections, you guys called one and then you let your Premier pick your candidate. What a thing to do, guys. Don't get into that. Now you're starting to sound like federal Liberals. You're starting to

sound like the federal guys. You let your Premier pick your candidate.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: No, that didn't happen.

Mr Murdoch: I'm sorry, it did happen. Read the Star. You guys used to tell me the Star was the bible. The Star was the Liberals' bible. I can remember you over here telling us that if it said so in the Star, it must be true. They've said you picked your own candidate—maybe a good candidate, I don't know.

Interjection.

Mr Murdoch: Well, I have to leave that for you to read for me.

Interjections.

Mr Murdoch: We can't get off track here, Mr Speaker. I know you'll tell me to stay on topic. I can't let members from the other side get me off topic, which is fine; I'd love to discuss their issues.

The issue here is what we're doing in this House, why we're letting this happen. I have to leave it to you guys in the majority, the vast majority over there, to see that things like this don't happen.

The member from Kingston should know well. He was in municipal politics before he came here. He should know quite well that that is one of the hardest things to do there. Probably the municipality of Kingston now has a board that picks their salaries. Probably a board or commission says, "This is what you should be paid." Most municipalities are doing that now. We in this House caught up with them a couple of years ago and gave it to the Integrity Commissioner.

What happens, though, if he comes in and the government doesn't like it? They pass a bill, which we're debating. We've wasted a whole afternoon here today. We could have debated something of importance, like health care, like our agricultural problems, like education. We could have been debating that here. But no, we have to debate our salaries again, and we're not getting anything anyway.

I'm just telling them over there that they're falling into the same trap we fell into, and we had eight years. They're doing it in one year. They're going to have done everything bad in one year that we did in eight years. We weren't perfect, and that's why we're over here. If you guys over there keep doing things like that, do you know what will happen to you? You'll end up back over on this side. You'll be sitting back over here.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Not all of them.

1540

Mr Murdoch: Well, not all of them. Some won't even end up here. As Mr Kormos says, some of them won't even get here. That's what happens to you. We had more than are sitting here now. I know some guys who aren't here.

This is what happens when you make mistakes like this and you don't have some guts. You have to have some guts in this place, and we don't have any. We don't have any, fellows, and that's a problem. You have to start standing up to your leaders. Do not let those in that front

office run everything. We over here made a lot of mistakes by letting them do that, and this is the kind of trouble we got into. I'm telling you guys not to do that.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): What about a pension?

Mr Murdoch: A gentleman just went by and asked about his pension. I know he's a long way from a pension, but we don't get any.

Interjections.

Mr Murdoch: Blame it on the whip. We used to like to do that too.

Anyway, I'll wrap up. I had some notes here, and I think I've gone through everything. I may have missed something, but all I'm saying is that I know this will pass. We'll have a voice vote and we'll all go out of here patting ourselves on the back: "Oh, didn't we do something great?" I just want to see what happens when the Liberals have to deal with OPSEU and the doctors. Will they be telling them, "No, we froze our wages"? We'll wait to see if they have guts to do that. What you're doing here is going down the slippery slope. We had it sorted out, and you've messed it up.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: Billy, you had 36 minutes left. My goodness, I was hoping to hear the iconoclastic voice of the member for Bruce etc—

Mr Murdoch: Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr Kormos: Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, whose students and teachers I was pleased to meet here.

The member talks about gutless politicians. Really, the reluctance of politicians to deal with this issue head-on in a responsible, open and public way is the ultimate demonstration of gutlessness. It's as if there were 100-plus eviscerated corpses here that lack the guts and other stuff necessary to deal with this issue on the record and in a public way. I'm very much looking forward to the 30 minutes I'm going to have in a few minutes' time, because I find it remarkable that, other than Ms Broten, not a single government member would want to speak to this bill—not a single one. It's just like when they voted themselves a 25% salary increase. Not a single one wanted to speak to it, and they chastised New Democrats, who were trying to block the 25% salary increase. They castigated this small group of seven New Democrats—

Interjections.

Mr Kormos:—eight, nine, who opposed the salary increase, who voted against it, who tried to derail it, who tried to send it out to committee. Let nobody be fooled by the Liberals, because it was Ernie Eves himself who, when the heat grew during the election, killed the 25% salary increase.

Mr O'Toole: It's a real pleasure to rise, out of respect, to defend the position of the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound—he speaks here so infrequently, but his voice is always heard, usually just straight in the media—and also of the member for Niagara Centre, who has been here longer than I have. I can speak only from my own personal experience.

I'm a great supporter of the position taken earlier by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo. It's patient,

respectful and not condescending of the important role of public service. I honestly believe that people listening would want to get a copy of her remarks, because it shows the lack of understanding in the public. I'm looking across at one of my peers, and I know how hard he works as the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge. He was the mayor of Pickering and probably made more there than he does now. I don't think he knew that, but now he does. He knows there's no pension. Most of his council and most of his constituents don't realize the sacrifice he made for public office.

Where this needs to be sorted out—basically the discussion here is important. The Premier—I don't know if it's a broken promise or not; certainly we like to use that message—must have done a poll or something on this. The 2.7% isn't going to make a great deal of difference. The debate is out there. I know that in Durham region there has been a wide debate on how much the non-elected regional chair, Roger Anderson, makes, and I think a positive response has come out of that. I think he's going to eventually have to run for election.

But I looked yesterday, and the queen of all politics is Hazel McCallion. She makes more than the Premier—and arguably she should. I was surprised that David Miller, the mayor of Toronto, arguably the third most important politician elected, makes less than the regional chair and less than many of the mayors in Durham and other areas. This is a big discussion. The people of Ontario only get what they pay for. Public service is important, and I believe it is important to represent your people.

The Acting Speaker: Any response?

Mrs Witmer: I will just briefly respond to the comments that have been made. I don't think there is much more to say other than to indicate that we are going to be supporting this bill and this resolution to move forward in order to freeze the salaries for this year.

I think we have pointed out today that since 1990 we have been making similar decisions. We have been looking at our salary and I think we really need to seriously consider the work we do, the responsibilities we have vis-à-vis the federal members of Parliament. There are 103 in this province who have similar responsibilities to ourselves. I think we have to continue to ask ourselves the question as to what is an appropriate level of reimbursement and we need to make sure that we recognize the important work that we do.

The Acting Speaker: Any further debate?

Mr Kormos: My goodness, this debate is proceeding along at a rapid pace. This is truly remarkable. This is miraculous that here we are on Thursday afternoon and members seem to want to wrap this up, second and third reading all in one day, and indeed from the government benches but five minutes of contribution by way of debate. Mr Murdoch, this is truly unprecedented.

But for the debate around the Liberals and Conservatives trying to increase their salaries by 25%—there, once again, it wasn't even a matter of a five-minute contribution. Time after time after time—couldn't get a Lib-

eral to speak to that, could we, Mr Murdoch? Couldn't get a Conservative to stand and speak to it either.

I am particularly grateful to my colleague Ms Martel from Nickel Belt. Even though she had other things to do, I prevailed upon her to stay in the House to give consent to the proposition that this bill should move immediately to third reading without debate. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I said, "If I am in the room, no way can I consent to that. I am going to say no. Please, Ms Martel, you stay here. I understand an agreement was reached between our whip and House leaders or whips of other caucuses."

The whip for the Conservatives—the staff person darn near swallowed his bubble gum when he thought the deal was going to be kiboshed. All Hades broke loose. "What is going on? We promised to get this thing swept under the rug quick as a boo." Not that the rejection of the 2.7% increase is in and of itself something that's bad. It's not going to carry any great weight one way or another. But the reluctance and fear to talk about salaries here is truly remarkable. Although there is reluctance and fear to talk about them publicly and on the record, there is an incredible zeal to increase them.

I take issue with the member of the Conservative caucus who talked about Mr Harris and his 1996 legislation and suggestion of somehow a salary decrease. When the bill passed in this House that eliminated the so-called tax-free portion, incomes were grossed up so that there was approximately a \$10,000 across-the-board salary increase. It was like what some would insist happened during the transfer from English imperial measurement to metric, that manufacturers seized the opportunity to reduce the amount of cereal in the Cheerios package. In the course of the 1996 vote, eliminating the tax-free portion, members actually got a \$10,000 increase; oh, and a pension plan that resulted in million-dollar buyouts for political leaders, payouts that were in the millions of dollars for political leaders, and that cost the taxpayer a fortune because of the gross mismanagement and the dirty little secret that was entailed in the pickup and cleanup of the flotsam and jetsam, before all was said and done.

1550

So let's talk about the minimum wage here. Let's talk about the minimum wage of \$85,000 and the fact that out of 71 government members, only four receive the minimum salary.

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Peter, how much did you take?

The Acting Speaker: Order. Are you in your right seat, member? I don't think so.

OK. Continue.

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

Out of 71 government members, only four receive the base salary; 67 out of 71 receive stipends in addition to the base salary. Of course the Premier does. Of course cabinet ministers do. Well, parliamentary assistants do, but there's at least one per cabinet minister; some have a couple. A parliamentary assistant doesn't make \$85,000

and change; a parliamentary assistant makes \$97,429. Then we've got parliamentary assistant after parliamentary assistant; a minister who makes \$36,000 in addition to the \$85,000, with a salary of \$121,297. Then we have a caucus chair who receives an additional \$10,655, taking that person up to \$95,895. We've got a Chair with an additional \$11,934, taking them up to just shy of 100 grand, at \$97,174.

You see, out of 71 members, there are only four who are in the losers' club. These are people who get nothing. These are people who didn't even become Vice-Chairs. Some people come by the losers' club honestly. As a matter of fact—and he had a very moving private member's resolution this morning—I suspect that the member for Peterborough comes by the losers' club honestly. He's probably perceived as a little bit of a loose cannon. He's inclined to criticize his own government from time to time in what's called survival politics in the riding back in Peterborough. So you see, you become a member of the losers' club either because you've earned it, as I suspect the member from Peterborough has—he's being punished. He's being told, "No, you criticized the government." If you constitute—oh, dare I say it—the role of a loose cannon, then you're in the losers' club. So there is the member from Peterborough in the losers' club.

The member from Sault Ste Marie—in the losers' club—insofar as I'm aware does nothing but tout the party line when he's back home. But somehow he finds himself in the losers' club, not even in the position of Vice-Chair—nothing, zero, zip, nada. He's in the losers' club.

There are only four members in the losers' club. In fact, there's the member from Mississauga West. The regrettable thing about the member from Mississauga West is that he's in the double losers' club, because not only does he not receive any stipend whatsoever, not even Vice-Chair, but they put him on the regs and private bills committee. As you know—you've been here a good chunk of time—regs and private bills committee is punishment. It's not an award or a reward for anything; it's punishment. You can be effectively comatose and be on it.

The other member of the double losers' club, of course—again, this warrants some brief analysis—is the member from Davenport. The poor member from Davenport, one of the most senior members in this House, a member whose Liberal caucus colleagues should admire him for his political astuteness, is in the losers' club, and not only in the losers' club; a senior member of the caucus, a person with seniority over all these new Young Turks just elected, gets zip, nada, zero, nothing. But he's in the double losers' club because he's on the regs and private bills committee too. I know the member from Davenport. I think he has displayed some real talent and commitment to the Liberal cause. Why does he find himself at the bottom of the pecking order, at the end of the food chain? The regrettable thing is that if there simply weren't enough perk jobs to go around so that you

had to have losers, because not everyone can be a winner, it would perhaps be of some solace.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: I put this to you: You have fewer losers than the Tories did. The Liberals have managed to perk up more members' salaries than even Tories dared do.

Hon Mr Gerretsen: No way.

Mr Kormos: Ask some of your colleagues, who will be pleased to point it out to you. Do you understand what I'm saying, Speaker? Proportionately, the Tories fed fewer perks to fewer people than did the Liberals—

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): With identical salaries.

Mr Kormos: —because you've got perk pigs. You see how what happens? You've got people who are perk pigs who use up perk jobs just to deny the losers the jobs. "What's a perk pig?" you say. Let me give you an example; those are the people with the red tabs beside their names: A perk pig is—

Mr Racco: That's not parliamentary.

Mr Kormos: Oh yes, it is—for instance, the member for Oakville. The member for Oakville is a perk pig. Let me tell you why. He's not only a parliamentary assistant, which grosses his salary up to just shy of 100 grand, but he's also the Chair of a standing committee. He doesn't get double-paid—you understand that—but he's consuming a perk job that one of the four losers could have. Do you understand what I'm saying? You could be the Chair of a committee if it weren't for the perk pig, the member for Oakville, who's only getting paid for one. Let's be fair: Being the Chair of a committee is not particularly demanding or exhausting work. You've got the clerk sitting beside you and you don't have to participate in debate. Most of the time you don't even have to worry about following your whip's instruction when it comes time to vote.

So you see it's a little—what do they say?—dis-ingenuous of the Liberals to talk about freezing their salaries while 67 of the 71 Liberal members have had their salaries grossed up from the base of \$85,000. It's peculiar that the only people who are really getting salary freezes are the four members of the losers' club, because 67 other members have already seen salary increases that take them just on the cusp of 100 grand a year, or well beyond it in the case of parliamentary assistants, and of course the Premier. Nobody denies the Premier that kind of salary, Lord knows, for the heat that he or she might take at any given point in time in our history. So be it. But then you've got the junket junkies. You have the losers' club, the double losers' club, perk pigs, and then you've got the junket junkies. You see, when you've got a caucus this big, and I've seen it first-hand, you've got to keep backbenchers quiet; you've got to keep them under control. You can throw them a bone.

The member for Sault Ste Marie gets nothing. Yet, seated one row behind him is the member for Thornhill, who's a Vice-Chair. How does the member for Sault Ste Marie feel that the member for Thornhill is a Vice-Chair and the member for Sault Ste Marie gets zip, nada,

nothing? How can the member for Mississauga West be comfortable with the fact that 67 members of his caucus have perks but he's the only one who really gets a wage or salary freeze? So you see, one of the things that a caucus has to do, for instance in this case, is tell the four losers, "Don't worry, your turn will come." That is designed to keep them in line.

In the case of the member for Peterborough, he probably knows that he's made his bed and he's got to lie in it. He's a bit of a loose cannon, a bit of a maverick—I admire that—in his riding. That's called good, grassroots politics and political survival, because even when their Premier and the government go down the tubes, members like that stay alive because they haven't been afraid to criticize or challenge their government. The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is a similar one. It's no surprise, no wonder, that he's back here at Queen's Park even after the drumming that the Conservatives took in the last provincial election. He's a maverick, a loose cannon, if you will. He wasn't afraid to take on Mr Harris or Mr Eves. Mind you, he suffered too, because it wasn't until Mr Stockwell—of all the mentors to have, I suppose, of all the guiding lights in that government—took him on as parliamentary assistant that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound found himself in the losers' club. So look: losers, double losers, perk pigs, junket junkies.

1600

Then we've got the whole phenomenon of the fact that the Liberals and the Conservatives—and my leader made reference to them as having conspired. I appreciate that you accepted that word as being, well, acceptable; that there was a conspiracy between the Liberals and the Conservatives to try to slide through what amounted to a 25% salary increase. It was only New Democrats that stood up and spoke against it—every one of them. I've got to tell you, the reluctance to speak to this bill is part and parcel of the reluctance to speak to the amazing reality that people in this chamber, people in the job, yes, do have the power and the authority and the responsibility to set their own salaries.

The reluctance, shame, fear and trepidation about debating that—and I tell you, Mr Hampton and I are the only two members of my own caucus who wanted to participate in this debate—appear to be something that permeates the souls of politicians in general; the fear of being candid about the fact that we can set our own salaries, the effort to slough it off to an Integrity Commissioner, who doesn't appear so independent when, in the case of Mr Eves, Mr Eves sends him a letter and says, "I know that there was a ruling about the salary increase that Liberals and Conservatives voted for, the 25% one, but since it's not politically expedient at this point in time, perhaps you'd like to ignore that standard."

Here you go. Now you've got Liberals attempting to demonstrate some sort of largesse by freezing salaries, by forgoing the 2.7% salary increase. The very rules that they were so enamoured with, that they pursued, that they promoted—all of a sudden they perceive it as being

politically expedient. But of greater concern is the fact that this may be a less-than-subtle message to other people who are earning their incomes at the taxpayer's tab. The concern, of course, is that this is a message to broader public sector workers: "Well, MPPs, government members, most of whom make close to 100 grand, if not more than 100 grand, saw fit not to give themselves"—

It's easy to say you're not going to take a salary increase when you're making 100 Gs a year, isn't it? It's not much of a sacrifice, but for the person making \$35,000, \$40,000 and \$45,000 a year, first of all, it is not only a 2.7% increase—or a 2.5%, 2%, 1.5%, 1.8%, 1.9% increase—of a smaller monetary value, it also makes a whole lot bigger difference to their lifestyles.

Where's the increase for people on disability pensions? Not a penny. Where's the increase for people on social assistance? Oh, those Liberal backbenchers, the ones who were incumbents and got re-elected, loved to rail, along with New Democrats, against the last government for having cut those social assistance benefits by 21.6%—22% if you round out the number. Where are those courageous people now, when in the course of this debate they've got the opportunity to make it clear to their own families, to their constituents, to their neighbours, to their friends, to their political supporters, that they are adamant that this government should keep that promise immediately?

There is something shameful and disgraceful about politicians who will pad their own pockets, who will take care of their own financial prosperity, but leave the poorest people behind and somehow tell people on social assistance and on disability pensions, "There's a deficit, so you, on the disability pension, and you, on social assistance, have to accept responsibility for paying down that deficit."

There is something disgraceful and shameful about politicians who will brag about forgoing a 2.7% salary increase when they're already in the top 4%, 5% or 6% of income earners in this province, in this country.

There's something, I suppose, at the end of the day, disturbing—and 16 years of it has disturbed me greatly—about suited people in general, but about the suits making pompous and arrogant decisions about the poor. Somehow, whether it's Mike Harris condemning women who are supporting their children on social assistance, telling them, "Don't get your allowance for pregnancy because you're just going to spend it on beer anyway," or whether it's Liberals who want to condemn the 21.6% slash of social assistance benefits by the Tories, yet who once they assumed power—it's over six months now, and those same people who suffered a 21.6% cut and who have seen no increase to adjust for cost of living, which probably puts them down somewhere at a level of 40% loss in purchasing power, haven't seen a penny, yet politicians who make among the top 4%, 5% or 6% of incomes in this province can feel overly proud about having accepted a freeze, when it otherwise would have been a 2.7% salary increase.

When you've got 67 out of 71 MPPs, a larger proportion of the caucus than even the Conservatives, receiving perks and incomes above and beyond the base salaries, I say to you that's disingenuous. It's disingenuous to whine and cry about the absence of a pension plan when every month, out of the public purse, money's deposited into an RRSP for each and every member of this assembly. You see, you folks—

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): You've got \$1.2 million in the bank. Don't talk about it.

Mr Kormos: Mario Sergio is unhappy. Mario Sergio needs surgery. Next time, administer Novocaine, nurse, before you start drilling.

Mr Sergio: Peter, you're not being fair.

Mr Kormos: He said I'm not being fair. Administer a double dose of Novocaine, because every member of the Legislative Assembly of course gets—what is it?—5% of the salary tax-free into an RRSP fund.

You see, you're the free enterprisers. You're the fans of this free enterprise economy who believe in self-supported pension plans. You and your business community friends say, "That's Freedom 55. I don't want the government telling me what to do with my money."

Here's a government and Liberal backbenchers who find themselves disdainful of folks who have to buy and do buy—they're not going to go to Bistro 990 around the corner here, or Bigliardi's in the evening time, or Canoe. Somebody mentioned Canoe the other day. Apparently that's an upscale, posh restaurant here in Toronto. I don't know about Canoe.

There's a government that wants to tax meals under \$4 to the lowest-income people in this province, yet they don't want to tax the people in their Rolls-Royces and Mercedes-Benzes and Lexuses and Land Rovers and high-priced vehicles like that. I find that incredible. This government feels real proud about taxing poor folk, about taxing senior citizens on fixed incomes, but they shake with fear at the prospect of rolling back some of the Harris-Eves Tory tax cut on the richest people in this province.

Then they proceed to blame those same poor folks and senior citizens and people on pensions. They seem to want to blame them for the deficit and expect them to help pay it off. I say that's wrong, and I say that politicians here—and I've known a few; I've known a whole lot—perhaps typical of politicians in most places in the world, but as gutless politicians, do you even earn what you're making now? As politicians who are afraid to take part in a debate, are you proud to accept the pay cheques you receive? As politicians who, yes, conspire to cut a deal so that an issue like this can be swept under the rug in but one afternoon without any debate on third reading, do you earn the salaries you're paid now? I mean, as politicians who are fearful of the responsibility that includes the responsibility to set one's own salary, do you deserve two thirds, do you deserve a half, do you deserve any of the pay you make?

1610

Oh, I've heard the arguments. I heard a Tory backbencher comment the other day. He was quoted in the press saying that he could make much more money in the private sector. Now, knowing who this person was, I doubted it because it just didn't strike me as being possible. But just recently, I've been briefed as to what that Tory backbencher's trade was and I realized that, yes, he probably could make more outside here than he could in here. But I tell you, at the end of the day, most people here have never made this much money before in their lives and they'll never make this much money again, make no mistake about it.

We haven't even begun to talk about the double-dippers—the lawyers, for instance, who maintain law practices; the business people, for instance—well, Speaker, please, the lawyers who maintain law practices and who double-dip, and other professions that may well be doing the same, the business people—I suspect there were far more of them in the last government, but who have continued to—is it illegal? Of course not. If it were illegal, some of them probably would have been busted. It isn't illegal. Is it morally, ethically wrong? Of course not.

But I've got a real problem with people who are in the top 4%, 5%, 6% of income earners who won't even address the substandard wage of the press gallery steward upstairs, who as you know can't belong to a union because he works directly for the Legislative Assembly, who doesn't have anybody directly bargaining for him but who earns a wage that is an embarrassment to every member of this assembly, and who has got members from each caucus fighting in the Board of Internal Economy currently, as of yet to no avail, to give that person at least some parity with similar jobs by similar workers for the Legislative Assembly.

So you see, here are a bunch of—I can't say it's just fat, white-haired guys, because it used to be—people of all shapes, sizes, stripes and colours, who earn themselves a good chunk of pocket change, who have no qualms about telling poor folk to wait, no qualms about telling people with disabilities to cool their jets, to rest their heels, because there's a deficit. After all, we have to pay down the deficit, and after all, Liberals, gutless wonders, are afraid to roll back any of the Harris tax cuts on the wealthy people in this province, the people who really can afford to pay it, but who are all hell-bent on increasing taxes for people who buy modest lunches at small mom-and-pop diners in the places where I come from in Welland and Thorold and Pelham and St Catharines, or anywhere in this province, quite frankly.

So here we are. The bill is going to pass. There will not be third reading on the bill because that's what the government wanted.

The Speaker is not sure whether the bill's going to pass. No, he's just exercising his fingers. I thought he was giving me the wavering gesture saying, "Maybe, maybe not." The bill is going to pass. There won't be any more debate. Liberal members won't participate in the

debate. Lord knows they're being paid to, but they won't stand up and participate in the debate for the 20-minute time slots that are available to them.

At the end of the day, it's not another proud day for the Legislature; it's a shameful day, because legislators were afraid, once again, to talk openly and candidly about their salaries. They're afraid to stand up on the record and say, "Oh, I think my salary's just right." They're afraid to stand up and say on the record, "Oh, I think I should earn more." They're afraid to stand up and say on the record, "Oh, I think I should earn less." They're afraid to stand up and say on the record that, really, freezing a salary means so little to Liberals in the current context because all but four Liberals received pay increases the minute they got elected here—or at least within a week or so—by virtue of the perk jobs. And it's not just cabinet ministers—people expect that—but parliamentary assistants: at least one and in some cases, I believe, more than one per cabinet minister; to Chairs, to Vice-Chairs, deputy, deputy, deputy, whips, deputy, deputy, deputy, thises and thats.

You've got people here far from the minimum wage of 85 grand and change. You've got people here in the top 4%, 5%, 6% of Ontario and Canadian income earners who somehow want to express some pride in freezing their salaries for a year when they've already received salary increases as a result of the 1996 legislation of approximately 10 grand a pop across the board, when they already receive 5% of their salaries paid tax free into an RSP, effectively to do what they want—well, one way or another for them effectively to do what they want upon reaching the age of 55.

Now there's an undercurrent of Liberals trying to cut yet another deal to restore a pension plan. Well, I tell you this: There won't be any deals to restore pension plans, no matter how eager and anxious the Liberals are to see a pension plan restored. There will be no deals to restore a pension plan. You people voted for the legislation. As I said, you made your bed; now you're going to have to lie in it. There was an effort to make yet another secret deal, another shameful, sad, pathetic deal. To slide a pension plan through like another greased pig won't cut it.

Thank you kindly, Speaker. I appreciate your patience with me.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments? Seeing none, further debate?

Seeing none, Ms Broten has moved second reading of Bill 42. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The bill is ordered for third reading.

MPP SALARY FREEZE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LE GEL DES TRAITEMENTS DES DÉPUTÉS

Ms Broten, on behalf of Mr McGuinty, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to freeze the salaries of members of the Assembly until the end of fiscal year 2004-2005 / Projet de loi 42, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative en vue de geler les traitements des députés à l'Assemblée jusqu'à la fin de l'exercice 2004-2005.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): His Honour awaits.

The Acting Speaker: The House is recessed to the call of the Chair.

The House recessed from 1622 to 1640.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario entered the chamber of the Legislative Assembly and took his seat upon the throne.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

Hon James K. Bartleman (Lieutenant Governor): Pray be seated.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly of the province has, at its present meetings thereof, passed certain bills to which, in the name of and on behalf of the said Legislative Assembly, I respectfully request Your Honour's assent.

Deputy Clerk (Ms Deborah Deller): The following are the titles of the bills to which Your Honour's assent is prayed:

Bill 15, An Act to amend the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 15, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur la divulgation des traitements dans le secteur public.

Bill 42, An Act to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to freeze the salaries of members of the Assembly until the end of fiscal year 2004-2005 / Projet de loi 42, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative en vue de geler les traitements des députés à l'Assemblée jusqu'à la fin de l'exercice 2004-2005.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): In Her Majesty's name, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor doth assent to these bills.

Au nom de Sa Majesté, Son Honneur le lieutenant-gouverneur sanctionne ces projets de loi.

His Honour was then pleased to retire.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn until 1:30 pm on Monday.

The Acting Speaker: Mr Caplan has moved adjournment of the House.

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

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Monday, April 19.

The House adjourned at 1642.

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