



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

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de l'Ontario

Première session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 19 April 2004

Lundi 19 avril 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 19 April 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

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*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EDUCATION ROUND TABLE

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): It gives me great pleasure to inform the House that this past Saturday I held an education round table in partnership with parents and students.

The bad news is that it was necessary due to the failure of the Minister of Education, whose own consultations excluded many who are interested in education. The good news is that over the weekend I heard from independent school educators, secondary school administrators, People for Education, teachers' unions, parents, teachers and many others. No one was excluded. We heard a wide range of viewpoints on matters important to students and parents. I invited everyone to participate to make sure the voices of all the people of Ontario could be heard, not just the vested interests that the minister keeps in his back pocket.

We discussed the Ontario College of Teachers. We discussed how to educate for skilled jobs. We talked about early childhood education and special education. We heard from business leaders who want to contribute. We heard from parents who want more flexibility in the system. The minister needs to know that there are many great ideas out there, and I'm glad to report that it is possible to work with all the voices of the people of Ontario in order to improve our education system. I would encourage the minister to listen to all these voices from all sectors from all across the province, not just to a few.

CATHERINE LITTLETON

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I would like to speak today about Scarborough resident Catherine Littleton. Since becoming a volunteer over 13 years ago, Catherine has donated over 4,000 hours of her time to Providence Healthcare, a health care facility for older adults in Toronto. The facility is located in the riding of Scarborough Southwest.

When she became a volunteer, she asked to work in one of the most challenging areas, the palliative care unit, where patients with terminal illnesses spend their last

days. When she started volunteering in palliative care, Catherine changed beds, helped nurses and served patients their meals. She even fed patients who were unable to feed themselves. Through such intimate care, Catherine got to know many of the patients in her care, developing deep friendships with many. Sometimes Catherine would stay with them overnight, which was often the most difficult time for patients. She would work from 11 pm to 6 am, holding their hand, talking to them, getting them a cup of tea or a glass of water—someone who could just be there if they woke up and needed to see a friendly face.

Catherine, who lives alone with no family of her own, says that she keeps coming back to Providence because she is inspired by the bravery of the patients and enjoys the spirit of the community, working with other volunteers and nurses in the unit. On behalf of all my colleagues here in the Legislature today, I want to congratulate her on her volunteer work.

PAUL DOYLE

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): On Easter Sunday morning, the people of the township of Greater Madawaska, in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, were saddened to learn of the death of their reeve, Paul Doyle, who passed away at Toronto Western Hospital after a brief illness.

Paul Doyle was born in Dublin, Ireland, on September 22, 1931. He studied accounting in Ireland and continued his business studies at the London School of Economics. In 1958, he came to Canada as an interim auditor for Alcan Aluminum. He spent 15 years with Alcan, rising to the position of secretary-treasurer of Alcan Australia. He later served as corporate planner for both the Hudson's Bay Co and Gilbey's, where he retired as president in 1987.

After retirement, Paul Doyle and his wife, Barbara, moved to the Griffith area, where he took an interest in local affairs, becoming reeve of Griffith and Matawatch-an townships in 1992. He served as reeve until the year 2000. In 2003, he ran successfully for reeve in the new township of Greater Madawaska.

Paul was well known for his drive and determination when dealing with an issue he felt strongly about, both in his own municipality and at county council.

Paul leaves behind his wife, Barbara, and their five children, Sean, Brian, Paula, Colleen and Terry, and their families. Paul Doyle was a man of many talents and interests. He will be greatly missed.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I'd like to highlight the very serious issue of support for mental health services for Ontarians. One in five Canadians is affected by mental illness. Most Canadians will be indirectly affected by mental illness through relationships with family members, loved ones and co-workers.

The Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario strongly emphasizes that the capacity of community-based mental health services must be increased to meet the needs of people with mental illness in Ontario.

The East Algoma Mental Health Clinic is one such provider of community-based programs that are vital to the people of Elliot Lake, Blind River, Spanish and the surrounding area in Algoma-Manitoulin. I've met with a number of the staff and personnel involved with the East Algoma Mental Health Clinic, including Mr Pope, Ms Price and Ms Philbin Jolette, as well as a number of my constituents who have told me of the increased need for, and the value of, the community-based programs that this clinic provides.

I would like to emphasize the need for priority funding for community-based mental health programs that are chronically underfunded in Algoma-Manitoulin and across Ontario. For over 10 years, mental health community services have been the poor sister of our health services in general. It's time to transform this system and its funding. It's time to ensure that the clients and patients receive the services they need in their home communities.

TVONTARIO

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): Dalton McGuinty wants to sell off TVO. His plans are in his little budget booklet in black and white. We say TVO is one public asset the McGuinty Liberals may "sell or lease ... to raise money."

This is what they say in the discussion paper re TVO: "Currently, the government pays \$54 million a year to operate TVOntario. Originally, TVO was created to help educate and inform Ontarians by supporting the education and training systems in Ontario. TVO now provides more broadly based public television. Is this the best way to spend money to achieve results in education?"

This is a serious misrepresentation of what TVO is all about. Right now, about 80% of TVO programs make their way into our classrooms and help our elementary, secondary and post-secondary students learn. By the end of next year, 100% of the shows will be classroom-connected.

Since 1970, the public broadcaster has been a world leader in educational broadcasting. In a 500-channel universe dominated by crass American infotainment, maintaining the one public broadcaster that delivers made-in-Ontario, commercial-free, learning-focused programming is absolutely essential.

When Mike Harris tried to privatize TVO in 1997, McGuinty opposed the sell-off. He said of Mike Harris, "This guy is driven by ideology. It's government run by extremists. They want to sell TVO as a matter of ideology."

The Liberals were right back then. There is no good reason to sell TVO. Let's oppose the sell-off.

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BEEF PRODUCERS

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I rise today to urge the members of this House and their constituents to support and aid our Ontario beef farmers.

In one of my first statements in this House, I spoke about the Ontario Cattlemen's Association, their struggle with the BSE crisis and Ontario's \$1.2-billion-a-year beef business. These farmers in this industry are still struggling, even with the recent \$1-billion aid for farmers announced by our federal counterparts. Many in my riding are worried about the lack of income, which may eventually lead to farm closures.

The beef and cattle industry is an important and integral part of Ontario's rural communities. Many cattlemen are still struggling to recover from the effects of the BSE crisis, as is noticeable in the recent farm suppliers' downturn in business, as their customers struggle with the financial implications.

As stated in this House previously, I'm proud that one of my first office accessories in room 330 here at Queen's Park was an "I Support Beef" poster provided to me by the Ontario Cattlemen's Association.

As the weather becomes nicer and we approach another great Ontario summer, I urge all members of this House to support our beef industry and to aid our farmers in their time of need. Get together with your family and friends. Go out to your local store and purchase a few steaks and have a barbecue while watching playoff hockey. And might I say: Go, Sens, go. Please do what you can and urge your colleagues, friends and constituents to also aid this struggling industry.

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I remain shocked that the McGuinty Liberal government has yet to back down on their plans to impose a new McGuinty meal tax on all meals under \$4. To date, my constituency office alone has received approximately 1,000 signatures on petitions attacking this plan.

Taxpayers' anger and confusion over the need to impose this politically bizarre McGuinty meal tax were also reflected in today's Toronto Star. Today the Star wrote:

"In a feckless move worthy of Inspector Clouseau, McGuinty and his minions managed to forge a coalition against them that consists of 22,250 restaurateurs in every part of Ontario, the Tories, the New Democrats, the Daily Bread Food Bank, the Canadian Taxpayers

Federation, senior citizens, students and food service workers.”

In fact, the only group that appears not to oppose this crazy idea is the 72 members of the Liberal caucus, but I wonder if that wall of solidarity is going to begin to crumble, because no doubt their constituency offices are similarly besieged with petitions in the number of, or probably greater than, those received by the opposition members.

I understand from a source in the restaurant industry that at least two Liberal MPPs will introduce petitions opposing this tax in the House today: the member for Stoney Creek and the member for Thornhill. Now, introducing a petition is a good first step, but a true test is whether a member has the courage to sign the petition. The test will be borne out after question period: Do they stand with their constituents against the tax, or do they take their orders from Dalton McGuinty's office?

BRAMALEA-GORE-MALTON- SPRINGDALE ECONOMY

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): I rise today to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of three local constituents who have been recognized for their efforts to put my riding, Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, not only on the economic map of Canada, but the globe.

Two local companies, Display Transportation and Rodair International, and their respective presidents, Mr Richard Delongte and Mr Jeffery Cullen, were recently recognized by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade for their commitment to promote the Canadian logistics service industry abroad. They were recipients of the ministry's Global Trader Awards of Merit in the area of expansion service markets. Both companies, while not the sexiest service providers, have carved out niches for themselves by providing excellent global service for their large network of clients.

The third recipient's story is quite different. Mr Michael Schultz does not head a global company; instead, he is a teacher at Chinguacousy Secondary School and a member of the Peel District School Board. He has been instrumental in making international business part of Ontario's secondary school curriculum and was honoured with a Leadership Award. He has worked to bring real-world practices into the classroom by providing students with the chance to start and run their own importing-exporting companies.

I rise today to recognize the contributions of three outstanding constituents of my riding.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Last Thursday, Energy Minister Dwight Duncan outlined a major government policy initiative. It was hosted by the Empire Club at the Royal York. I'd like to thank the minister for extending an invitation to me.

The minister repeated several times, “Ratepayers must pay the real cost of electricity,” but what he failed to tell them was what the real cost of electricity is. He went on to explain that he has increased it from 4.3 cents to 5.5 cents—that's 25%—and in fact it looks like there will be higher prices in the future.

In his remarks he had something for everyone: conservationists, environmentalists, investors, generators and, more importantly, bureaucrats—everyone except small consumers, individuals on fixed incomes, small business and agriculture. And people who bought the Medallion Homes with radiant heat or heat pumps, look out: You will be paying the true cost of electricity, with no help from this government.

He went on to speak about shifting peak demand, but try to tell that to constituents in the riding of Durham, like the dairy farm using between 8,000 and 10,000 kilowatt hours per month. That's a 27% increase in the rate.

I say yes to conservation and to learning to use electricity wisely, and I look forward to the Premier's statement later this afternoon on conservation and smart meters. Perhaps he should attach a smart meter to his Minister of Energy.

WEARING OF PINS

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I am pleased to rise to ask the House for unanimous consent. This week is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week, sponsored by the Kidney Foundation of Canada. They have asked us if we would wear pins in recognition of that.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SAFE STREETS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA SÉCURITÉ DANS LES RUES

Mr Lalonde moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 58, An Act to amend the Safe Streets Act, 1999 and the Highway Traffic Act to recognize the fund-raising activities of legitimate charities and non-profit organizations / Projet de loi 58, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1999 sur la sécurité dans les rues et le Code de la route pour reconnaître les activités de financement des organismes de bienfaisance légitimes et organismes sans but lucratif.

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

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): The bill amends the Safe Streets Act, 1999, to provide

that the prohibition in subsection 3(2) of the act does not apply to fundraising activities that are conducted by registered charities or by non-profit organizations on the roadways where the speed limit is not more than 50 kilometres per hour as long as these activities are permitted by municipal bylaws. A similar amendment is made to section 177 of the Highway Traffic Act.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ENERGY CONSERVATION ÉCONOMIE D'ÉNERGIE

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): For most of our history, Ontarians have enjoyed an abundant supply of cheap, reliable energy. All the power we wanted was right at our fingertips at the flick of a switch. Today, we can no longer take our energy supply for granted. If we don't act soon, we will face an energy crisis. Our province is growing, with more homes and businesses being built every day. I'm pleased to report that our high-tech economy is thriving, meaning, however, that our industries, our homes, our hospitals and our schools all need more electricity than ever before. But at the same time, our ability to produce power is falling behind. Many of our nuclear plants are nearing the end of service and, despite advances in clean, renewable energy, Ontario continues to rely on dirty sources of energy, like coal.

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L'Ontario ne peut pas bâtir une économie forte pour le 21^e siècle sur des sources d'énergie vétustes. C'est pourquoi notre gouvernement a pris l'engagement de remplacer les usines à charbon qui polluent notre air et endommagent notre santé.

Ontario cannot grow a strong 21st century economy by relying on obsolete sources of energy. That's why our government is committed to replacing the coal plants that are polluting our air and damaging our health. After all, one coal-fired unit admits as much pollutant as 160,000 cars. The eight-unit Nanticoke facility represents the equivalent of the exhausts of 1.3 million cars. Replacing coal is the kind of real, positive, overdue change that our government ran on and that Ontarians voted for.

Because previous governments failed to act, we are faced today with an enormous challenge. We will need to refurbish, rebuild, replace or conserve 25,000 megawatts worth of generating capacity by the year 2020. To put that in some perspective, that is more than 80% of Ontario's current electricity generating capacity. To meet these goals through increased generation alone, we would need generation capacity about 11 times the size of Niagara Falls itself.

Our government has already announced plans to put 2,500 megawatts of generating capacity and demand-management initiatives in place no later than 2007, and

there's more on the way. But clearly, producing more electricity is only part of the answer. We also have to slow the endless spiral of increasing demand. It is simply not sustainable.

So we are now asking Ontarians to get involved in slowing that spiral of demand, and we will give Ontarians the information and tools they need to save money on their bills as they save electricity. When it comes to electricity, it is much cheaper for our province to conserve it than to generate it, and it's much cheaper for our consumers to save it than to pay more for it.

Some other jurisdictions have aggressively pursued conservation, but this province hasn't been as aggressive as it should have been, and that has wasted time and money and electricity. For example, California has conserved to the point that the average per capita consumption of electricity there is up 1% since 1975; here in Ontario, it's up 25%.

There are steps we can all take right now. For instance, if each of Ontario's 4.5 million households replaced four 60-watt light bulbs with compact fluorescents, the energy savings would allow us to shut down one unit at a coal-burning plant. Again, that is the pollution equivalent of 160,000 cars. Compact fluorescent bulbs seem more expensive on the store shelves, but because they last years longer and use up to 75% less energy than conventional bulbs, they can save you four times what they cost. They're a sound investment.

People with electric water heaters can save between 200 and 1,400 kilowatt hours per year—that's somewhere between \$20 and \$140 per year—simply by fixing leaky taps, insulating their water heaters and switching to more efficient shower heads.

Real gains could be made by doing things as simple as turning off the light or TV or stereo when you leave the room, unplugging appliances when you're not using them, or not using that large, mostly empty freezer that you might have sitting in the basement. That old, inefficient beer fridge in the basement may seem like your best friend at playoff time—and we all know where those are going—but every time you open the door, it's pay-up time because that fridge can be costing you about \$150 a year in extra electricity—electricity we cannot afford to waste.

There is so much that we can do. Taking a five-minute shower instead of a bath uses half as much energy—I say to all Ontarians that if there's anybody out there who knows how you can get a teenager out of a shower within five minutes, I would be delighted to receive that information. Turning down the water heater when you are away, and turning it down a few degrees all the time, can pay big dividends. Set the fridge at "cool" instead of "almost frozen." Turn down your furnace, even a few degrees, at night when you're under the covers. Keep appliances clean so they're efficient. The coils on the back of the fridge, the lint screen on the dryer, the air filters on your furnace and air conditioner all need regular cleaning.

Across Ontario, people can get an energy audit for their homes. These audits provide specific steps people

can take that could reduce their energy bills by up to one third. I learned just recently that if you were to leave your household computer on throughout the entire year, that will cost you in the range of \$250 for electricity alone; 60% of that electricity, by the way, is consumed by the computer screen, the monitor. These are the simple kinds of steps we're asking Ontarians to take.

En échange, notre gouvernement permettra à tous les Ontariens et à toutes les Ontariennes, qu'ils soient chez eux, dans leurs entreprises ou dans les bureaux du gouvernement, de sauvegarder l'énergie et d'économiser leur argent si durement gagné, tout en préservant l'environnement.

In return for those activities that we are calling upon Ontarians to undertake, our government will make it possible for Ontarians in every home, business and government office to save energy, save their hard-earned money and save our environment. Our government is taking bold action to make Ontario a North American leader in conservation. I'm not talking about approaches that have been used in the past, such as introducing a few government programs or printing glossy brochures. I'm talking about nothing less than creating a profound shift in the culture of this province, about moving from a culture of inefficiency to a culture of innovation, about moving from a culture of waste to a culture of conservation.

Our plan will give consumers, businesses, utilities and government the tools they need to use less energy and use energy more wisely. Together we will make a real change in the way we use energy in this province. Our government's goal is ambitious: to reduce electricity use by 5% across the province by 2007. But our government will also do its part. In fact, we will hold ourselves to an even higher standard. We will cut electricity consumption in all government operations by 10% over the same period. To help reach those targets, Minister Duncan has already announced the creation of a conservation secretariat headed by a chief conservation officer. Our government has appointed MPP Donna Cansfield to lead the conservation action team, which will promote our conservation initiatives around the province. We are going to provide the leadership that creates opportunities for savings, but it's up to Ontarians from all walks of life to make good decisions about how they use their energy.

Right now, most customers don't get a break on their bill if they use energy during off-peak hours when demand is lower. In particular, those off-peak hours range from about 10 o'clock in the evening until 7 o'clock in the morning. The reason they're not getting a break is because old-fashioned energy meters only record how much energy is being used and not when it is being used. Smart meters, together with more flexible pricing, would allow Ontarians to save money if they run appliances in off-peak hours. That's why we are directing the Ontario Energy Board to develop a plan to install smart electricity meters in 800,000 Ontario homes by 2007 and in each and every Ontario home by 2010. We will also expand and encourage the practice of net metering. Net metering will enable homeowners and

businesses generating renewable electricity to receive credit for the excess energy they are producing. This will provide additional electricity supply from clean, renewable sources such as wind and solar power.

We're going to launch province-wide consultations to allow people to participate directly in Ontario's new culture of conservation. We want to lead Ontarians in a very important conversation, and it has to do with coming together so we can meet a most significant challenge that faces all of us; that is, a desperate—I don't want to go that far; I think the minister's got the right language. We find ourselves in a predicament—it is not yet a crisis—and if we take the necessary steps, we will overcome this challenge.

1400

Leading the way in this new culture of conservation will be our young people. We will ensure that our primary and secondary school students have the resources they need to learn about conservation. This morning I had the opportunity to visit Cedarvale public school here in Toronto. I met with Ms Smith's grade 6 students. Subsequent to the recent blackout, students had begun to ask themselves what they might do to help reduce electricity usage at school, at hockey arenas and in their homes. They put together a number of pamphlets and provided me with a very interesting and exciting proposition that speaks to how much hope we can have in the future, because children, in particular, understand the nature of the issue and want to involve themselves and their households in taking responsibility for meeting our electricity challenges.

The decisions we make today will have a tremendous impact on the future those children will inherit, and that future is already beginning to look brighter. Innovative steps like smart meters and net metering are being used in our province. Net metering is already an option in some Ontario communities. Milton Hydro is pressing ahead with its own smart metering project. Our plan will see pockets of innovation like these expand across the province in a few short years, allowing more Ontarians to see real savings. But the benefits of a culture of conservation go beyond what people will see on monthly bills. A culture of conservation will help Ontario build a high-skills, high-tech, high-performance economy by rewarding and encouraging innovation, and this, in turn, will help stimulate investment, create jobs and build a stronger, more sustainable economy—an economy we can all be proud of.

There can be no doubt that Ontario faces a real challenge in meeting its energy needs, but our government is seizing the opportunity to promote a genuine conservation culture in communities, businesses and homes. We'll also engage local distribution companies, the private sector and community organizations. Together we can make Ontario a leader in energy efficiency. Together we can help create more jobs in an innovative economy, ensure stronger communities and provide cleaner air to breathe. A culture of conservation will ensure that Ontario has an electricity supply that is the envy of our competitors and a magnet for our investors.

I'm talking about an Ontario where consumers have both the stability they want and the reliability they demand and deserve; an Ontario where the energy that comes through the wires stimulates the energy that makes us great, the energy that stimulates our growth as an economy and society. I'm talking about the innovation of our businesses, the success of our schools, the compassion that marks our health care system and the cleanliness of the air we breathe and the water we drink. I'm talking about an Ontario with a standard of living and a quality of life that are second to none, and that Ontario is ours to deliver.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It's my privilege to rise in the House today to recognize National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week, running from April 18 through April 24. Throughout the week, people and organizations here in Ontario and across the country are joining together to promote awareness of the great need for organ and tissue donation. They're launching a massive appeal for people to sign their organ and tissue donor cards and talk to their loved ones about their wishes.

One of the most profound gifts we can bring to one another is the gift of life. Last year, some 399 organ donors made it possible for doctors in Ontario to perform 693 organ transplants. These compassionate donors gave hundreds of Ontarians a new chance at life, and those transplants have a much higher success rate today, thanks to new technological and pharmaceutical breakthroughs.

As our population ages, more and more Ontarians will need life-saving organ transplants. These people will be our neighbours, our family members, our constituents, our friends and very likely someone in this Legislature today. I'm troubled that despite this urgent need, the donor rate has stalled in every province, including Ontario, for the past decade. Today, more than 1,700 Ontarians desperately need a transplant. Many of them will receive the organs they need, but others will die waiting for the right donor. We have a responsibility to prevent that from happening, and the power to do so is to be found amongst all of us.

Myths and misconceptions about organ and tissue donation are keeping people from signing their donor cards or considering living organ donation. A recent survey showed that 30% of Ontarians believe that age is a barrier for organ and tissue donation. We need to get the message out that Ontarians can donate no matter how old they are.

National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week is an opportunity to bust these myths and spread the facts about organ and tissue donation. For inspiration we need look no further than to one of my health care heroes: Kristopher Knowles, a sweet, spirited, courageous grade 8 student from Sarnia who badly needs a liver. Kristopher has taken a year off school to promote organ donation in Canada, and he just reached the 100th day of

his 353-day cross-Canada journey to inspire people to become organ and tissue donors.

Today, I'm urging everyone to get behind Kristopher to raise awareness of the benefits of organ and tissue donation, to let people know that donations save lives and bring hope to many hundreds of Canadians of all ages and to their families each and every year.

I want to acknowledge the critical work of the Trillium Gift of Life Network, Ontario's central organ and tissue donation agency. The network is helping to drive public awareness about organ and tissue donation and is leading innovative programs to encourage education about donation in workplaces and in communities. Last week I had the opportunity to attend, with the Toronto Automobile Dealers Association, Toronto fire and the York region police department—just one example of workplace campaigns.

To assist the Trillium Gift of Life Network with its important work, our government will be replacing the network's outdated information system. This new system will help to ensure that people receive the right organs and tissues at the very right time. Our government wants to ensure that all people who need a transplant will have a chance at life. Our government has just approved a program to support living kidney donation in transplant hospitals. Living donation is donating a kidney or part of a liver to a relative or friend, and it has become a growing source of transplants over the last four years.

All of us in this House have the opportunity to champion organ and tissue donation in our communities and to bring the message to people in different languages and different communities and different religious faiths. Like so many things, I truly believe that change will come from young people. We must shape the thinking of a new generation.

It's my honour to announce that the Trillium Gift of Life Network is creating a Reaching Youth Council and that Kristopher Knowles has agreed to act as council chair. This council will lead a province-wide effort to promote organ and tissue donation awareness to Ontario youth in our schools.

I urge everyone here today to sign an organ and tissue donor card. This is something each and every one of us can do. I urge you to talk to your family members about your wishes. Don't wait. Do it today, and you might just have the chance of saving someone's life—someone like Kristopher Knowles.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): In response for the opposition, I would say that we agree with Jack Gibbons from the Ontario Clean Air Alliance. We agree with the most recently issued report by the IMO—Dave Goulding—which outlines that the real problem is being caused by your hasty decision.

In fact, this isn't a campaign to have a culture of conservation; it's a culture of confusion. If you look at

most of the supply-side issues, you really have created the problem.

If I read the IMO report, "Ontario's electricity system faces ... challenges over the next 10 years. The uncertainty surrounding the return to service of Pickering A nuclear ... the lack of new generation investment and the commitment to shut down 7,500 megawatts of coal-fired generation by 2007 all contribute to a potentially severe shortfall."

We all know, Premier, that when you have a shortage of supply, the replacement energy is going to have to come from outside of Ontario. You know that just south-west of Ontario is Ohio, and in Ohio and other parts there are over 200 coal-fired generating stations that are quite willing and able to transmit power to the province of Ontario.

1410

What I haven't been impressed with is your slow response to indicate what your theory is, what your policy is with respect to demand management issues. We talked about interval meters and time-of-rate meters—and you know that your plan to intervene in that area is quite unremarkable. Are you going to incent consumers—individuals on fixed incomes and small businesses—by encouraging the retail sector to give them a smart meter to allow them to manage load? I spoke earlier today about agriculture. How could a dairy farmer in Ontario shift demand to those off-peak times that you talked about? The cows have to be milked, and you're putting them out of business.

Quite honestly, the Premier really has moved very slowly and inconclusively to set about a very important policy discussion. If you want to look at the history, when we were in government we had set up the alternative fuels committee—you should look at that report. We set up the generation conservation task force; their report was filed to you in December. We're the ones who initiated the Energy Star program, which rebated people on the retail sales tax.

You talked earlier about having some sort of control in the consumers' hands. It sounds to me like the smart meter should be given to your Minister of Energy so he can monitor his own behaviour on this file. What you've really outlined today is sort of like a clap-on/clap-off. This is what the people are supposed to do: turn off the hockey game and turn up the meter, because you're going to be paying more for electricity.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): It is my privilege to rise in the House today to respond to the statement from the minister recognizing National Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week. This is one issue that affects each one of us here in this House and everybody within the province of Ontario. This is a week where we need to really focus and emphasize the need to talk to our families and friends about organ donation. I would encourage everyone to share their wishes with

their families regarding organ donations because we do have the opportunity as individuals in the province of Ontario to make the donation of an organ or tissue in order that we can improve the quality of life for another human being or, in some cases—many cases—to give someone that second chance at life itself.

We know that the need for organ and tissue donation continues to be there. Regrettably, we haven't seen much change in this province or in Canada. As of December 2003, there were 1,775 patients awaiting organ transplants. That included heart, kidney, lung and pancreas transplants. Despite past efforts across this country, we in Canada continue to fall short of organ donation as is seen in other countries throughout the world.

If you will recall, in 2000 our government recognized the significance of organ donation. We launched a similar awareness campaign. We were looking to issue a challenge to double Ontario's organ donation rate by 2005, and we did see an increase in organ donations. At that time, we also committed to increasing the funding for organ and tissue donation and transplantation to over \$120 million by 2005, yet more needs to be done.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I listened intently to what I believe was an attempt to announce an energy efficiency and energy conservation strategy, and I want to make the following response.

First of all, I want to remind the Premier that in 1992, the government of the day brought forward an aggressive energy efficiency strategy, and the then Liberal energy critic from Ottawa South, Mr McGuinty, said he was opposed to it because he said Ontario couldn't afford an energy efficiency strategy.

I wonder where we would be today if the Liberals had supported the government of the day and we had implemented all of those energy-efficient fridges and all of those energy efficiency measures. The Premier should remember that.

The Premier should also remember that when the Conservatives brought forward their strategy to privatize Ontario's hydroelectricity system, part and parcel of that was to do away with all of the energy efficiency strategies that were then in place. Why? We know why: because private sector companies that are more interested in selling than conserving wanted all of those energy efficiency strategies done away with. The Premier should remember that he and every Liberal in the House voted with the Conservatives, not only on the privatization, but to get rid of the energy efficiency strategies which today he wants to promote.

I see a lot of public relations here, I see a lot of spin, but I looked very carefully for the substance. The reality is this: For most of us in our homes, we can't turn off our refrigerator. If you turn off the refrigerator, you can't eat the food. Similarly, if you have an electric water heater, you can't turn it off. If you turn it off, you don't have hot water, and similarly with a number of other appliances. So I was looking for something from the government

which indicated that they are prepared to put forward money, incentives, so that people who have an old refrigerator, one that uses too much electricity, can afford to buy a new energy-efficient refrigerator, can save electricity, can save on their hydro bill, and perhaps over three or four years can pay back the loan. Did I see such an incentive strategy? No, Speaker; none.

In his remarks, the Premier talks about how people should have an energy audit of their home. Well, part of what he was opposed to in 1992 and 1993 was the green community strategy, which provided funding so that people could actually get an audit of their home; they could have experts come in and look at how much electricity they were using and provide them with some ideas and some incentives on how they could reduce their electricity consumption and save money. The Premier then was opposed to that.

The government wants to place a lot of emphasis on so-called smart meters. They say that by using smart meters, you can in effect lower the on-peak consumption, and he cites California. I just want him to know the results from California. California thought that by bringing in so-called smart meters, they could reduce electricity consumption by 500 megawatts. In fact, they were only able to reduce electricity consumption by 31 megawatts. The reason is that people can't turn off the fridge; they can't turn off many of these electrical appliances that they have to have every day to keep their food safe.

This is a PR announcement, but it's terribly lacking in substance that will lead to real electricity efficiency in the province.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): New Democrats join in organ and tissue donation awareness. We salute advocates like Kristopher Knowles and George Marcello, and we say that it is time for this province to take a bold step forward. We need legislation in this province that makes it clear there is no property interest in the organs of a deceased person. It has to be an opt-out system rather than an opt-in system. There are methods available through the opt-out system. There are people whose faith dictates that they cannot donate organs or whose own ethical and moral standards can be accommodated.

If we're going to be serious about organ donation, let's make sure that organs of deceased persons are available across the board.

1420

VOLUNTEERS

BÉNÉVOLES

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent that each party will be able to speak for five minutes on National Volunteer Week.

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

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Today marks the start of National Volunteer Week, which runs until this Saturday, April 24. National Volunteer Week is a time when we acknowledge those who have made a positive impact in our communities. It is also a time to reflect on the commitment and conviction of the volunteers who have not only contributed their time and effort, but who have a vision of a stronger and more caring Ontario.

The McGuinty government is about strengthening our great province. If all of us gave just an hour of our time once a week, imagine the possibilities. Each year in Ontario, 2.3 million people volunteer their time and expertise in strengthening our neighbourhoods and communities. Together they contribute more than 390 million hours of volunteer time. This represents more than \$6 billion to our economy.

Volunteers make vital contributions to virtually every aspect of Canadian society. This includes the areas of education, social services, the arts, recreation and much more. I am reminded of the quote that, "The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit." This epitomizes how volunteers give of themselves without expecting any personal gain in return. It can be as simple as taking time out on a Saturday afternoon to coach a Little League team, sorting food at a local food bank, or spending time with a senior living on their own.

In my hometown of Hamilton, hundreds of people volunteer every day, like James McBride, who each year helps 150 low-income earners prepare their tax returns for free.

There's Betty Robinson, who volunteers every day with the cancer assistance programs in Hamilton. She picks up and drops off cancer patients for treatment. She also coordinates the annual Run for Cancer fundraiser event. Betty Robinson is 82 years old.

Our government recently recognized 12-year-old Ryan Hreljac from Kemptville, Ontario. He started volunteering when he was six, when he heard about the plight of people in Third World countries who didn't have safe drinking water. Since then, he has set up a foundation and raised funds to bring clean water to other countries, making a huge impact. Ryan was recently named to the Order of Ontario, along with 24 other dedicated individuals who gave of their time.

In the old city of Vanier, residents at le Centre d'accueil Champlain have benefited from the tireless efforts of volunteer Marie Rose Pelletier. The generosity of this volunteer par excellence knows no bounds. Her dedication and enthusiasm, combined with great attention to detail, help brighten up the days for the centre's residents. Marie Rose Pelletier truly makes a difference.

These are just a few of the thousands of examples of how volunteers are around us every day.

Recently I attended an event at the Royal Ontario Museum, just a stone's throw from the Legislature. I

learned how the ROM relies on the dedication of its volunteers. The ROM estimates that volunteers contribute about 86,000 hours in support of the museum. This translates to an economic contribution of more than \$1.8 million annually. This is typical of many great community organizations. They have the power to mobilize hundreds of volunteers who can be counted upon.

This morning I had the pleasure of helping out at a very important local program in Hamilton. I was delighted to volunteer for the North Hamilton Community Health Centre's children's breakfast club at St Luke's parish hall. This program has operated for the past eight years and serves breakfast to an average of 60 children every day. I was thrilled to learn that many of the high school students who volunteer with this program used to benefit from the breakfast club themselves. They are giving back to their communities because they know first-hand how important it is.

As part of National Volunteer Week, I will also attend a volunteer recognition event tonight sponsored by Volunteer Hamilton, and I know we are all attending similar events across the province. It is a wonderful way to acknowledge those who have made a difference and serves to encourage others to give back.

I'm proud to say that the Ontario government supports several initiatives to promote volunteer action across the province. Such initiatives include the Volunteer Service Awards and the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers. I strongly encourage our citizens to look at opportunities in their local communities to see how they can help improve the quality of life for others. I know that many of my colleagues on both sides of the House contribute their time and donate to several worthwhile causes. This does indeed make a difference, and I hope that others in your community are encouraged to do the same.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I want to begin my remarks by expressing appreciation to the Minister of Citizenship for her fine remarks and to say that I'm very glad we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to volunteers through National Volunteer Week.

I will begin by saying thank you to volunteers who coach minor sports, fundraise to feed and clothe people in need, give time to care for seniors, and so many other activities. Their contribution is valuable by its definition, because volunteers' talents are given into service by their own free will and, in doing so, they form the social fabric of our communities throughout the province.

Volunteers have shaped our way of life. I'm reminded of this fact when I think of volunteers who served in Canada's armed forces during the major wars of the last century and especially as we approach the 60th anniversary, on June 6, of D-Day, the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France. We should always remember that they paid dearly to leave us with a peaceful society where we are free to give and serve. The organization Volunteer Canada says that National Volunteer Week was first proclaimed in 1943 to make the public aware of the vital contribution made by women to the war effort.

We can only do justice to the tradition of volunteering by guaranteeing its future through the young people of

Ontario. For example, we can continue to support the minimum 40 hours of community involvement for high school students. Through volunteering, we know that young people develop the skills they need, an understanding of civic responsibility, and they learn that they can make a difference through their actions.

Planting the seeds of volunteerism is a two-way street, because youth and children need guidance, help and positive role models in life. My own experience as a Big Brother, when I had a little brother from 1987 to 1990, when he turned 17 and the program officially ended, was a deeply meaningful experience that continues to guide my perspective. I had a chance to be a friend and mentor to a young man as he grew up, and I'll never forget the experience. Big Brothers continues to be part of my life. I'm glad to serve as an honorary member of the board of the North Wellington Big Brothers.

Volunteering, mentoring and working to improve the future for young people is an important focus for me. That is why I strongly support Ontario's Promise, an initiative launched by former Premier Mike Harris and minister for children Margaret Marland.

Ontario's Promise brings together business, non-profit agencies, community leaders, parents and individuals to make and keep five promises to Ontario's young people. The five promises are: (1) a healthy start for all children; (2) an ongoing relationship with a caring adult; (3) a safe place with structured activities during non-school hours; (4) marketable skills through effective education; and (5) giving back through community service.

I liken Ontario's Promise to John F. Kennedy's Peace Corps idea. It has the potential to light the fire of idealism and spirit of service throughout an entire generation. I ask MPPs to forgo partisan politics where Ontario's Promise is concerned and support this program as a strong partnership for children and youth.

Over the years as an MPP, I have also supported volunteer firefighters in a number of ways. In my riding, and in the vast majority of rural communities, we are indebted to volunteer firefighters. They protect our homes, businesses, farms, cottages, schools, hospitals and all manner of buildings from fire, and they are often the first on the scene at car accidents and other emergencies. The skills they develop are essential where they volunteer and wherever they serve. Those skills are highly valuable in a monetary sense. There is no way that small communities could afford fire departments without volunteer firefighters. Without them, property taxes would be prohibitive, with opportunities for home ownership, businesses and jobs lost or taken away.

I want to remind all members of how important volunteer firefighters are, even to those members who represent cities, and hope you will understand how they benefit the whole province through their service to rural Ontario.

The Wellington Advertiser, one of our local newspapers in my riding, also deserves recognition for their story about National Volunteer Week that appeared in last Friday's paper. Here is how they described oppor-

tunities to volunteer: “In Wellington county there are numerous opportunities for individuals of all ages to get involved, from participating in environmental cleanups with Greenspaces for Wellington to acting as a prospective role model in the life of a young boy or girl through Big Brothers or Big Sisters, or as a volunteer driver, childcare assistant or special events volunteer” with the community resource centres of our riding.

I join them in asking people who are interested to step forward and volunteer. Your services are needed. As stated in the article, “Volunteers are not paid; not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless.”

I had the pleasure of attending the Centre Wellington Chamber of Commerce’s recent dinner, where they paid tribute to Roberta and Rienk Vlietstra of Fergus. One of our local papers said the following about them, and I quote, “For, like other involved volunteers everywhere, the Vlietstras are significant contributors to their community.”

The same could be said of all of our volunteers, and for this we express our thanks.

1430

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): New Democrats support the statement made by the Minister of Citizenship and say that we’re happy to support National Volunteer Week. We honour all those men and women, young and old, who put in a great deal of their time at the service of creating a decent and civil society. We argue that our democracy would be seriously diminished if we didn’t have the level of volunteerism that we do. We note that more and more people are putting in a great deal of time, spending billions of hours of their time in volunteer work. We are worried about that, I must admit. We’re happy they’re doing it and worried at the same time—worried because we think they ought not to replace the obligations of government, and we’re seeing more and more that volunteers are doing just that.

We have a number of examples to show that when governments shirk their responsibilities, volunteers are left to fill in the gaps. If you look at the elementary and secondary levels, parents are raising \$36 million for essential supplies. That’s wrong. They ought not to be doing that. Money should be flowing from the Minister of Education down to school boards so parents do not have to do that, because rich parents can raise the money, no problem, and poor parents cannot. So you create an uneven level of support in those schools. It’s wrong. When you look at how many out-of-the-cold programs we have in this society, they are growing, programs run by volunteers and volunteer organizations that are helping to feed and house the homeless. My question is, what is the obligation of government? We know what volunteers are doing and we praise them, but we are nervous about how governments are putting less and less of their resources to deal with that very problem.

If you look at the fact that there are more and more people in shelters, record numbers, and in some cases they’re so full that people have to be run out of their shelters because there is no room, my question is, we

know what volunteers are doing, but what is the obligation of government?

If you look at our nursing homes, we have more and more volunteers filling in because we are giving less and less for staffing.

On April 23 the mayor is calling a litter pickup day, calling on all citizens to pick up litter. Why? Because we have fewer and fewer people doing the job of cleaning our streets.

My worry is this: If this government refuses to consider progressive income taxes on individuals who are earning more than \$100,000, it will mean more and more unfair user fees, and we will need more and more volunteers to fill in the gap for the absence of a strong government and a strong role for government. That’s my worry.

In the meantime, we thank all of those volunteers very much for the work they’re putting in to make our society more civil.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): Monsieur le Président, le caucus NPD veut remercier les bénévoles pour leur ouvrage. Nous avons l’opportunité cette semaine de déclarer notre support pour tout l’ouvrage qui est fait dans nos communautés, de nous assurer que nos communautés sont vivantes et que ces communautés-là sont capables de fonctionner. Mais comme a dit mon bon collègue M. Marchese, le problème est que l’on se fie moins à l’État et de plus en plus aux volontaires. Ça commence à être un problème parce que, si on regarde les services dans nos communautés—les hôpitaux, les services municipaux—ces services se font de plus en plus par des volontaires. Il faut se demander à quel point c’est l’obligation de l’État et à quel point c’est l’obligation des volontaires.

On sait que le gouvernement conservateur provincial et le gouvernement libéral fédéral ont beaucoup transféré et ont beaucoup diminué le financement des programmes. À cause de cela, on voit que beaucoup de ces agences, comme les hôpitaux et les écoles, ont besoin d’aller demander aux volontaires de reprendre la capacité de donner certains services qui dans le passé avaient été payés par l’État. Oui, c’est important d’avoir des volontaires, mais on ne devrait pas toujours avoir à se fier à ces volontaires pour s’assurer que les obligations de l’État sont faites.

Donc, de la part des néo-démocrates on veut dire que oui, les volontaires sont importants, oui, on a besoin de les soutenir, oui, on les félicite pour l’ouvrage qu’ils font, mais l’État a sa responsabilité, et à la fin de la journée on demande que ce gouvernement et cette Assemblée s’assurent que nos programmes sont adéquatement financés pour que ces programmes-là soient là pour le futur.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to beg the indulgence of the House to announce that May 18, 2004, will be the date on which the budget is presented to the people of Ontario in this place, in the Legislature of Ontario.

QUESTION PERIOD

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I wanted to raise this with you prior to question period beginning. I want to say at the outset that the official opposition, I think, has been quite pleased with respect to the number of questions that you've been able to manage in terms of the operations of the business of the House since it opened for the spring session. However, Mr Speaker, I think there was a clear breach of parliamentary convention this past Thursday with respect to the demonstrations on the part of the government side of the House, in terms of delaying question period for extended periods of time, and also the responses from ministers to lob-ball questions from back-bench members.

I would make a request of you to give guidance to members with respect to the time that you will expect from the chair in terms of questions and answers, and give some parameters around the times, as well as curtailing the demonstrations on the government side of the House.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Let me thank the member for his observation. I will look at it very closely as question period goes on. But I would ask for co-operation from all so we can proceed in a very effective way.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): If I may, Mr Speaker, to that same point of order: I noticed that as well, as did my colleagues. We found it regrettable. But you see, that's what happens when you change the rules to strangulate the role of the opposition parties here in the Legislature. I would say to the House leader for the official opposition that you make your bed, you lie in it. And I would say to the government that they've been in that position of being frustrated about not being able to exercise the role of opposition and I trust that they would pay heed to that history when it comes time for them to use their majority government power to do any further rule changes.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. The point of order has been raised. I'm sure that we know the rules and we ask you to adhere to them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Mr Premier, will you now admit that your guesstimated figure of \$500 million in savings by cancelling the equity in education tax credit was just a made up number and is nowhere near the actual number?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): First of all, I want to remind the leader of the official opposition that he originally opposed the private school tax credit. We have every confidence in our numbers, but I tell you that when all is

said and done, this is an important matter of principle for us. If I have one extra dollar available and I have the choice as to whether I'm going to put it into a private school or a public school, I want the people of Ontario to know that this Liberal government will put that money into public education.

Mr Eves: First of all, the Premier knows very well that no dollars went to any private school in Ontario. Where they did go was to parents of children of middle- and modest-income families who chose to send their children, for one reason or another, to an independent school of their choice.

You were quoted on September 2 of last year as saying that this was going to save \$500 million a year that would go into the public school system. Your campaign platform said it would save \$425 million a year. In fact, the actual number for last year, 2002, was \$29 million, and the number in the budget for 2003 was no more than \$60 million. Will you now admit that this is just hocus-pocus, that it's a number you made up, along with a whole pile of other numbers, I might add, to make it look good?

1440

Hon Mr McGuinty: Here's another number of which we are very proud: We put \$112 million into public education recently to help our most needy children. That was specifically geared toward needy children, some of our most vulnerable, who are having special learning challenges. We are very proud of that investment.

Again, I say to the leader of the official opposition, this is a matter of very important principle for us. It's also a matter upon which the people of Ontario can notice a very distinct contrast. They want to take public dollars and put them into private schools; we want to take every public dollar that is available to us and put that money into public education.

Mr Eves: The Premier knows very well that their platform talked about increasing public education funding by \$1.6 billion. We had a platform to \$1.9 billion, \$840 million of which was delivered within 48 hours of Dr Rozanski's report. So to stand there and babble on about \$116 million, which pales in comparison, is stretching the truth, shall we say, to say the least.

There are at least 20 campaign promises that you've broken to date. Now will you at least come clean with the people of Ontario about the McGuinty—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. The leader of the official opposition used a couple of unparliamentary words. I'd prefer if you'd withdraw them, please.

Mr Eves: If I've said anything that offends the Speaker, I happily withdraw it.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The original question had to do with public education. I want to return to that theme because, again, I think it's a very important matter of principle to us. The Leader of the Opposition made reference to their investments in public schools. But what we have learned as a result of getting into schools and

speaking with parents, teachers and trustees is that we have a public education system that is struggling, at best.

We intend to do everything that we possibly can, notwithstanding the severe fiscal constraints which we find ourselves having to cope with, to show that this government and the people of Ontario are committed to public education. We understand that, at the end of the day, public education at its very best will give us the best workers, who will get the best jobs and earn the highest pay. But more than that, it will give us the best citizens, people who will take responsibility for their communities. That's why we're so strongly in favour of public education.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Minister of Finance. The promise that was made by your party during the last election was to enact reforms that would reduce automobile insurance rates by an average of 10%. That was an unqualified promise to the people of Ontario made during the election campaign. You made a statement in the House here the other day with respect to that. I think people listening to that and reading about it would reasonably infer that you actually mean that people in Ontario who own cars can expect to see an average reduction of 10% in their premiums this year compared to last year. Is that what you want people to believe?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): What we need the people of Ontario to believe, because it is the truth, is that for three years before we came to power automobile insurance rates were going on one trajectory only: up like this; over the course of three years, 43%.

As a result of the initiatives that we took on the day we were sworn in, we have begun to set a trend that has auto premiums going down in this direction, 10% over what they would otherwise have been as of April 15th.

Mr Flaherty: But you said in the House on Thursday, "That report shows an average rate reduction of 10.15%." Now people in Ontario listening to that, quite rightly I would think, would say, "Well, the Liberals are fulfilling their promise to reduce auto insurance premiums by 10%; that is, that I will pay 10% less this year compared to last year."

But when people open their automobile renewals this year and they see their premium, you know that that's not true. They are not going to see that, because what it is is 10% of the rate asked by the insurers, of the rate need by the insurers, not last year's rate compared to this year's rate. So, for example, some of the largest insurers in fact will only be reducing their premiums 2% or 3%. Come clean with people who drive cars in Ontario: You are not reducing their premiums by 10%.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I have a great deal of respect for the member from Whitby-Ajax. He is a former Minister of Finance. During his period as Minister of Finance, insurance rates went up and up and up, and during the period of his predecessor and during the period of his

successor, insurance rates for private automobiles in this province went in one direction only: up. We made a campaign commitment to take steps to start to reduce premiums. We took those steps. As of April 15, the filings are in place, which will bring down rates by, on average, 10%.

Mr Flaherty: Not only is the Liberal Party not keeping the promise they made in their campaign document of a 10% reduction from last year to this year, this minister can't even keep the promise he made last Thursday, which was the 10.15% in rates from last year to this year. But, this is not coming clean with the people of Ontario, especially the people of Ontario who have the greatest need: those in the Facility Association. You know, Minister, the Facility Association's loss for last year was about \$400 million; it's a 29% increase.

Stand in your place and tell me that people who can't get insurance with insurance companies in this province—it's a mandatory product; they have to have it to drive their cars—and that the thousands and thousands of drivers put into the Facility Association are going to see, on average, a 10% reduction in their premiums this year compared to last year. Stand up and say that.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Once again, my friend from Whitby-Ajax has to take credit for an unprecedented rise in insurance rates during his time in office.

Now, I'll answer his question quite directly. Those who are put into the Facility because of bad driving habits and bad driving records will not see that reduction. We have specifically excluded that class of drivers. But under the old regime, far too many drivers were relegated to the Facility. That is going to change. We have now finished part one of our reform. Part two and part three are about to come. I want to tell a former finance minister that insurance premiums started to go down the day his government was defeated and our government was elected.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question?

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. It's also about your promise to reduce auto insurance rates by 20%, because drivers all across Ontario, as they open their insurance notices, are getting a nasty, nasty surprise. In almost every case, it's a double-digit increase. That means people aren't saving money on their insurance; they're having to raid their wallets even more to pay the insurance bill.

Premier, admit it: Your much-announced scheme to reduce auto insurance rates is a con game, a scam, and you've broken your promise once again.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the Minister of Finance, Speaker.

Hon Mr Sorbara: We have very good news for the people of Ontario. As they begin to renew their automobile insurance policies, for the first time in four years they will see a moderation in rates in this province.

I want to tell my friend the leader of the New Democrats that we made a commitment during the campaign to begin the process on the day we were elected. We did

that. We are now starting to see the benefits, but our work has not yet ended. We will continue, and we will have the strongest, most competitive insurance system in the entire country, right here in the province of Ontario.

1450

Mr Hampton: So now it's not a rate reduction, it's a rate moderation.

I want to read to the Premier what you promised in the election, from the Liberal campaign book: "The Ontario Liberals believe that people who must have insurance to drive want to see their rates come down, not just rise more slowly." You didn't promise a moderation. You promised rates would come down.

Let me tell you about James Harman from Timmins. Without any convictions or at-fault accidents, nothing over the last year, his premiums have doubled—from \$2,819 to \$5,328 this year. No accidents, no claims, nothing, but his insurance rates have doubled. Is this what the Premier meant when he said he was going to cut rates by 20%?

Hon Mr Sorbara: The commitment during the campaign was to take steps which ultimately would bring rates down by, on average, 20%, and to do it in two steps, the first step just now completed.

When we took office, insurance premiums were at an historic high in this province. Those are the rates that we inherited. On the very first day in power, we took steps to freeze rates and to begin a process of reform of the system. The completion of that part of the reform has now begun, and 55% of the market has now reported. Those reports show a rate reduction of 10.15%, exactly what we committed to in the campaign, delivered within six months.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: OCUFA, which is the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, has just produced a very interesting report. It says that, beginning in 1995, user fees, copayment fees and administrative fees implemented by the former Conservative government took almost \$1,000 a year out of the pockets of lower- and modest-income Ontarians. They say that the Conservative approach of raising copayment fees and administrative fees cost people a lot of money, and in fact it hurt those with fixed incomes the most.

Your government now is considering doing exactly the same thing with the seniors' drug benefit program. Your own pre-budget consultation document says so. If you know that this was so unfair under the Conservatives, why is your own government thinking of doing it?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the question from the leader of the NDP so that I can make it clear as to the direction that we are pursuing as the government. We understand full well the thrust of that report and agree very much with it. We agree that the vulnerable and our middle class in particular find themselves in a position

where they are worse off than originally. That's why, I say to the member opposite, we're proud to say that we have increased the minimum wage already. We have taken steps to freeze tuition in the province. We have cancelled giveaways to private schools and large corporations. We're getting back into the business of public housing in Ontario. We are assuming our responsibility when it comes to helping out our most needy and most vulnerable.

Mr Hampton: Premier, you know how unfair the Conservative agenda was, that it hit those on fixed incomes, lower and modest incomes the most, that it hurt them the most. Yet here we have the Ontario prescription drug benefit program and you're thinking about going after all kinds of seniors. You're going after the wrong people. You couldn't have it more wrong.

Premier, those individuals with \$100,000-a-year incomes got a 35% tax cut from the Conservatives. Imagine that. Those people who are in the top five got a 35% tax cut, yet you're not going to touch them. You're going to go after seniors living on fixed incomes.

I'll give you another chance, Premier. Stand up today and tell seniors across Ontario that you're not going to go after the prescription drug benefit program, you're not going to hit them with another round of fees.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Well, Speaker, if the member opposite has seen a copy of the budget—he seems to speak with tremendous authority about what we are about to do—I would be delighted if he would share that with us.

In the words of that immortal political philosopher Dr Phil, the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. This is what we've done so far: We've increased the minimum wage, we've cancelled corporate tax cuts, we've cancelled sending half a million dollars into private schools, we're working hard to get rid of the 60-hour workweek, we're providing emergency medical leave to our families and the like. That is the direction we are pursuing, that is the direction we will continue to pursue and that will be well reflected in our very first budget.

FABRY DISEASE

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, today you also have a chance to be a health care hero. About three weeks ago, I asked you to respond to the letters and desperate pleas for help from Fabry patients, their families and friends. You promised to look into it. Regrettably, there has been no response.

In the gallery today is John Strauss. He has asked you for help. In fact, today he and his wife, Donna, have brought 32 more letters asking you for help.

As you know, on April 25 the compassionate supply of Fabrazyme ends for him and four other patients in Ontario. Without this treatment, people such as John will face premature death or strokes. Will you commit today to ensure the continuation of Fabrazyme on com-

passionate grounds until such time as a final decision on approval is made?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would like to thank the member for her question. In fact, other members have been in touch with me on this issue as well. I recognize it is a time-sensitive matter. I do not have a resolution to announce to the House today, but I can assure the member, the gentleman in the gallery and any others struggling with this challenge that the government of Ontario is working aggressively on this file with a view toward a resolution that will be positive for those patients who are seeing benefits from this product.

So although I am not in a position today to confirm exactly what those arrangements will be, I give that member every assurance that we're working on this as a priority. It has lots of direct involvement from staff in my office, and I am very hopeful of a resolution in very short order.

Mrs Witmer: I do want to remind the minister that there is a tremendous amount of anxiety for these five patients and for their families. I've had passionate pleas for help from children—daughters—who probably will also be candidates for Fabry disease. John, here today, who is from our community of Mannheim, is down to his last treatment. Bill Taylor, a patient in Ottawa, had his last treatment last week and is now desperately looking to be able to continue the Fabrazyme. I want to quote Bill, who pleads with you: "This is not a political issue. It's about my life and the lives of other patients." Minister, I hope you will help to save the lives of people like Bill and John, I hope you will follow the example of Alberta and I hope that today you could commit to helping these five people continue with Fabrazyme on compassionate grounds until the final decision for approval is made.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I cannot add much beyond what I said in my earlier response except to offer the strongest possible assurance to the member and to those suffering with this illness that their government is working aggressively with a view to responding to the call that is required. It's a challenging issue for a variety of reasons, but in the face of those challenges we are working aggressively and I'm very confident we will find a resolution that is up to the standard we all expect to deliver in Ontario.

1500

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): My question is for the minister responsible for seniors. My riding contains a very high percentage of seniors, probably one of the highest in the country. Currently Ontario has 1.5 million seniors. I guess I should also suggest that my seniors are very avid Toronto Maple Leafs fans. So may I say on their behalf, "Go, Leafs, go!"

By 2028, the number of senior citizens in Ontario is actually expected to double. The seniors in my riding and across Ontario can find it extremely difficult to under-

stand and access the services to which they are entitled. This lack of information leaves a very negative impact on their health, their community involvement and overall quality of life. Seniors and their families often have to go from office to office, building to building, to get the information they need. My question is, what is the minister responsible for seniors going to do to ensure that seniors have better access to the range of services that their hard work made possible?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I'd like to thank the member for a very pertinent question. We all agree that seniors deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and deserve to understand and have easy access to all the various government programs that are out there, no matter what level of government. Our government is striving to make that happen, to make seniors understand the programs they're entitled to and the programs that are out there.

Let me just give you three examples of that. First of all, our Guide to Programs and Services for Seniors in Ontario is available on-line and in a number of different languages. As a matter of fact, over 100,000 copies of the on-line program guideline have already been distributed around the province to seniors and different senior organizations. Our seniors' info line is available toll-free and can answer questions in 20 different languages. Finally, just last fall we partnered with the government of Ontario to launch seniorsinfo.ca, a collaborative seniors' portal. This integrates senior information and services from all three levels of government and will make it easier for seniors to find the necessary services that they need.

Mrs Cansfield: We need to continue to work with Ontario senior groups, service providers and other levels of government and build on these initiatives to ensure that seniors, today and tomorrow, enjoy the very best quality of life. So I ask, what initiatives are underway that demonstrate our efforts to plan in a collaborative way for our aging population?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Again, thanks to the member for the question. There are a number of initiatives that are ongoing. As we know, the senior population is going to rise tremendously over the next number of years, so it becomes ever more important. With the help of Ontario's major seniors' organizations, our government will develop a comprehensive approach to seniors' issues that will improve all services that affect them. Ontario's Alzheimer and elder abuse strategies are already in place and are good examples of the kind of working relationships that have developed between government and different organizations.

As a matter of fact, later on this June, federal and municipal colleagues will be joining provincial colleagues at a symposium entitled Breaking Down the Silos: Integrating Services for Seniors. It will be co-hosted by this province and the Canadian Seniors Partnership, a partnership that we co-chair, which was formed to explore and support innovative intergovernmental service-delivery opportunities to help our seniors.

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: Mr Premier, you have brought forward a number of bizarre and violently unpopular policy ideas in your six months as Premier; to refresh your memory: tolls on Highway 69, mandatory retesting of all drivers in Ontario, and the retroactive taxation of trailer home owners. But your new 8% Dalton McGuinty meal tax takes the cake and then taxes it too.

You are being besieged by petitions from all across Ontario; today, from members of this caucus, the NDP and your own caucus. Will you do the right thing? Will you back down and cancel your plan to bring in this ill-conceived, bad idea that's going to tax people across Ontario? Mr Premier, just say no.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): To the Minister of Finance, Speaker.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The first thing I will do is correct the record of my friend from Erie-Lincoln apropos tolls on Highway 69: not going to happen. Apropos retroactive taxes on trailer parks, it was the policy of the previous government to do that. It was that policy which we changed and corrected. So that's now in place.

I know that my friend from Erie-Lincoln was elected to indulge in what the Minister of Tourism correctly describes as idle speculation about taxes. My responsibility, as I've announced today, is to bring forward a budget in this House on May 18 and to start in that budget to correct some of the damage done by the previous administration over the course of the past eight years.

Mr Hudak: The finance minister makes exactly the same point I did. You brought forward these trial balloons—like the tolling of Highway 69, the retesting of drivers across the province and retroactive taxation—and after letting them twist in the wind for weeks, you shoot them down. Mr Premier and Mr Finance Minister, you're twisting in the wind once again.

The Toronto Star compares your handling of this issue to Inspector Clouseau, in bringing forward this coalition. You answered my other questions and shot down three of the policy ideas. Why don't you have the courage to put your money where your mouth is? Answer yes or no: Are you going to back down on this ill-conceived new 8% McGuinty meal tax, yes or no?

Hon Mr Sorbara: You can almost feel the earth shake when my friend from Erie-Lincoln quotes, with support, the Toronto Star. This is a new era in Ontario politics.

I tell my friend from Erie-Lincoln that we'll present a budget in this Legislature on May 18 that will start to repair some of the economic, public service, public administration and fiscal damage that was done by the previous administration. We will fulfill our commitments in the area of education. We will fulfill our commitments in the area of health care. We will build stronger

communities in this province. We will do all of that, beginning with the presentation we make on May 18 in the budget in this Legislature.

LITERACY

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): My question is for the Minister of Education. I recently attended my MPP back-to-school day at Bishop Allen Academy and St Leo Catholic School, where I had an opportunity to speak to both students and teachers. Many of the students, teachers and parents in my riding are concerned about the literacy and numeracy failings in our high schools. Today's students are tomorrow's leaders and our province's most valuable resource, but many of them need our help. What is our government doing to help the many grade 10 students who have not been able to pass the literacy test?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): There is an immediacy to the needs of students. They have not been responded to in this province for quite a number of years. We find not pockets, but large numbers, of students who are struggling with things that everybody in this House can empathize with: the basic ability to read and write.

For example, when the Toronto board learned that 10,000—10%—of their students in grades 1 to 5 are only reading at level one, we willingly got into a pilot project with them so that those students will receive, right away, intensive literacy support, 20 hours before the end of the school year. Also, they will have a summer camp program at the end of the school year to sustain those skills at the same time they're learning other things and how to socialize. Literacy and numeracy will be delivered by this government, and we're trying very hard to make up for the lack of effort by the one before.

Ms Broten: Many of the experts, the teachers who work day in and day out with our students, tell me that grade 10 is far too late. They tell me we need to focus our attention on the earlier grades to help kids catch up and excel sooner. Minister, what, if anything, is our government doing to address this long outstanding issue in order to better assist our youngest students?

Hon Mr Kennedy: The basic thrust here is that the earlier we reach kids, the better. We know that we need to have them come to school ready to learn and that, as much as possible, we can impart the skills and attitudes at an earlier age, but it has to be intentional. All around this province, our boards and schools and principals have been scrambling just to find the basic resources. What we have said is that we will be actually working with them, realistically partnering, to make sure these things get delivered, that this focus is part of what they can look forward to. One anxiety of families across this province, that their students will somehow get missed by the school programs that are out there, is becoming less and less a possibility, because we're now working with the Toronto board and boards all around the province to make sure that literacy and numeracy are the first order of the day.

1510

TAXATION

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Premier. The people of Ontario are not going to swallow your soup-and-sandwich tax. They're not going to take it. You've got a Tim Hortons revolution out there. If you go out to those little restaurants, if you go out to where people are eating and drinking coffee, they're not happy with what you're saying or what you're not saying.

They're angry because you're raising their bills for water, you're raising their bills for hydro, and you're not doing anything about auto insurance. Now you're taking dead aim at their \$3.99 breakfast. We're talking about ordinary people: seniors, students, cafeteria workers. We're talking about people in factories.

I want to put it very, very simply. I don't want a dance; I don't want vague answers. I just want the straight answer, and so do they, because they're talking about it everywhere. Are you going to institute this tax or are you not?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Minister of Finance.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I appreciate where my friend from Beaches-East York is coming from. We could spend every single question in question period going over the same territory. We'll take a tax, pretend that it's coming, and then demand that it not come.

All I can say to my friend from Beaches-East York is that we acknowledge the presence of a very powerful campaign, from McDonald's and Tim Hortons primarily, about the exemption on \$4 meals. All I can tell my friend is that it is the intention of this government to continue on its track record of doing the most for those who are most vulnerable in this province. We would never do anything that would hurt that constituency.

Mr Prue: The people now know what "choose change" means. It means that when they buy a \$3.99 breakfast and they give \$5, they don't get any change because you keep it. There are 380,000 people who work in the food industry, 380,000 people in the restaurants, and 158,000 of those are students who are trying to pay their way through schools and universities.

I'm worried because you're talking about not whacking the poor and the small people. Well, these are the same people who rely on those jobs, and we know that if you put in this tax, you're putting their jobs at risk. Can you assure them that their jobs will not be at risk, that you will not be putting in this new 8%, that they can be secure, and that they will have jobs to go forward to in the weeks and months ahead?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I can assure my friend that the budget that will be presented on May 18 will take very important steps to build a new foundation of strong economic growth right across the province of Ontario. That means employment opportunities for those who are

just coming into the workplace. That means economic growth that will create new jobs. That means that we'll be looking to the entire province, not just the greater Toronto area.

I want to say to my friend that I am surprised at the tenor of his question. It is scripted in exactly the words that representatives from Tim Hortons and McDonald's put to me about job loss when they came to see me two weeks ago. They threatened me by saying, "If you just say that you won't do it, then we won't have to mount the campaign." I can't indulge in that kind of negotiation. I tell my friend on the other side, and those at McDonald's and at Tim Hortons, that we'll have to wait for the budget.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. It relates to a report over the weekend—extremely well researched by the Toronto Star, I might say—that relates to a very serious safety issue that demands your attention. It speaks to the literally hundreds of bridges across this province that are in a serious state of disrepair in many cases—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Would you allow the member to state his question? More shouting is coming from the government side. The member for Oak Ridges.

Mr Klees: In response to appeals from municipalities across the province, the previous government had made a commitment to assume responsibility for those bridges and for their maintenance and inspection. I'd like to know whether that in fact is going to be your policy as well. Will you support municipalities across this province to deal with this important safety issue?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Actually, I'm surprised to have this question from my colleague on the other side. He should remember that his government was the government that really downloaded the bridges on to municipalities, and they did so without a plan and without giving them any tools to address those needs. We are absolutely committed to working with the municipalities to work on these issues and give them the tools to address these kinds of concerns.

Mr Klees: Minister, regardless of what you are attempting to spin at this point, the reality is that we made a commitment to these municipalities to provide the funding. Will you stand in your place today and confirm that you will assume that same responsibility, or will you allow that first bridge to collapse under your watch and then attempt to spin your way out of that as well? Will you do the responsible thing today and assume responsibility and commit to a partnership with municipalities across this province on this important safety issue?

Hon Mr Takhar: It's really interesting that my colleague on the other side seems to have all the answers

to all the problems when, as the Minister of Transportation, he could not implement any of them. Now all of a sudden, he has a solution to every problem.

We are prepared to work with municipalities. We are prepared to give them a new deal so they can address their long-term issues. They downloaded the bridges on to municipalities without any plan or without giving any resources to the municipalities.

PRIMARY CARE REFORM

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. My constituency office has received dozens of calls from people in my riding who try desperately to find a family physician. As Ontario's population ages, the need for family physicians will continue to grow. What are your plans to improve access to primary care for the people of Ontario?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): While I recognize that the question comes from the hard-working member for Peterborough, it's a question, regrettably, that could be asked by pretty much any member in this House. The reality is that we're struggling in many parts of our province with access to a family doctor.

Our party has a plan. In the election campaign, we committed to 150 family health teams, which have the great advantage of being multidisciplinary, of offering Ontarians the opportunity to receive their care from teams of health professionals working together. What I can say to the honourable member is that the case is being well made in the community of Peterborough. I receive a lot of correspondence from there, and recently, because Peterborough is such an example of the challenges that we have, I'm pleased to say that this government appointed Mayor Sylvia Sutherland to the board of the College of Physicians and Surgeons so that she could be a strong voice there for communities like Peterborough that are struggling without enough access to family practitioners.

Mr Leal: In Peterborough, we've developed a very innovative, integrative primary care model proposal that would provide primary care for the 18,000 to 20,000 people who currently do not have a family physician. I know that we've had the opportunity to present this innovative model to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I want to ask the minister today, how will this plan effectively and positively help our citizens and perhaps be used as a template throughout Ontario?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The member makes an excellent point. Peterborough is demonstrating an extraordinarily strong act of local leadership on this issue. We've had the opportunity—my political staff, and staff from the ministry—to meet with representatives from the Peterborough community. While I'm not in a position today to say that Peterborough gets the go-forward, I am very clearly in a position to say that the proposal that has come forward from the Peterborough community is very

closely aligned with our family health team proposals. As a result of the hard work of the member from Peterborough, he can be absolutely certain that the people in his community are clearly on our radar screen. We like a lot of what they're doing and we hope to be able to give life to proposals like this one very soon.

1520

SCHOOLTEACHERS

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the Minister of Education and relates to the qualifications of people teaching credit courses in our public schools. As you know, our government created the Ontario College of Teachers and gave it the responsibility of ensuring that people who teach courses in our public schools are qualified and certified by the Ontario College of Teachers. Is the minister aware of the number of persons teaching credit courses in our public schools who have not gone through the qualification and certification process with the Ontario College of Teachers?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): As the member opposite may remember, there is a service that's provided through the ministry to acknowledge uncertified teachers as a last resort. There was last year, I believe, something in the order of 1,200. Those requests grow throughout the year. To the best of my knowledge, there are fewer than those at this time last year, but I will happily get back to the member and let him know what the number of those instructors is in the colleges.

I will say, though, about his previous advocacy of private schools, that about half of the instructors in private schools are acknowledged by the college and half are not.

Mr Flaherty: The mechanism is called "letters of permission," and I'm told there are about 2,000 of them extant in Ontario, now teaching credit courses in public school.

The point is this: We have this elaborate process in the Ontario College of Teachers which, I think the minister will agree, does a superb job vetting teachers, making sure we only have qualified, screened teachers teaching credit courses in public schools. We have this anomaly of 2,000 or so letters of permission that are over in the Ministry of Education. I'd suggest to the minister and ask him whether he'd be prepared to move the letters-of-permission function to the Ontario College of Teachers for this very good reason: It is only the college that has access to the database of these teachers in the 50 American states and across Canada so we can make sure we have certified, qualified teachers in our public school system.

Hon Mr Kennedy: I just want to say that what parents in this province want to see are motivated, well-trained teachers in front of their class, and what we've had in these last years is conflict and attacks from the people opposite. I have to give the member credit that he finally expresses some interest in the state of well-being of the public schools in this province. This is the first question we've ever had to that effect.

I will say as well that it is our commitment to make sure that we have the best-trained teachers in the province, people operating in a context of respect from this government and from the rest of society.

Finally, I will say that we will absolutely take under advisement the suggestion made by the member opposite and by others, because we are about strengthening an independent college of teachers, which the previous government turned into a battleground between themselves and teachers. Instead, it will be depoliticized and working on behalf of teaching standards, on behalf of students in this province, the way it should have been since its inception.

LAKEVIEW GENERATING STATION

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): I rise today to ask a question of the Minister of Energy. But before that, I'd like to thank him for making energy planning in Ontario a thorough, thoughtful and long-range process, not a knee-jerk reaction for political gain and the support of friends.

My question is the following: The Lakeview plant produces approximately 1,140 megawatts of electricity in my riding by burning coal. As everyone knows, coal-fired generating stations contribute terrible pollutants to the air we breathe and depend on. Can you assure us today that our government is serious about cleaning up our air and remains committed to closing this plant by May 2005?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I want to thank the member for Mississauga South for his question and re-emphasize that cleaner air is a top priority for our government. Lakeview accounts for 26% of the GTA region's SO₂ emissions and 8% of total NO_x emissions. As a result, Lakeview will be the first coal-fired station that we'll be closing. The station is required to cease burning coal by April 30, 2005. After that date, emissions from Lakeview cannot be greater than those from gas-fired generation.

This government is doing things differently. After very little progress on new supply initiatives by the Tories, we're already acting to address this issue by announcing RFPs for 2,500 megawatts of new capacity and/or demand-side management—the first time in Ontario's history there's been a call for that—and up to 300 megawatts of new renewable resources. I expect that call for proposals to be out this week. That's why we're changing the way business was done under the Tories and the NDP, and we're making an important difference to air quality in the province of Ontario.

Mr Peterson: Minister, thank you for your reassurance. This plant, although a significant polluter, is a major contributor to our local economy, as it employs many people, directly and indirectly. Not only has the government continued to improve health care and education, we are also committed to improving our environment and to economic growth and prosperity for all.

In light of the phasing out of plants such as Lakeview in my riding, what avenues are being considered that could mitigate any potential job loss with the closure of this plant?

Hon Mr Duncan: To the member of Mississauga South, in fact, Lakeview does employ about 200 people. The Ministry of Energy and Ontario Power Generation are looking very closely now at the employment impacts of shutting down Lakeview and the potential redeployment of employees within the electricity sector. It should be noted that as the generation of coal is replaced, significant investments will be required in alternative cleaner options, such as renewable gas-fired generation, the potential refurbishment of nuclear plants, and conservation and demand-side initiatives. As a result, a large fraction of OPG staff could potentially be redeployed to other business units within OPG or by other electricity generators within the industry.

As the electricity needs of the province are further assessed, additional new generation capacity or refurbishment of existing capacity will be required. This will provide further redeployment opportunities for the employees affected by the shutting down of the Lakeview station. Let me give the member opposite our assurances that we will make sure that the interests of your community and those employees are well protected with our plan.

CHILD CARE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): A question to the Premier: During the election you made an announcement with great fanfare at Withrow school's child care centre in my riding, pledging your support to regulated child care. Non-profit child care centres in Toronto, including Withrow, are about to make cuts and raise fees.

Theresa Radwanski is here with us today. She's the supervisor at the Children's Circle daycare. She says her centre will have to cut spaces because you are sitting on \$58 million in federal money that is supposed to go to child care. To make up for these cuts, she'll have to charge \$1,400 more per year for a family with two children.

Premier, will you release that federal money today? It's not your money, it's their money.

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

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I thank the member opposite for this question. Originally, when this question of federal money being sat on came up, I looked into it, I asked my ministry to look into it, and that is not case. There isn't any federal money that we are sitting on. In fact, for the first time in a decade, the money that the federal government did give for child care in this province was actually given for child care in this province.

We have a commitment to increase the accessibility to child care. We're moving very quickly in developing our plans. We are also going to improve the quality of child care in this province by regulating the profession, something that the early childhood educators wish.

Ms Churley: Minister, you should talk to the people who are running the child care centres, because that's not what they're going to tell you. You have that money and you haven't freed it up. The families in my riding and across Toronto don't have another \$1,400 in user fees for child care. Yet if you don't release this money—and you better look into this because it's sitting there, this \$58 million—to the city, that is what they'll have to pay. The city is finalizing its budget this week so they need the money now. If you don't free up this money, they will have to cut another 220 child care subsidy spaces on top of over 1,700 lost over the past two years.

I want to ask you very specifically, Minister: Why are you hiding this \$58 million that came from the federal government for the daycares in this province? What are you up to? Will you release that money today?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: I'm surprised at the tone of that question. I actually did look into this situation, and there is no money being hidden anywhere. In fact, this government gives \$700 million a year to child care. We are also, for the first time in over a decade, delivering the federal money to child care, over \$300 million by 2007-08. We are increasing the quality of daycare. I don't know where she's getting this information. It's simply not true.

1530

MOTORCYCLE INSURANCE

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Finance. I've been hearing from constituents who are concerned about increasing motorcycle insurance rates.

I recently received a letter from a constituent who, like many others in Ontario, was under the impression that when your government promised to freeze, and then reduce, automobile insurance, insurance rates for motorcycles would also be frozen. I'll read from my constituent's letter:

"I recently had an insurance company ... write up a quote for me for motorcycle insurance in December. They quoted me roughly \$1,300 for complete coverage. When I went to follow up on my quote this week, imagine my surprise when the company told me they had a rate increase on February 1, 2004, and my insurance for my motorcycle would be \$2,325. This is completely unacceptable."

Minister, is this another broken Liberal promise? Why are motorcyclists around this province not enjoying a reduction in insurance rates?

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I appreciate the question from my friend from Parry Sound-Muskoka. I simply want to tell him that in the initiatives we took on automobile insurance for private passenger

cars, we did not include motorcycles. We didn't make the commitment during the campaign.

He's right that there is a significant rise in premiums for insuring motorcycles, for a variety of reasons, including the fact that it is motorcycles that often give rise to the most serious and debilitating kinds of accidents, which are most costly in terms of their health care implications. But I will tell my friend that as we continue to reform the market and transform the systems for assessing damage and bring better competition to the marketplace and bring about an ability for customers to fine-tune and specify needs in insurance, I am confident that rates in this area will also begin to moderate.

Mr Miller: The rising cost of insurance is not only affecting individual motorcyclists but is negatively impacting the entire industry. The motorcycle industry is a \$1.25-billion industry that employs over 8,000 people; however, it is an industry in Ontario that has suffered due to rapidly increasing insurance rates. Sales of motorcycles throughout the rest of Canada increased 10.9%, while here in Ontario sales are down by 8.4%.

I'm also concerned that high insurance rates will affect Canada's largest sport bike rally, which happens to occur in the beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka and will be happening this year on July 9 to 11, in case you decide you'd like to attend. It is imperative that the high cost of motorcycle insurance be addressed sooner rather than later. What is the timeline for reduced rates for motorcyclists? When will motorcyclists enjoy lower rates?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I'm not sure whether that was a supplementary question or an invitation to participate in the rally and the show. I'll look at my calendar, and if I can be there, I will.

As to motorcycle insurance rates, I want to repeat: Although we did not make a commitment—our commitment was to deal with the eight million of us in Ontario who must have automobile insurance so we can get to our jobs, so that we can tend to our families—we have taken the steps necessary to begin the rate reduction of up to 10% on average. Regrettably, our initiatives did not include motorcycles, but we will look at it, at the urging of my friend from Parry Sound-Muskoka.

APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. We've said many times that the key to a prosperous economy in Ontario is investing in our number one resource, that being our people. We know that to build a strong workforce in Ontario, we need to help all people, our young people and our not-so-young people, upgrade their skills so that they can find success in our highly skilled, knowledge-based economy.

Your announcement last week regarding apprenticeship training programs was welcome news to my constituents in Hamilton. As the ambitious city, Hamilton's economy relies on the continuous development of skilled trades, and as such, I am confident that this investment

will benefit Hamilton and also the future of Ontario. As part of that announcement last week, our government approved several projects at Mohawk College, a wonderful post-secondary education facility in my riding. Could you please tell this House and the people of Hamilton more about these important investments?

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I thank the member from Hamilton West for that question. Mohawk College is located in Hamilton. I am really pleased to say that Mohawk was one, of all the colleges in Ontario, submitting very strong proposals for apprenticeship programs. Indeed, Mohawk College has received almost \$1.1 million for their apprenticeship programs. Those programs will include new equipment for automotive service technicians, electrical trades and the steam fitter apprenticeship programs. They had already upgraded their curriculum. This will now give them the equipment to do the job for apprentices.

Ms Marsales: These projects are certainly good news for current and future apprentices in the Hamilton area. They are also invaluable investments for our local Hamilton economy. I understand that, in addition to the apprenticeship announcement last week, an investment was also made in pre-apprenticeship programs. Could you please tell this House what a pre-apprenticeship program is and how this investment impacts on our local economy in Hamilton?

Hon Mrs Chambers: Once again, I am grateful to the member from Hamilton West for giving me the opportunity to say that the pre-apprenticeship program actually helps would-be apprentices to upgrade their skills in preparation for taking part in these apprenticeship programs. They also have the opportunity to get some work experience so that they will know for sure that this is indeed the program for them.

Mohawk College actually put forward two proposals, which will have them receive \$434,000 in addition to the almost \$1.1 million that they received. These programs include one at the Stoney Creek campus, where there will be a pre-apprenticeship program offered for sheet metal workers. There is also a partnership between Mohawk and the YMCA of Hamilton and Burlington. That will be a program introducing these individuals to truck and coach technicians.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which I picked up yesterday in Walkerton at the Tim Hortons. There was an awful pile sitting there on the desk. It says:

“Whereas every day, 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across the province;

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

“Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4.”

1540

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): It’s the same petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every day, 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across Ontario;

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

“Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4.”

That’s on behalf of my constituents, and I have 2,200—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Petitions. The member from Simcoe North.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North):

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every day, 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across the province;

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

“Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4.”

I’m pleased to sign that.

IMMIGRANTS’ SKILLS

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to present this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“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’ve been trained in their country of origin; and

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign my name to this petition.

TAXATION

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every day 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across the province;

“We, the undersigned”—165 of us—“petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4.”

I have proudly signed that petition.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition which is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I’ve signed the petition myself and I agree with it. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“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.”

TAXATION

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas every day, 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across the province;

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

“Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4.”

I sign my name in agreement.

ONTARIO BUDGET

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

“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” great “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 will add my name to this petition.

AUTISM SERVICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I’m pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

“Whereas our new Premier, Dalton McGuinty, and his Liberal government made a campaign commitment to expand funding for valued therapy for autistic children; and

“Whereas the families of autistic children continue to call upon the province to extend funding to children six

years and older who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) funding; and

“Whereas the new Premier has admitted, ‘We simply don’t have enough people right now with the skills to help those children under six, let alone those over the age of six’; and

“Whereas the Liberal Premier, Dalton McGuinty, described the current cut-off age as unfair and discriminatory;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to force the government to live up to its promise and extend funding to children six and older who will benefit from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) treatment.”

I support this and affix my signature.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I have a petition today:

“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 affix my signature.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I now have over 3,000 petitions from seniors in my riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1550

TAXATION

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every day 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a new ‘tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across the province;

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

“Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4.”

I’m proud to sign my name to this petition.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): Mr Speaker, you’ll recall that last week I said there were petitions coming in—about 6,000 signatures. I’m getting more signatures here from the petition by Joan Faria and her colleagues.

“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 of our senior citizens living in nursing homes and retirement homes throughout Ontario.”

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of customers at the Crystal Beach Tim Hortons on the Niagara Peninsula. It’s signed by Chris Cook and Chris Beck, among others, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas every day 1.5 million Ontarians, including seniors, health care workers and students, purchase a basic meal that costs less than \$4; and

“Whereas a new 8% tax on such meals will disadvantage low-income Ontarians; and

“Whereas adding a tax for the first time on a glass of milk, a salad, a bowl of soup or a cup of coffee will affect a total of 1.5 million Ontarians each and every day in restaurants and cafeterias across the province;

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

"Do not impose a new 8% tax on basic meals under \$4."

In support, I affix my signature.

FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from my constituents in Parry Sound-Muskoka.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas municipalities are solely responsible for funding fire services; and

"Whereas the previous government committed \$40 million to help small and rural communities in the purchase of new emergency firefighting equipment;

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

"That the province of Ontario proceed with a program to support municipal fire services for the purchase of life-saving equipment, and that the province develop a rural response strategy in consultation with municipal fire services."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): "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....

"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;

"To instruct Premier McGuinty to demand more help from Ottawa instead of demanding more funding from seniors."

I have affixed my signature.

SMOKING BAN

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): "Whereas the Minister of Health for Ontario has permitted the administrator of the Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre in Penetanguishene, Ontario, to impose a total smoking ban in the maximum security Oak Ridge division and on the outside grounds; and

"Whereas the decision to impose the ban was made by an executive administrative committee comprised of non-smokers ... without any opportunity being given to the

inmate/patient residents and employees thereof to address the issues and concerns upon which it was made; and

"Whereas the executive administrative committee alleged that it was instituted on the basis of tests which proved that the specially ventilated designated smoking rooms were leaking, but have never produced any evidence of the alleged tests and the ministry itself claims to have no knowledge of them; and

"Whereas the executive administrative committee and the Minister of Health have completely ignored repeated requests when the majority of inmate/patient residents and employees, including non-smokers, for the return of smoking; and

"Whereas the provisions of the Tobacco Control Act and the Smoking in the Workplace Act which prohibit smoking in specific areas do not apply to a place that is used for lodging or residence; and

"Whereas the majority of inmate/patients at Oak Ridge are federal prisoners detained under the Criminal Code of Canada as a result of the commission of criminal offences who would be permitted to smoke if they were detained in a federal institution under the jurisdiction of Corrections Canada; and

"Whereas all other government buildings throughout Ontario permit smoking outside of the buildings within feet of the doorways, and the two local medical hospitals in the Penetanguishene-Midland area permit smoking in specially ventilated designated smoking rooms as well; and

"Whereas all other psychiatric facilities have continued to permit smoking, with the exception of Brockville, which permits it on the outside grounds only; and

"Whereas the total smoking ban has prevented the inmate/patient smokers (who comprise 70% to 80% of the institution's population) from sharing a common cultural behaviour and social interest with their families and friends who also smoke;

"We, the undersigned inmate/patients and employees at Oak Ridge, our families and friends and others, and members of the local community, including non-smokers who are disturbed with the situation, hereby petition members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to require that the Minister of Health permit smoking to continue at Oak Ridge or, at the very least, permit smoking to continue on the outside grounds."

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AUDIT STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA VÉRIFICATION DES COMPTES PUBLICS

Mr Sorbara moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor /
Projet de loi 18, Loi concernant le vérificateur provincial.

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'm delighted to have this opportunity to say just a few words on the substance of this bill, the political philosophy behind it, why we introduced it and what impact it will have on us in the Legislature and, more importantly, on the people of Ontario.

Could I just take care of a little bit of business first and note that the time allotted is, I understand, one hour, and I will be sharing my time with my colleague the member from Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, the member from Etobicoke Centre and the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, who is my parliamentary assistant, by the way.

The Provincial Auditor, in this Legislature and in this province, has historically played an increasingly important role in ensuring the transparency and accountability of just about everything we do as a government. Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor, which will amend the Audit Act in the province, is a very significant step in strengthening the role of the Provincial Auditor.

By the way, once this bill is law, we rename the office and he or she becomes the Auditor General for the province of Ontario. That's neither here nor there; that's a little bit of nomenclature. The fact is that every province and the national government use the term "Auditor General," and Ontario will adopt that. What is much more important is the new powers that will vest in the Auditor General, or the Provincial Auditor, as a result of this bill, and I want to spend some time on that.

Before I do that, I want to put this bill in a bit of a political context. As you know, during the recent election campaign that ended on October 2, one of the themes of our party, the Ontario Liberal Party, was in the area of democratic renewal, democratic reform, improving our democratic system. To be sure, reforming our own procedures here and the way our democracy plays out doesn't really create new employment and doesn't add food to the table and doesn't deal with the size of classrooms and doesn't deal with waiting times, but it's still a very important component of what we do as a government, because it deals with the very way in which we govern ourselves.

1600

There were a number of very specific items in the campaign proposals, and I'd like to talk about a couple of them in anticipation of dealing with the Audit Act.

The first, and the one that I think is closest to my own political heart, is our commitment to have fixed election dates in Ontario. It really transforms very significantly our democratic system. I look at the table officers and I think they wonder about how you organize and run a Parliament that isn't subject to the whim of a Premier to call a general election and to dissolve the Legislature. But I personally think that bringing about fixed election dates in the province of Ontario is a very important improvement and reform in our democracy. I believe that because it takes power away from the Office of the Premier and puts that power back in the hands of the

people in this room, the 103 of us who make laws and pass those laws in this chamber.

Once we've passed a bill to establish fixed election dates, the timing of an election is dependent not on when a government leader determines it's a good idea, but on when the Legislature has determined the election shall take place. I think that's a very important reform and I understand that some time over the course of this year, the Attorney General will be making submissions in that regard.

One of the other things we said during the election campaign, and that we have already dealt with in this Legislature: a bill to ban partisan advertising. I think that bill, as much as anything, touched on some of the concerns that the broad population of Ontario had about the previous administration, because all of us as residents and citizens of Ontario had the "benefit" of seeing basically partisan political advertising arriving in our mailboxes, being presented to us on our television screens or on our radios really throughout the eight-plus-year history of the previous administration.

The sum total of that advertising represented hundreds of millions of dollars in, I would say, wasted expenditures, because really that was all about a government using taxpayers' money to tell taxpayers what a great job the government was doing. When you see it in those terms, you see how important it was to initiate that reform, to put it in the form of legislation.

My colleague, the Chairman of Management Board, did that prior to Christmas in the fall sitting of the Legislature. I recall when we were having that debate, it was referred to as "historic legislation," perhaps the first of its kind in North America, to put an absolute ban on the waste of taxpayers' money in partisan advertising. I hope the thinking behind that kind of reform can underpin and be a foundation for all of the things we do on our agenda for democratic renewal.

We took some steps to bring to the attention of the people of the province, through freedom of information amendments and other initiatives, to open the windows, to open the curtains, to shine the bright light of day on two of our most important companies, Ontario Hydro—now Ontario Power Generation—and Hydro One. The initiatives of the previous administration had basically drawn the curtains closed and shut off those very important corporations from the light of day and political inspection by members of this Legislature and the general public. The steps we've taken, I think have been very helpful indeed.

The Audit Act is of a significantly different category, because what we do as we amend the Audit Act and enhance the powers of the Auditor General is give much more power and authority to every single member of this Legislature, whether sitting on this side of the aisle or that side of the aisle. Let's remember that the Auditor General, as he will be called soon, is an officer of this Legislature. He is a public administration official who reports not to the government, not to the cabinet, not to the Premier, not to the Chair of the Management Board;

the Provincial Auditor reports to this Legislature. His responsibility is to follow the direction of the 103 people elected to this House, to inspect and report on and verify all of the expenditures made by the government on behalf of the members of this Legislature.

So his powers, like those of the Ombudsman, are unique. He or she does not take direction from the cabinet and doesn't take direction from the Premier; the Provincial Auditor gets his instructions from those of us who sit in this House as MPPs. This bill expands the power of the Provincial Auditor in a number of very significant ways. In expanding the power of the Provincial Auditor, you expand the power of the members of this Legislature—all of us: government members, official opposition members, third party members.

As we move toward passing this bill, we should remember why it is that we're doing it and what it is that we will be achieving. Probably the most important expansion of those powers is the authority in this act to allow the Provincial Auditor to do so-called value-for-money audits in a wide range of institutions and organizations that, up until this time, have not had to account to the Provincial Auditor.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It's about time.

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from Trinity-Spadina interjects and says, "It's about time," and we agree with him. We agree with him that it's about time. I point out to him that we committed to it in our campaign, and we introduced it shortly after we were sworn in.

I think it's worth it to explain what a value-for-money audit is. Essentially, a value-for-money audit gives the Provincial Auditor the capacity to inspect and report on expenditures made by institutions such as universities, community colleges, school boards and the like, to review the expenditures of those institutions and those organizations and report back to the members of this Legislature about whether or not true value was derived from the expenditures made by them.

Why is it important to us to hear about that through the Provincial Auditor?

Mr Marchese: To all of us.

Hon Mr Sorbara: To all of us. Well, that's simple. I think the simple answer is that we have the burden in this House of levying the taxes amongst the 12 million of us in this province who actually pay for the programs. So we raise the money by way of the taxing power of this House and we allocate the money under laws and regulations made by this House to a wide variety of institutions. So surely this House needs the power to have a Provincial Auditor who can review the expenditures and determine whether we derive value for money.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): Transparency.

Hon Mr Sorbara: As my friend from Brant says, this gives us a new level of transparency in the management of the public's business.

Mr Marchese: What about reviewable grants?

Hon Mr Sorbara: My friend from Trinity-Spadina is interjecting about reviewable grants. I tell him, had I

more time on this occasion, we could get into that topic in great detail. Unfortunately, I have promised to share the time, and I just want to take the final couple of minutes—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I just want to tell my friend from Trinity-Spadina that as this bill moves through the Legislature, I think it's possible that some will say, "Now, this goes too far. We cannot interfere with the autonomy of crown corporations or hospitals and inspect their level of expenditures."

1610

Our view is very different. This is not a bill that imposes an eye or an inspection that is unwarranted. This bill will give us the capacity to make sure that as we allocate the revenues we derive from taxpayers, those funds are spent wisely and they're spent well.

I know that there's going to be a good, healthy debate on this bill. I look forward to monitoring that debate, and in the end, that this bill will pass, I hope, unanimously in this Legislature. My friends from the New Democratic Party, I think, intend to support it. I'm not sure where the official opposition is, but then I'm not sure about where they are on any particular matter at this time in the evolution of their political history.

Mr Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill. I encourage its swift passage.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Continued opening debate?

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for his words in leading out this debate today and setting the tone and language that will be imparted with this bill.

In the few moments that I have to speak in support of this bill, I would like to allude to what we have imparted and to what I have imparted during the fall campaign and what I have imparted since that time, time and time again here in the House and in committee, and that is that we do need accountability. With Bill 18, accountability will be front and centre. For example, it'll match very closely to that which we had talked about as we went out around this province with Bill 8, the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act, when we talked about accountability. We talked about accountability agreements and we talked about Ontarians wanting a government that will be held accountable. They want agencies, departments and the like in public Ontario to also be accountable for what they do and for the money they spend.

With Bill 18, we are working through amendment to open up government and its related departments and agencies, to bring the voice of Ontarians to Queen's Park. I was elected to represent my riding here at Queen's Park and I'm doing that to the best of my ability, but I do know that when I campaigned, the words "accountability" and "Make sure that our tax dollars are spent wisely," were in the minds and on the lips of those people I met going door to door and those people I've talked to since. They have spoken to us in pre-budget town halls and what not. They continue to speak to us, and we will

continue to listen to them through that dialogue. They are talking about a government and departments and agencies that are transparent, responsible and accountable. We know that transparency and accountability are the best safeguards of public service, and I hope to outline this in my presentation here in the few minutes that I have.

Not only will this bill change the language of amendment, as an example, and it was outlined that the auditor would now become the Auditor General, but it will expand the authority of the provincial Auditor General to provide value-for-money audits, as was explained by the minister, something that Ontarians have been saying to us, especially after seeing the concerns with value for money at the national and provincial levels during the past number of years and months.

For example, last spring—and this, once again, was outlined by many of my constituents as I went from door to door—Ontarians and constituents expressed loudly and clearly their concern with the great waste of taxpayers' money by the former government when a budget was delivered outside the confines of Queen's Park. They were annoyed. That was expressed very clearly. It was expressed in letters to the editor and in the pre-budget public town halls that I had. They saw, when speaking of value for money, a government wasting taxpayers' money outside the House when a perfectly fine forum was in place in this House.

They support what we are doing, they support what Bill 18 stands for, and they support the idea that we have a government that will look after and will put in place and publicly make the expressions that their money is being spent wisely. They witnessed these important tax dollars being wasted. With the money that was wasted just in that situation, think of the number of textbooks that could have been purchased for schools in our ridings. Think of the number of different medical items that could have been purchased for hospitals and what not, from the money that was wasted. That's what this bill is going to do. It's going to give the Auditor General that chance to look at the books, examine the books, and make sure that the money is being spent wisely.

Accountability is what Ontarians want. Ontarians will have an Auditor General who will have the power to scrutinize the spending of not just the Ontario government but also all of its crown corporations and transfer partners. This bill will allow the Auditor General to audit the hydro companies and all related organizations. We know that Ontarians would surely love to see this.

The Minister of Energy, with full-scope value-for-money audits in place, should never have to face what our energy minister has faced in recent months and what my seatmate, the honourable member from Etobicoke Centre, as the parliamentary assistant has faced during the past few months, where Ontarians have been disgusted at what has been divulged and what has been opened, to the extent that it has been. But they want to see more. I think that the Auditor General will have that chance, and will have that authority, to deliver more. I look forward to that.

There's something else that I would like to say. It has been a rite of spring for some time now that hospital administrators, school board directors and superintendents have had public scrutiny of their salaries. This, again, will be an opportunity that those other crown corporations and transfer partners, such as Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation, will also have that opportunity. Here in Ontario, we have that information, of employees and directors and what not, with their salaries being made public too. I think there is a lot that's going to be revealed in the books when this happens. I think it should happen.

We will have checks and balances. We will have regard to economies and efficiencies in the departments that I just alluded to. That's what Bill 18 is all about. There must be procedures in place to measure and report on the effectiveness of programs. The Auditor General will be given this authority. Ontarians have wanted these assurances for a long time that public money is well spent.

This past weekend, I had the opportunity of going into our local college, St Lawrence College in Cornwall. I have been working very closely with the president and the CEO, president Volker Thomsen and CEO Pat Finucan, with regard to concerns and problems with that college. They, I am sure, are excited and very happy to see that the Auditor General will have this chance to go into the books. They certainly would not have anything to hide because they have expressed everything to me.

Do you want to know the greatest opportunity that I had to see where dollars and cents were spent? It was in the open house that the early childhood education program put on on Saturday morning. What an opportunity to see young, dynamic Ontarian students who were taking those dollars and making sure that in programs that weren't at the college—that had been in the past but had left for some years and are now back at the college—they are getting the best bang for the buck out of them. The directors of the program and the students were saying, "We need more. We need more."

1620

I think in needing more, what we will also need is to make sure those dollars that are already there are being spent wisely. Something that's going to happen here is that the Auditor General will be able to see that the public, and the public who are supported by those dollars, will speak loudly and clearly. They're doing it in public expression, as I saw on the weekend, and they will continue to do it as we move forward and get this bill passed in the House and the Auditor General has the responsibility to deliver.

I'm looking forward to this. I know that the senior who's sitting at 4 Gray Avenue in Long Sault in my constituency is looking forward to this and she's watching this afternoon. She's a senior, the mother of 12 children, and I'm number two on that list. She said to me when I got here, "Make sure that the government dollars are well spent." I'm here looking after her needs, after the needs of the constituents of Stormont-Dundas-

Charlottenburgh, of Ontarians, and I think the Auditor General is going to have the responsibilities that we want him or her to have.

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): It's a pleasure to be able to stand up in support of Bill 18 and my colleagues. I'd like to begin my discussion of Bill 18 with a little bit of history. A number of irregularities finally became apparent in the government's books after they had been hidden for many years. These findings made it necessary to use new and fundamental legislation to redefine the office and the person of the Provincial Auditor. These problems, including considerable inaccuracies in the public accounts, which I will speak to later, were so serious and so harmful to the province at large that they could be termed, and I will quote, "errors of grave nature." In fact, there were some indications that very serious incidents had occurred within the government treasury itself.

Clearly, the Provincial Auditor needed more independence from the government as well as a more solid mandate for working on behalf of the public to keep government honest. Government needed to view the public's main watchdog in an entirely different and far more respectful light.

There was a situation in 1885 that led to the introduction of the Audit Act, 1886. That act established a Provincial Auditor who could be independent of the treasury department. I believe that Bill 18, before us now, is the modern-day equivalent of that legislation that was passed 118 years ago. Bill 18 redefines the role and the person of the auditor to make them more relevant to today's environment and to the scope of government spending. In fact, in 1886 our budget was \$3 million. Today it's \$75 billion, including a very large deficit that was bequeathed to us by, shall we say, more recent history.

The major new provisions of Bill 18 will expand the capacities of the auditor and our respect for that auditor and for the position. It will rename the Provincial Auditor as our Auditor General. With few exceptions, most of the government auditors throughout the world carry the title of Auditor General. I would imagine our auditor has dealings with counterparts in other countries, and this renaming will give him or her at least in part an equal footing in terms of respect, as well as the office. As well, the title of Auditor General has a domestic cachet that inspires, as I indicated before, the respect the auditor truly deserves.

The title of Audit Act is changed to the Auditor General Act. The Auditor General can examine accounting records relating to reviewable grants directly or indirectly received by municipalities.

The Auditor General will now conduct special audits of grant recipients other than municipalities and of crown-controlled corporations and their subsidiaries. Under the current Audit Act, the Provincial Auditor may carry out only limited scopes of audits of grant recipient organizations. The scope of a special audit is specified and obstruction of a special audit is prohibited. There is

an updated description of the scope of the opinion that the Auditor General is required to give about the financial statements of Ontario.

Bill 18 changes the act to govern the collection, use and disclosure of personal information by the Auditor General. There is a new prohibition on the disclosure of information and documents that are subject to specific types of privilege unless the privilege holder consents.

These new additions to the act are in keeping with new concepts for the protection of privacy in general.

Bill 18, in combination with Bill 25, the banning of partisan advertising and other actions by our government, constitutes yet another fulfillment of our campaign promise. These activities will contribute greatly to the accountability and transparency of the government of Ontario.

On a more practical level, Bill 18 will help ensure that organizations across the broad public sector deliver more value for money, as my colleague indicated. Let me remind you that 50% of total government spending or expenditures go directly to broader public service and to organizations. The Provincial Auditor will have the power to fully scrutinize public sector organizations such as hospitals, school boards, colleges and universities so that the people of Ontario can be assured their tax dollars are spent, and spent wisely.

As the former chair of a board, I can tell you that I often wished for the opportunity for the auditor to come into the school board to audit those books in a very public and accountable way. With my personal experience as a school trustee, I can tell you that our public bodies need the kind of oversight only an experienced professional auditor can bring. I can also tell you that the pressure to spend the public's money unwisely as much as wisely is almost overwhelming, because often you have to spend it or lose it.

By giving the Auditor General the right to investigate spending by crown-controlled corporations and transfer partners, trustees, board members and executives, they will be much less tempted to let their personal feelings indicate spending priorities, amounts and recipients. Clearly, expanding the powers of the Auditor General will affect the thinking at Ontario Power Generation and related energy public bodies, and frankly we welcome the help of an untethered, fully enabled Auditor General to remove any temptation from these companies to waste the public's money.

The best reason to expand the scope of the auditor is contained in his latest report. Just this year he revealed the following. The Tory government failed to address a serious backlog in the court system. The Ontario Court of Justice has the highest backlog of criminal cases in 10 years. They allowed \$60 million in fines to go unpaid. The auditor found 150 types of security risks at Ontario courthouses, including unauthorized weapons, assault, vandalism and theft. Deadbeat parents are \$1.3 billion behind in their court-ordered child support payments.

At the Family Responsibility Office, caseloads per worker are too high—600 to 1,700, versus 400 for

Quebec and 335 for Alberta—and 90% of all calls to the call centre get a busy signal and require repeated phone calls. In some cases the follow-up doesn't happen for a year, and it takes an average of 3.5 years to complete a case.

Some 95% of inspection resources are spent on video retailers, which received a total of eight complaints, while there have only been nine inspectors of debt collectors despite 4,108 consumer complaints.

The economic development ministry spent over \$4.3 billion without a strategic plan. The strategic skills initiative spent 75% of its money on construction equipment instead of skills training. The ministry wasted money on untendered contracts and expensive trips. The auditor found that the PCs doled out over \$1 billion of the innovation trust fund without ministry or legislative oversight, a plan, or even cabinet approval.

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Some 27% of waterworks did not submit the minimum number of samples to test for E coli or fecal coliforms. Three hundred non-municipal waterworks have never submitted a test at all. Water inspectors visited only 54 of 357 private water treatment plants and 44 of 1,119 smaller plants in designated facilities. Total inspection activity is at 63% of the 1995-96 levels.

There are eight boards of health without a full-time medical officer of health. Public health departments, 100% funded by the province, receive the same amount of funding as they did in 1991. None of the province's public health units conduct all necessary inspections of food preparers to avoid food-borne diseases, and 14% of children have not received all of their vaccinations by the age of seven.

We already have taken steps to rein in on why spending has been allowed to go on for years before the present government took control. Last fall, we introduced the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Amendment Act, 2003, to require Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation and their subsidiaries to disclose employees who earned \$100,000 or more. Now the Auditor General will have a stronger hand in seeing that we get value for our money when we pay these kinds of salaries.

Ontario citizens have the right to know how governments spend their hard-earned tax dollars. Governments in general believed that in 1886, when they named their first Auditor General, and throughout history, and we believe it today. Unfortunately, some individual governments had wandered from this concept.

We do believe in democracy. It must be increasingly more relevant, more apparent, more transparent and more accessible to our people. We do believe in this relevancy and accessibility, and we rest on the knowledge that people will feel better about their government when they know they are dealing with people who are transparent.

The Auditor General's office holds the key to much of that knowledge, and we have made the key fit the door that the former government had held quite closed. Bill 18 is no less an important component of our plan for the most ambitious democratic renewal in Ontario's history.

We are answering the repeated requests of the standing committee on public accounts to expand the powers of the Provincial Auditor to improve accountability of public organizations. We are responding to the demands of the public, who want more with regard to their economy and to the efficiency in the spending of their tax dollars. And we are taking appropriate procedures to measure and report on the effectiveness of programs that will make this province work so much harder and so much better in the future.

I cannot believe there is anybody in this House who doesn't stand for accountability. I know that when I knocked on the doors in my constituency, the seniors in particular would say, "I ask you to spend my money but to spend it wisely, to let me know what you're spending it on and to measure it, please, for its effectiveness."

That really isn't very difficult to ask, and it's certainly, as well, within the realm and the responsibility of this particular government to respond to. It is an important and integral part of this party's platform as we follow through on the promises and commitments that we have decided to make on behalf of the people who elected us to this Legislature.

So I wholeheartedly support the proposed Bill 18, and I understand that there will be additional speakers to this bill.

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): The people of Ontario sometimes have a hard time keeping up with all the different levels of government and how they operate. There are many of us in this Legislature who have had experience—as the member from Etobicoke Centre has, she's been a very involved trustee at the local Toronto school board and, I think, the Etobicoke school board. I mention that because the ordinary citizen assumes there is a very detailed oversight of all expenditures at every level of government, whether municipal, provincial or federal. I know that my experience at the local level and coming to the provincial level is that there's a certain gap in terms of oversight.

I can recall sitting in opposition—in fact, I sat on the public accounts committee—trying to find out how government at the provincial level approved expenditures. I remember inquiring about certain massive expenditures and essentially being told those are not dealt with in the House, they're not dealt with at this committee, they're dealt with in another ministry or dealt with at estimates. There was always a reason we couldn't deal with an expenditure item here on the floor of the Legislature. The assumption that there's line-by-line scrutiny is a vast stretch. That's why I think the public would be pleased if they understood that Bill 18 is really being put forward in terms of trying to bring more oversight to provincial expenditures.

We must remember that almost 80% of the monies the province raises are transferred to different partners; for instance, hospitals, school boards and other agencies. So there is a desire—I remember John Gerretsen, the member from Kingston and the Islands, saying for a number of years that there should be an expansion of the

Provincial Auditor's role. He thought it would be beneficial for the taxpayer, in terms of his or her knowledge, but also beneficial for elected officials, the MPPs, trying to follow the money trail as it left the Ministry of Finance and went off to various municipal partners and crown corporations, so we knew we were getting value for money.

It's all about trying to ensure that money that's very difficult to raise—as we well know, it's difficult to get people to accept taxes in the first place, but it is extremely difficult to levy these taxes, collect them and then not really be able to account for them. Bill 18, in essence, gives greater power and authority to the Provincial Auditor so that he or she can follow the money trail. That's what it's about.

I've had people ask me, "Ontario Power Generation spent \$3 billion supposedly trying to fix Pickering. They didn't fix it. What did they do with \$3 billion?" I get asked that question as an MPP, and I think members on the opposite side get asked the same question. I'm sure, whether they sat in the government on that side or in the government on this side now, it's difficult to answer. In other words, how could we not ask for an accounting of the \$3 billion spent? In part, they brought in the four consultants, the American dream team, who got paid \$40 million to spend \$3 billion. They didn't fix the problem, and we don't really know where the money went. It's not meant to be a partisan comment. It's just a question that is legitimately asked by ordinary Ontarians: "Don't you, as elected officials, follow that kind of expenditure?"

We are being asked how the Ministry of Education spends its money. Where does it go? Who can follow the money from the Ministry of Finance? Who allocates money to the various boards across the province or to colleges and universities? How was the money spent? Was it spent wisely? Frankly, we didn't really have a solid case to defend the expenditures, because our Provincial Auditor—and the number one watchdog of our expenditures is our auditor—could not go to the colleges or universities or municipal partners or crown corporations like Ontario Hydro or Ontario Power Generation and ask to look at their books. He couldn't do that.

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We're not talking about a minor expenditure. We're talking about landmark expenditures in our hospitals, in the health care field, to our municipal transfer partners and in hydro—OPG, Hydro One etc. We thought there would be checks and balances when we first came to this place, but in essence there are not enough checks and balances. Bill 18 is putting forward a very strategic use of one of the best departments in this Legislature, and that is the Office of the Provincial Auditor, who operates independently and reports to the Legislature. He does not report, nor is he accountable, to the government. He is accountable, through his annual report, only to the Legislature, and therefore is directly accountable to the people of Ontario.

Like many wonderful things we have in the British parliamentary system, the Office of the Provincial

Auditor is one of the most valuable offices we have here in the Ontario Legislature. The independence and objective oversight that office has are for the benefit of the people paying the taxes and to ensure that the money is well spent.

Up to this point, there were too many parts of government that were off limits to the Provincial Auditor. In other words, the Provincial Auditor could not go to Ontario Hydro, nor could he go to the various hospitals that spend billions of dollars, to see where and how effectively the money was spent.

We know that over past years the Provincial Auditor has done an amazing job in bringing to light essential weaknesses in our expenditure controls. We have seen it time and time again. I can remember the Provincial Auditor questioning the financing of and the whole process of selling off 407. He was the first one to red flag that. He said, "Is this an appropriate way of selling off a government asset?"

I remember him doing a report on the Family Responsibility Office and on our court system. It doesn't matter what area of government, the Provincial Auditor in past years has gone into these areas under provincial jurisdiction and written reports, and the annual report, which are available for the public to view and question, for the opposition to raise and for the media to expose. I think it's a very healthy part of our Parliament here in Ontario.

Like many things we have in this crazy thing called democracy, it's sometimes taken for granted. I think it's even better than the American system. You have this independent person who is directly responsible to the Legislature. I think they have the office of the Comptroller General in the United States, which is a little different. The Provincial Auditor is an office that I think is well worth every cent and every dollar we pay that person and all the people who work with the Provincial Auditor.

This act, for the first time in this province, significantly increases the scope and parameters of this office. This is a benchmark piece of legislation. I know people watching at home will say, "Well, here's another piece of legislation. The MPPs are up there talking about more legislation." Bill 18 is almost what I would call safety legislation. It's for the protection of the people of Ontario that money is not going to be squandered or sometimes not spent. It's not as if they're doing it deliberately; there just isn't someone giving a second objective opinion on how money is expended in another department of government.

I think many of the ministries sometimes welcome the fact that the Provincial Auditor comes in and not only suggests improvements but has solutions for them. It is a very important role, not only to criticize and point a finger at the ministry and say, "You shouldn't have spent that money that way and you spent too much," but also to make recommendations on how to get better value for dollars. Then they also indicate in the provincial report that the Provincial Auditor will return the following year to see if there has been any progress or success.

It is, again, one of the unheralded parts of government that doesn't get much profile. It usually gets one or two days of profile when the Provincial Auditor's report is tabled and, depending on how damning it is, it gets more media or less media. But it is an ongoing job of this Provincial Auditor to scrutinize, to give objective analysis and to do a value-for-money audit on the expenditure of billions of dollars. We cannot afford in this province to have any money improperly spent, and by that I mean money that perhaps could have been better focused in a certain area or more strategically used. We can't miss those opportunities. We've got to make sure that the money is targeted to where it can do the most good.

That's why in this government, too, we're also talking about outcome-based, results-based budgeting. If there is money being spent in a ministry, or now in some of these crown corporations, we want to make sure that those crown corporations are getting good outcomes. By that I mean, is there better service for that city in Ontario, better service for the students in our colleges or universities? Is there duplication or overlap? These kinds of comments will be priceless, I think, as the Provincial Auditor goes into these new areas, which, again, up until this point—and if this bill passes—were behind the curtain. They were off limits. The Provincial Auditor was not allowed to trespass into those hallowed halls of the universities or colleges or hospitals.

It's not being done to penalize our colleges or universities or hospitals. In essence, it is an opportunity to get a second opinion, to get a group of professional auditors who have experience in government to go in and compare apples to apples, to ensure that those investments of taxpayers' dollars bring the greatest result for the greatest benefit to the people of Ontario. We know there are not always going to be glowing reports about our ministries, as there were about ministries of the previous government, but at least at the end of the day we can all say that the Provincial Auditor's intentions were good and the Provincial Auditor was right in bringing attention to that kind of expenditure, or lack of proper expenditure, and we agree, whether we are in the opposition or in the government, it was money well spent.

That's why in Bill 18 we are going to give that Provincial Auditor, whose name we are now going to change to the Auditor General, the ability to scrutinize crown corporations, colleges and universities and some of our municipal agencies for the first time. Just to give you an example of how thorough this is, for instance, the Provincial Auditor under this act will have free access to records, all books, accounts, financial records, electronic data, processing records, reports, files, all papers and things on property belonging to or used by a ministry, an agency of the crown, a crown-controlled corporation or grant recipient. So the auditor will have unfettered access to all papers, books and documents.

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The Provincial Auditor will also have the power to examine under oath any person on any matter pertinent to

an audit or an examination under the act. That is significant power we are giving the Provincial Auditor. That Provincial Auditor can go to the university, college, hospital and can ask for an interview under oath. I don't think many of us realize that the Provincial Auditor had that power.

Also, for the purpose of exercising powers or performing duties under this act, the Auditor General may station one or more members of the office of the Auditor General in any ministry of the public service, agency of the crown or crown-controlled corporation. This is another useful tool. In other words, the Provincial Auditor doesn't just go in there for a day and say, "We want to see your books." The Provincial Auditor can designate members of his or her staff to stay in that ministry or crown corporation to get a fuller understanding and grasp of the operations of that crown corporation so that they can have a full, comprehensive appreciation of the intricacies of that operation as it is in that crown corporation or ministry. So they can have someone appointed to remain there to get a thorough understanding before they make a recommendation. It's not a hit-and-run, in-and-out type of audit which would not do service—

Mr Marchese: Thorough.

Mr Colle: Very thorough, as my colleague for Trinity-Spadina says. He wants to go in there to have a very thorough organizational view.

Another very important power that the Provincial Auditor has under this act is that no person shall obstruct the Auditor General or any member of the office of the Auditor General in the performance of a special audit. No person can destroy any books, accounts, financial records, electronic data—anything that's relevant must be kept intact so there's no way they can avoid laying all the data in front of the Provincial Auditor.

These are very necessary powers that go a long way in expanding the office of the Provincial Auditor. In the long run, by going into these crown corporations, we'll hopefully avoid some of the questionable expenditures in the past in some crown corporations or funding partners, and put them on guard too that all of us are under scrutiny. All of the ministries have been under scrutiny in the past. Whether it be the Ministry of Health or Ministry of Tourism, all ministries were subject. But now it's not only the Ministry of Transportation that has to be cognizant of the Provincial Auditor coming in, it's also now the presidents of colleges and universities and the hospital boards. They have to understand that they will all be subject to scrutiny. Not for the purpose of, as I said, vilifying or scapegoating, but for the purpose of ensuring that there are uniform standards of expenditures that are transparent and result in the best outcome possible, not for us so much as legislators, but for the 12 million people of Ontario who want to see their tax dollars—which are hard to come by—spent properly and wisely.

We've got before us a very significant piece of legislation which will not make the headlines in the major newspapers and it won't be the topic of late-night

talk shows or talk radio, but this is preventive medicine. What is the old saying in Leamington about an ounce of prevention—if you drink that much tomato juice you'll be able to avoid the doctor? "A tomato a day will keep the doctor away." That's what they say in Leamington. This is prevention. This is inoculation against monies—and as I've said, we're talking about massive expenditures of dollars that we transfer to our partners. We are going to use the Provincial Auditor to follow the money trail to ensure that everyone is using the same benchmarks, the same proper accounting practices and the same approach to ensuring that the people of Ontario will say, "That was money well spent. I won't agree with all the money that was spent, but at least it was money well spent because I have faith in the Provincial Auditor"—as, I think, most Ontarians have—"that there's someone acting as a watchdog." None of us in this chamber—never mind an ordinary citizen who's trying to make a living working, trying to raise a child, trying to take care of their elderly parents—has time to monitor \$75 billion of provincial expenditures. We can't do it.

That's why we need a watchdog of our money, like a Provincial Auditor, who in essence is someone we entrust with a very important role. We trust that job, and the Provincial Auditor, to ensure that every aspect of government is subject to scrutiny on a regular basis. As I said, it's a scrutiny that continues with benchmarks and reports that I think are very useful for us as legislators, even very useful for the ministries involved and, hopefully, the crown corporations involved.

This is really a bill, as I've said—I'll call it the bill for protection of the tax dollar. It's really a protection for the 12 million Ontarians who want to see their dollars spent wisely. I hope we will get unanimous consent on this bill. I don't think there's anybody on either side of the House who doesn't believe there should be expanded oversight over all of these billions of dollars that we spend.

I'm confident that the Provincial Auditor, given this expanded role, will in essence do the hard work required so that the taxes paid will be spent wisely and prudently for the good of all Ontarians. I think Bill 18, again, is a positive step. It's a benchmark piece of legislation, that I hope we can all support. It's good legislation, and I would hope you'll all support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to be able to rise and make a few comments on the lead-off speech by the minister and all of his colleagues on the Liberal side. I look forward to this debate, especially when the House is as warm as it is today. We know there's a lot of warm weather coming up in the next few weeks. It should be very interesting to debate a lot of these types of bills.

We've been referring to this bill as the Sheila Fraser act, simply because it brings out a lot of points that we've seen Paul Martin suffer at the hands of some of the Sheila Fraser report that came out and condemned many of the things that Mr Martin and Mr Chrétien had accomplished in the last 10 years.

I think what's important is that there's nobody, I don't think, in any political party that doesn't want to see more transparency in government. That's why I believe it will get a lot of support. I would suspect that in the end all three parties will support creating the position of Auditor General, I'm assuming after Mrs Fraser. I think for that reason, we on this side of the House will probably support that in the end.

However, we do look forward to all the debate that will take place on this. Obviously a lot of things have to be corrected, some of the things about partisan advertising. It's amazing when someone talks about the millions of dollars spent on partisan advertising by the previous government, yet if you go back through the NDP, through the Peterson government, through the Harris government, the same amounts of money, in perspective, have been spent on government advertising, plain and simple.

You're doing it already. Look at your Trillium hand-out, from the Trillium board. In the last copy I saw, there were eight pictures of members of the Liberal Party in the Trillium book. Plain and simple as that.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: No NDP members, no Conservative members, but eight Liberal members. I look forward to further debate on this.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The member from Trinity-Spadina.

Mr Marchese: Spadina. Trinity-Spadina.

The Deputy Speaker: That's what I said.

Mr Marchese: That's what you said. I was just repeating it, in case. I have every reason to believe that all of the New Democrats will support this bill. I haven't caucused with them, but I have every reason to believe that we will be supporting it. The whole issue of transparency is important to taxpayers and citizens alike. We all want accountability in terms of where public dollars are being spent. So in this respect, there's no reason to think that anybody would be opposing such a bill.

Here is a question we pose to you: This individual has expanded powers, beyond that which he or she had in the past. We now know that they will be able to do audits of hospitals, school boards, universities, colleges and crown corporations such as Hydro One and OPG. This leads me to believe that the expanded powers give more burden and greater responsibility to the Auditor General and his or her staff, and therefore it would seem to me that that individual could use a couple of bucks.

1700

There is nothing in the bill or in this discussion that makes me believe that you folks have thought about this, or if you did, none of you articulated the need to put in a couple of dollars for this office. I would assume you would agree with me that if he is going to have these expanded powers, with all these additional responsibilities, then the money should follow. Mike, I know you said you can't put it in the bill, but I didn't hear any one of the five speakers—because I think there were four or five—say, "Money will follow. Don't you worry." Make me believe that.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I am very happy to speak to this, to the Minister of Finance and his comments, to his parliamentary assistant and my colleagues. My comments have to do with the fact that I grew up in a family of auditors. My father is a chartered accountant, and beyond that, he's a certified fraud examiner. He's one of these people who actually goes into the court as an expert, whom the courts rely upon to tell about fraud.

One of the things we've looked at is that you have a situation where there is a difference between what's known as a quantitative audit and a qualitative audit. A quantitative, as you know, is whether the credits and the debits add up: Is there any money missing? But it doesn't answer the question, how was the money spent? Was it spent well? Was it spent to achieve the result that was requested or was it wasted?

We have audits with all of our transfer partners. When we send 80% of the money that we have to spend out to school boards, hospitals, universities and colleges, we merely ask, is the money missing? "We gave you the money. Did you spend it?" We don't have the ability, until we pass this act, to ask the question, are we getting value for that money? When you put in quantitative audits, what you get is people knowing, "Don't steal the money. Someone is checking. Someone is checking to make sure that at the end of the project it all adds up. Don't even think about stealing the money."

But now we need to progress. As the member for Etobicoke Centre said, we haven't reformed this act since the 1800s. We need to go into the modern age. The modern age says that we have to ask that question, are we getting value? The mere fact that we can ask that question will raise the standards and send a message to all of our transfer partners that, "Now you are accountable for the value for the money that you receive from taxpayers." That's why I am very pleased to support this act and I'm encouraged that other parties will support this act as well.

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak on Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor. I very much appreciate the comments. When you read the bill, there are a couple of areas of concern that I hope we'll be able to find out about, possibly through the committee process.

Under subsection 4(1): "The term of office of the Auditor General is 10 years and a person is not eligible to be appointed to more than one term of office." In 4(2) it says: "The Auditor General continues to hold office after the expiry of his or her term...."

If I was in government and didn't want a new person after 10 years, I just wouldn't appoint a new one. Effectively, what somebody could do is extend that time as long as they wanted to so that the same individual could retain that time. I think some timelines need to be in there that within a period of time he has to be replaced. Otherwise, some governments could continue on with the same individual if they desired. Well, that's up to the government of the day.

The other one is 9.1(1), where it speaks of "a reviewable grant received." What is a reviewable grant in order

to be looked at? What is the process to initiate a review of that grant? I think some of this stuff comes out, as members will find out, through the regulation process. These are just some of the things I think we would like to find out about. "On or after April 1, 2005, the Auditor General may conduct a special audit of a grant recipient with respect to a reviewable grant received...." What is the process to start that? Can the public at large come forward and say they'd like to have this reviewed? Is there a process to go through that? Hopefully the government members may be able to enlighten us on what the intent is in that area as well.

The municipalities were also mentioned. I wasn't sure I caught the full remarks on that, but it says in subsection 9.1(2), "Subsection (1) does not apply with respect to a grant recipient that is a municipality," and then when you get down to 9.2(1), "The Auditor General may examine accounting records relating to a reviewable grant received directly or indirectly by a municipality." What's the intent there and how would it unfold? Hopefully the members will let us know that.

The Deputy Speaker: Reply to the questions and comments?

Mr Colle: I want to thank the member from Oshawa for those comments. Staff have already started looking at those. I think as we go through this bill, those are the kinds of questions we've got to clear up. I also want to thank Mr Wilkinson, the member from Perth-Middlesex, "the agricultural capital of Canada," he calls it. Maybe we should call this the Wilf Wilkinson Memorial Act, since his father was a famous auditor from Belleville. They called him the "Belleville auditor." I also want to thank my colleague from Trinity-Spadina.

This bill is quite valuable to all of us, as I think the comments have noted. If we can make this bill work, it's going to bring a lot more credibility, not only to the Legislature and how we spend money, but also to all our transfer partners. At first, there was reluctance to do it. I remember the origins of this when, as I said, the member for Kingston and the Islands, who was chairman of the public accounts committee, would constantly ask in opposition that this kind of legislation be brought forward. We made that commitment in our platform, we made that commitment in opposition, and we are now bringing Bill 18 forward because it is sound, it is what is needed, and I think in the long run the public of Ontario will be better served if there's this wider power to the Provincial Auditor.

As the member from Trinity-Spadina said, there is an issue of resources here, that taking on more tasks will certainly involve appropriate resources, and we're cognizant of that. But in essence I think there's agreement that the functions of the Provincial Auditor are worthwhile functions that we need to invest in, and this bill, for the first time in decades, expands the role of a very important office, the Provincial Auditor.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise on behalf of the opposition party, and I

should alert you that I will be sharing some of the time with various members of our caucus who will have the courage to stand and speak to this very important bill.

I think the member from Simcoe North said it best: It's called the Sheila Fraser Act. That should ring some sense of fear into the Minister of Finance who, as we all know, is potentially under investigation, just prior to getting to present the first budget in the province of Ontario—under a cloud, I might say, but I won't go down that road. I'll just say that the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, is here today. I was pleased he responded to the member from Oshawa, who raised a couple of very good points, I might say. In fact, they're points that are intended to be part of my remarks this afternoon, however brief they might be.

I looked at this bill, and I'm going to go at it in sort of—it's not really that large. For those viewing this afternoon, it's 12 pages. Half of it's French, so that means it's six pages and, of that, there are two full pages of scheduled agencies. So it really comes down to about three or four pages, pretty much general wording, changing the name from the Provincial Auditor to the Auditor General, and giving him authorities that everyone in the House would agree with.

In fact, in some ways it's a compliment to me personally—and I don't want to take this—because I did serve, as Mr Colle would know, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance for a couple of years, and take great interest in this topic. In fact, it was on December 3, 2002, that I introduced Bill 218. It was a private member's bill because, having been in the ministry and listened in public accounts, as well as on the finance and economic affairs committee, which I am still on, I introduced this bill entitled An Act to amend the Audit Act to insure greater accountability of hospitals, universities and colleges, municipalities and other organizations which receive grants or other transfer payments from the government or agencies of the Crown.

1710

In fact, when I reviewed and parallel these two bills, the current bill that we're debating, Bill 18, and my own bill, basically the title on my bill is a little bit longer, more specific, but I thank Minister Sorbara for respecting the hard work that I and my caucus at that time did to bring accountability.

In fact, I have some remarks on the former Provincial Auditor, Mr Peters, for whom I had a lot of regard and, I would say, considerable respect. I'm going to introduce this and try to see if those listening today can sort out the explanatory notes, mine or theirs, and see if there is any difference.

"The bill will amend the Audit Act to enable the Provincial Auditor to have access to the financial records of crown agencies, grant recipients and crown-controlled corporations. The auditor is authorized to audit the financial statements of grant recipients. It is an offence to obstruct the auditor in the performance of the audit. The auditor is allowed to examine people under oath. The

auditor is required to keep information confidential that comes to the auditor's attention while performing the duties under the act."

That's just the preliminary. Here's another one; it's another bill. For the viewers here, we're not all chartered accountants, but I think we have to have oversight on public expenditures. No one would disagree with that at all. I think for the general public it's interesting to understand that there's about a \$70-billion-plus budget, and of that \$70 billion, I would say about \$60 billion is transferred to the partners that are mentioned that will be under this audit. Those partners would be municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals, often referred to as the MUSH sector. It will extend to crown corporations, which would include OPG, Hydro One—the whole energy sector would be subject to this in terms of those public sectors.

The explanatory note in another bill I'm reading here should be somewhat common:

"The Audit Act is amended to change the title of the Provincial Auditor to Auditor General and to make corresponding changes to the title of the Assistant Provincial Auditor and the name of the Office of the Provincial Auditor." These are basically mechanical things that they're doing. There is one section here, as I start to move into this, and the member for Oshawa mentioned this as well:

"Section 4 of the act is ... to specify the term of office of the Auditor General is 10 years. A person is not eligible to be reappointed." I would like clarification of reappointment within the term, because there are some other sections here that would allow the auditor to be suspended, which raises the question of the independence of the auditor. I think there needs to be some further work done on this bill. I hope that it would be sent to committee.

"The new section 9.1 of the act authorizes the Auditor General to conduct special audits of grant recipients, other than municipalities"—that was raised by the member for Oshawa—"and of crown ... corporations and ... subsidiaries. The expressions 'grant recipient' and 'special audit' are defined in ... section 1 of the act."

All this is to say that there is no one on any side of the House who doesn't want complete accountability and transparency. So my sentiments in remarks from the opposition are that we for a long time—not just the fact that I introduced this, and I'm going to repeat it, back on December 3, 2002, and now again the bill, as I've demonstrated, is almost a word-for-word lift. I thank legislative counsel for the advice they gave me and for the fact that we followed it—in fact, I would say that even in the public audits you would see that much of the advice given by the auditor during the auditor's annual report while we were in government—it was clear that we were very supportive of many of the recommendations he made. I think the member for Trinity-Spadina outlined it earlier, when he asked the question of the minister or his parliamentary assistant, "Where's the money?" Quite honestly, they're creating not just a new

name for the office and the new roles and the much broader expanding mandate, but where is the money? We will be looking carefully.

The Minister of Finance announced today that the budget would be on May 18, which is good. I think technically we will be waiting to see if there is any money. In fact, I will also be looking at it from my own audit perspective, as is my duty, to see if any of the 230 promises are fulfilled: the 8,000 nurses; a maximum of 20 students in classes in schools; or perhaps they will roll back the toll on the 407; or maybe they will reduce auto insurance. In fairness, I doubt it. They haven't enacted any of those.

In fact, the member from Whitby-Ajax asked a question of the Minister of Finance today, and I didn't feel satisfied by the answer. I'd like to refer that question directly to the auditor. Would that be allowed under this bill? Could members, who are completely blocked from any kind of reasonable answer, follow up with the auditor directly from this House? I'm looking at members and ministers in the House today.

I know there was an announcement last week by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. I've had it from my college president, it's in the press, it's in the media: It's not enough. They've put a freeze on tuition for two years, which is good, but that reduces the revenue to the colleges and universities and it reduces the money for our students. I put it to you that there will be fewer classes and there will be more in the classes. That's what will happen. I can tell you as sure as I'm standing here that they've really introduced larger class for the colleges and fewer specialty classes.

The problem I find throughout most of this is that the accountability must be extended. In fact, I think members of the opposition and certainly the critics of those particular ministries must be able to refer unanswered questions in this House—whether it's the tolls on the 407 or whatever—to the auditor, to specifically direct their actions. I put that on the floor here today. Hopefully there will be responses to it.

I'm going to start driving a small bit further down into the detail. This is the Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review that was presented here by Mr Sorbara earlier in the year. I just want to get a couple of things on the record. On page 8 of Mr Sorbara's document—I'm reading his own document here—he says this “must be our watchword as we begin to redesign government.” This is under the title “Restraint.” It goes on to say, “So we're asking our partners in health care, in education and in the rest of the broader public sector to temper their requests for more.” I think that's a very clear signal of predetermining the outcome of fair collective negotiations.

It goes on to say, under “Redesigning Government,” in the minister's own words, “In education, for example, we need stronger student achievement in numeracy and literacy. We need to reduce our health care waiting lists and we need to improve our air quality.”

There are a number of commitments there, not just the 230 promises—I'm trying to stay focused here. I'm

wondering if we can audit that. That would be a good place to start. We're all here. We go to the people, we lay out our platform, and I am of the view that this is an issue before all parties here today. I'd like to have all the platforms costed and put to the people honestly, because today's public are much more informed, and I think much more engaged, than in years gone by.

This is in response to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, the pre-budget consultation process. I'd be happy to supply copies of any of these documents I refer to and quote from to persons who want copies. Just call my constituency office or log on to the Web site and you will find out who I am and what I'm about, as well as listening to your concerns.

In the pre-budget consultations there were a number of things outlined that I think are important. There is a list of recommendations; for instance, “that the government keep its promise to tell taxpayers what specific improvements we expect from every new investment, and provide a value-for-money analysis for any program spending increases or new program investments.”

That sounds reasonable. That recommendation was turned down, voted down by the six members of the government, the Liberal caucus members. It was under that whole shadow of “Were they listening?” that the 49 recommendations, almost exclusively, were turned down—almost all.

1720

For instance, we had a very respectful presentation in Niagara Falls. The member from Erie-Lincoln, Mr Hudak, was there. I commend him on the record here today. He stood and presented a very valid argument. This is recommendation number 39. I'm going to read it. He drafted it, I believe:

“That the requests from the Sherkston Shores campground for the introduction of a tag/sticker program on recreational vehicles and the Minister of Finance to stop the current policy of assessment be referred to all affected municipalities, especially the city of Sarnia, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, MPAC and the Ministry of Finance for their comments; and

“That these comments be forwarded to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs for consideration.”

This just brings me to one point that I really want to put on the record here: MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp, is another corporation—

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): You formed it. You wrote the rules.

Mr O'Toole: You're the government now.

There's a presentation from John Holt from CLT Canada—and Marcel Beaubien, I might say, did a great deal of work in the whole area of assessment, trying to get it right.

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: They're barking; they're trying to shut me down. I'm trying to be as patient and respectful as possible, under some pressure.

MPAC would be a very good place to start the audit, I'd say immediately.

Interjection: Yesterday.

Mr O'Toole: We may be getting behind on that audit.

Again, I'm just drawing to your attention that these are recommendations to make the government more accountable. There was one section in here—I'm looking for it and I'll probably find it. This is with respect to Mr Peters's audit of the \$5.6 billion. I'm quoting from page 5 of the standing committee report:

"The report on the review of the 2003-04 fiscal outlook prepared by Mr Peters builds a case for a potential \$5.6-billion pressure on the province's finances, but there are several factors that must be considered at the same time. Firstly, Mr Peters clearly states in the introduction of his report that he 'carried out a review, which does not constitute an audit.'" The reason that the report does not constitute an audit is that Mr Peters was granted access to only a select amount of information, selected by the government, the McGuinty government. Under Bill 18, they will be in non-compliance with the bill for refusing to submit all the documents, a barrier to the auditor. Maybe we should go back and have a look. Is the bill strong enough? Does the bill go far enough? "Without complete access to all the government's financial information, it was impossible for Mr Peters to perform a complete analysis of the status of the provincial books."

If we had Sheila Fraser there—talk about the ad scandal.

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: The interim auditor is just that, interim, because Mr. Peters has left. I would make a recommendation here on the floor today that we hire Sheila Fraser. Let's get to the bottom of this thing now. Let's start and go forward.

Interjections.

Mr O'Toole: Secondly, for those listening, Mr Peters's report contains an opinion of the state of the province's finances at a point in time that he expresses. Here's a quote: "no opinion as to what the actual deficit for the year ending March 31 ... will be". There it is. That's the end of the quote. Those are very technically important details.

There's one other thing, in the short time I have left. I want to make sure that my good friend from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford has a chance because, as a practising lawyer—and Deputy Speaker, I might say—he hardly has enough time, sometimes, to fulfill all his duties outside of here. But he does want a lot of speaking time. You can usually catch him Thursday morning, if you're so interested in his legal interpretation. But you'll have to wait until Thursday.

The last validation—this is quite an important document. For those members that are paying attention—there are a few—this is a report of the office of the provincial controller, fiscal and financial policy division, Ministry of Finance. It was issued in January, 2004—rather current. I'm quoting from page 19:

"As in the private sector, public sector organizations are subject to independent audits. The government of Ontario relies on both internal and external audits. Internal audits work with the ministries to ensure that proper control of spending and other financial activities are followed as activities are planned and carried out." Here's the point: "The office of the Provincial Auditor acts as the external audit for government. In December 2003, the government tabled amendments to the Audit Act that would give the office wider powers, including value-for-money audits."

Really, that's what I want to get down to. It's fine for ministers to stand in their place and pontificate, whether it's on energy or health care. We heard today that many vulnerable people are being denied access to a life-saving treatment by the Minister of Health. A value-for-money audit would determine, whether it's a child with autism, if it is a value-for-money experiment. When the Attorney General, Michael Bryant, is in court denying people access to autism treatment—intensive behaviour; quite expensive. A value-for-money audit and those things, I think, are appropriate in those particular cases.

I do have a number of other points that I would like to make, but out of respect for my good friend and seatmate, Mr Tascona, who has been quite constant at nagging me to wrap up my time. So with that, there's much more to be said on Bill 18. I support it conceptually because it really does replicate—for the readers, they should get a copy of Bill 218. It was introduced by me on December 3, 2002. Thank you for your time, and good bill.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I am going to be speaking with a number of other colleagues. I really appreciate the member from Durham relinquishing the floor today. I would say that, as usual, he spoke to the point. He said he was only going to speak 10 minutes, but what's the extra half-hour?

Mr O'Toole: Let's have it audited.

Mr Tascona: It's already on the time. I don't think you have to audit it.

I want to speak on the bill. This bill has got a lot of different provisions that I think have to be addressed, perhaps with some amendments coming forth. One of the clauses, which is clause 12, the new article 9.1, limits the power of the Auditor General to begin work under this bill until after April 1, 2005. The date today is April 19, 2004. So the act is set up so that the auditor cannot go back farther than grants received after this bill comes in effect. What's happening is grants that are being given to these agencies, crown corporations and their subsidiaries, now and up to April 1, 2005, are not going to be subject to this act.

I would suggest very seriously that if this act is to have any substance at all, it should be amended to give the auditor the power to act immediately once this legislation is given royal assent, which in all likelihood could be given at any time, depending on how fast the government wants to put this bill forth. There were two bills last week when I was in the Chair that were given royal

assent. Bill 15 and Bill 47 were given royal assent last Thursday. So the government can move this bill along.

1730

Obviously it is a bill that has some merit. And certainly we are looking to give the auditor greater powers. As the member from Durham indicated, that's something he was looking for even last year, in terms of greater authority.

There's also the new section 10, which gives the Auditor General broad access to information and specifies that "disclosure to the Auditor General ... does not constitute a waiver of solicitor-client privilege, litigation privilege or settlement privilege." This section has to be explored in detail as to its effect on the use of the information given to the Auditor General.

There's also a new section 11.2, which deals with access of the Auditor General to information, and punishment if access is impeded or documents are destroyed. The question is, is the punishment outlined sufficiently severe, where we see that you have impeded access or documents have been destroyed?

There is also a new section 12, which outlines the content of reports of the Auditor General. We should question whether these statements are sufficiently broad, and do they allow for special reports?

There's also a new section 27, which deals with secrecy on behalf of the Auditor General employees who receive information. Section 27.1 deals with the issue of privileged information. The question is, how did these clauses affect the use of information given to the Auditor General?

The new section 27.2 deals with the protection of personal information which may be given to the Auditor General. The question is, are these protections sufficient? That's something that has to be looked at.

Now, the bill may be sufficient, as far as it goes, but it should be amended to give the Auditor General the power to begin operation under it immediately. I don't know why there's a delay until April 1, 2005. That's going to have to be explained by the minister responsible.

The question also is, what is the balance to be achieved between the protection of privacy and the use of information by the Auditor General?

Also, what resources will be dedicated to the Auditor General to ensure the ability of the office to carry out work under this act? That's something that's going to have to be dealt with.

But I want to refer, at this point in time, to the red book, as we'll call it, which was part of the election platform of the Liberals. It says, "Government that Works for You," and in that document there's a section that deals with "Accountable agencies and appointments." It states, "We will lift the veil of secrecy on government agencies and appointments. Major government agencies, boards and commissions are large and important bodies. Yet they operate with too little accountability to the people of Ontario."

Well, one of the major accountability issues—and I sit on the committee for agencies, boards and com-

missions—is when there are appointments to these agencies and boards of the government; and the one loophole that the government has decided not to close under the standing orders is where there's an interim appointment, which means it's not a full-time appointment and reappointments. Neither one of those comes before the agencies, boards and commissions committee. They bypass it, because if you do an interim appointment—the government has done a number of them, for example, under the Ontario Municipal Board and the Assessment Review Board, to name two; and also under the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corps boards—that's another one where they made an interim appointment. Neither one of those appointments went through our committee. And any reappointments will not go through this committee.

I think if the government wants accountability, if you're making appointments as the chairs and the head persons of those particular commissions, why wouldn't you allow the agencies, boards and commissions committee to at least interview these individuals? I've put that on the record at that committee a number of times, and I would hope that when we deal with democratic renewal, that's something the government's going to look at in terms of dealing with that particular committee to make it truly accountable.

The other question is, there seems to be a slowdown with respect to the FOI process, which is certainly not playing by the rules in terms of releasing or answering information from FOI requests. That is just not being done. If we're talking about transparency and accountability, why is that freedom of information process being slowed down? There has to be an answer given to us by the Minister of Finance, who's responsible for this particular bill.

Just to digress for a moment, I want to point out to the members that I just received number 11, the MPP birth certificate update from the Minister of Consumer and Business Services, Jim Watson. I appreciate getting this update because it proves to me that he is a very responsible minister.

But he still hasn't fixed the problem. He goes on to say, "I'm pleased to report that the office of the registrar general is securely on track to provide better service to the citizens of Ontario. Staff at the ORG are continuing to increase the number of certificates issued. The total number of calls and the number of requests to our call centres continues to see a decline, and there has been a 20% decrease in the average number of telephone calls received from MPP offices."

What he also reports is that 62 person-days of overtime were worked in Thunder Bay and Toronto on the weekend of April 3 and 4. The minister is in the House and I want to thank him for this update. I've been keeping them. I have number 9, number 10, and number 11 now in my office. We had a good conversation the other day, and I want to put on the record that we have just been deluged in my office by these birth certificate requests. What happened was, the registrar's office,

which is responsible for it, had been sending them down to my office. I bring that to the minister's attention and hope that practice is going to stop—I know he's working hard on this problem—because we're not equipped to deal with all these birth certificate requests. I think I probably have the third-largest riding population-wise.

Interjection: We need an audit. Is that dealt with in this legislation?

Mr Tascona: Perhaps this may have to be subject to an audit. That might be a good one with respect to what's going on on this particular issue. But the minister is working with us. I've got number 11, "MPP Birth Certificate Update," and I want to point that out for the record, because I'm looking forward to number 12. My staff is still working hard on that issue, and we're just not staffed to deal with those types of problems.

I also want to digress for a moment to—I was at the multiple sclerosis walk yesterday, which was a tremendous walk in my riding. I believe we raised over \$130,000 for the MS walk. They have a number of issues and one they pointed out to me yesterday, and I'm glad—well, the Minister of Transportation was here. But what he's undertaken to do, to his credit, is to deal with the disabled parking permit program review. To the credit of the Minister of Transportation, he has said that he's going to review this program. I'm looking forward to the disabled parking permit program review because that was an important issue, and I raised it at the walk for MS yesterday. And I can tell you that that's a big issue for the Simcoe county chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society newsletter that I received. This walk was across the province. It's also a provincial organization, which is where we're going with this review.

That's something that's very important as we progress with respect to accountability and transparency. So I wanted to compliment the Minister of Transportation on undertaking that review, and also the Minister of Consumer and Business Services for providing me the update number 11 with respect to birth certificates.

I have raised a number of issues with respect to how this bill applies. I don't know whether the parliamentary assistant's here in the House. I'd like to get an answer in terms of why it's not in effect until April 1, 2005. We know this bill can be put through fairly quickly and given royal assent and can be made active fairly quickly in terms of the fiscal year that's coming up. What that really means is that this bill won't be effective until next fiscal year, April 1, 2005. We just entered fiscal year 2004.

That's all I have to say on this bill. I know other members—Laurie Scott wants to speak on this, and other members who are here, so I'll give up my time now—much shorter than the member from Durham in terms of his time—so we can continue.

1740

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): Thank you to all the speakers on this bill this afternoon.

I would like to follow up on some of the remarks that have already been made by my colleagues who have spoken before me. I'm sorry to go over ground that has

already been covered, but I do feel it's important to emphasize some of the areas of Bill 18 which could be strengthened.

As a new member of the Legislature, it's important to bring forward the changes that may help the bill become a better piece of legislation. The first area which our caucus feels could be made better is in clause 9.1. This is a clause that allows the Auditor General to begin his or her work under the new legislation on April 1, 2005, as was mentioned, notwithstanding the fact that this will come into effect on April Fool's Day, which, in my opinion, is never a good idea. But I agree with my colleagues from Durham and Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford that the important part here is that the legislation should come into effect as soon as it is passed, and the sooner, the better.

I understand that there may be a need for some delay in the implementation due to the need to change over other regulations, but I'm sure the minister has received this advice from the lawyer of his ministry. Notwithstanding the ministry's lawyer's advice, I believe it is important for the public to have the legislation become effective immediately upon its passage. Bringing the legislation back to April 1, the auditor cannot go back further than the grants received after this bill comes into effect. Allowing the bill to come into effect immediately allows the auditor to react sooner.

The Auditor General's new powers around the balance between achieving the protection of privacy and the use of the information collected is the second area where we would like to see Bill 18 tightened up. New clause 10 gives the Auditor General broad access to information and specifies that, "A disclosure to the Auditor General ... does not constitute a waiver of solicitor-client privilege, litigation privilege or settlement privilege."

New clause 27 deals with secrecy on behalf of Auditor General employees who receive information. As well, clause 27.1 deals with the issue of privileged information, and clause 27.2 deals with the protection of personal information that may be given to the Auditor General.

The balance between the public's right to know information and the right of the individual to their own privacy is an important issue which many governments, both provincially and federally, have struggled with for many years. My constituents will want to know if this government has taken into consideration this important balance. As an example, what are the assurances from this government that they have cross-referenced Bill 18 with the changes that have been made in Bill 31, the act with respect to the protection of health information? Bill 18 broadens the Auditor General's ability to examine the books of school boards, municipalities and, of course, hospitals. Does Bill 18 contemplate the changes being made under Bill 31? Very often the preparation of legislation within a ministry is done with care and proper preparation within that ministry. However, often in large governments when bills are being prepared which cross ministry boundaries, the due diligence is not as strong.

For example, I hope the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health and their staff have done the proper work that's entailed in the preparation of these two bills.

In our rapidly changing society, with the advent of new technologies and the explosion of access to information through computers, we want to make sure on this side of the House that the government is properly protecting the right of privacy of individuals yet enhancing the powers of the Auditor General.

The third area which I would like to bring to the attention of the Legislature with regard to Bill 18 is the proper funding of the expanded role of the Auditor General's office. The bill contemplates a large increase in the potential audit capabilities of this office. In this House, we all know that the power to expand the Auditor General's authority is only theoretical if it is not backed up by proper funding and staffing. I look forward to the budget—the date was announced by the Minister of Finance today to be May 18—to hear whether the government will properly fund these expanded powers.

The Liberal government has made many public statements about the perceived size of the province's deficit. This government has already spent \$3 billion of taxpayers' money in the last six months. They have many more promises from their political platform that they must fund. I hope that this government is not increasing the powers of the Auditor General for political expediency. That proof will be in the amount of money that this government puts toward the implementation of this bill.

I have been following the federal government's auditor, Sheila Fraser, and I commend her for all the work she's done. Certainly, transparency and accountability should be the number one priority of this government. There will be an investigation into this government and its actions as soon as possible.

I hope that they do put the money toward the expanded powers of the office and that the government commits to its actions and it's not just rhetoric.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this bill today. I turn it over to my colleague from Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: I'm really pleased to be able to rise and speak for a few moments on Bill 18—as I called it earlier in one of the two-minute comments, the Sheila Fraser act.

I want to thank the member for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, the member for Durham and my colleague from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock for their fine comments on this particular bill. In particular, I want to thank Ms Scott. As a newcomer to this House, I think she has been a very valuable member of our caucus. We're very proud of the fact that she has done so much hard work and is working very hard on behalf of her constituents in Lindsay and all those little communities that make up the great riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock. As you know, she had big shoes to fill with Chris Hodgson leaving this House; he was a very well respected member. I have to say to her constituents what a great job she has done.

We've had some interesting topics already today. The first thing I think of is the comments made earlier today

on volunteer recognition in this House. I think we all look around from all of our different ridings. What a great week it is when we can actually recognize the volunteer work that goes into this great province. We hear it over and over again in our ridings. I spent the whole weekend at various functions. I didn't get a chance to say it in a statement today today but I wanted to congratulate people who really aren't looking a lot today at an auditor bill; I wanted to congratulate the people of Elmvalle for the fantastic job they did on the weekend with their annual maple syrup festival.

As well, we talked today about the Ontario Trillium program for organ donation. What a fantastic program that is as well. In different provinces across our country—actually, it's even advertised on some of the hockey games and the sports events. I'm noticing there's a lot more advertising making people aware of that particular drive to make sure more people are aware of that.

Then we get around to the announcement today by the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance says that there's going to be—surprise—a budget on May 18. What a surprise. I wonder how many people guessed that date. We knew three weeks ago that that was the date. When you were in opposition on that side of the House, you begged every year, “We should have a budget by the end of March every year in this House. What's wrong with you?” By God, here we are later, we're back here in this new Liberal government, and you've already stretched it out almost to the first of June. How are the school boards and the hospitals going to get their grant allocations protected? How are they going to know what kind of funding they have to work with?

1750

Why do you think they actually announced May 18—four days after the by-election. You know what? I don't think it's going to be a very pretty budget, and I think those folks over in Hamilton might have a different opinion on this. I think they actually are concerned the Liberals might lose that riding, and I don't think they're going to be very happy about that, so, “We shifted it over to May 18.” I know that Mr Sorbara would never say that, but I think that was the underlying thought behind announcing it in this House today, the same as he announced last week this fantastic decrease in auto rates, a 10% decrease. Yet we've heard nothing but horror stories that everybody's insurance rates are going up. Last week he told us they're going down, and now we're counting on him to commit to those words.

I'm a little bit concerned when he starts talking about the Sheila Fraser act. The Minister of Finance stood up today and talked about all the wonderful things that this government will be doing. I was surprised that he's still on the Americanization-of-Ontario politics. I can't believe this, these fixed election dates.

The minister, Mr Sorbara, when he was on this side of the House, brought in a private member's bill. We couldn't believe it. He wanted to Americanize Ontario politics with fixed election dates. He got very hot, very upset about that. He's still on that path. I don't know if

we want that here in Ontario. I don't like fixed election dates myself. Quite frankly, I can't see the advantage.

I like the fact that we're different than the United States. I'm a true Canadian patriot. I believe that there's something special about having the Premier or the Prime Minister having the flexibility in calling that election date. The Minister of Finance spoke about that quite a bit in his opening leadoff today. He talked about Americanizing Ontario politics again with the fixed election dates.

Very simply, I think it's kind of nice watching Paul Martin run around after the Sheila Fraser reports. We're talking about the Sheila Fraser act here, but I'm referring to the Sheila Fraser reports. He doesn't know when to call an election. Possibly the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister would like to actually have more—I'm glad now he has that flexibility because he's in big trouble. He's in huge trouble. He looks like it, when you see him speak now. He looks like no one believes him any more. He looks like that.

So that's why I'm kind of interested to see what the Sheila Fraser act will—

Mr Levac: Are you running federally?

Mr Dunlop: No, I'm not, but I'm very interested in Mr Martin. We sat on this side of the House for eight years, and you folks as well, and we watched Mr Martin and Mr Chrétien just crucify the health care system. We watched them crucify our Armed Forces.

Now we're finding out that the Sea Kings are going to be 50 years old before they're replaced. Brian Mulroney was going to have them replaced in 1993. Now they'll be 50 years old. We're expecting young people in our military to float around, to serve our country in 50-year-old helicopters. That doesn't sound like Americanizing Ontario politics.

The other thing—

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be getting under anybody's skin here.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr Dunlop: The other thing he started talking about today was banning partisan ads. That's really interesting. I look at some of the ads we had on in the last couple of years, the ads on Telehealth. What would be wrong with telling the people of Ontario they should have a Telehealth system? We spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on Telehealth. We told the public about how valuable that program was. You're not going to cancel Telehealth, are you? Is that part of your budget plan? You're not going to cancel that, are you? I sure hope not. It's a fantastic program.

I bet all you folks from ridings in northern Ontario really appreciate Telehealth, because it's through the whole 705 now. It's got to be a fantastic program. We had to advertise that. We had to put ads out on that to inform the public. We made millions of little fridge magnets etc to make sure that the public knew about Telehealth.

Flu shots: Partisan advertising is informing the public about flu shots?

Interjection: We didn't say that.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, you did. Flu shots were part of our advertising program. We informed everybody with large newspaper ads all across the province how valuable flu shots were for you. And I think you did the same thing last fall. After you were elected, I'm sure you ran ads asking people to get out and get their flu shots.

Then we have all the information thanking the public, thanking the citizens of our province, thanking our health care professionals for doing a fine job with SARS. There were millions of dollars spent on that advertising, and we informed the public. I really don't think there was anything wrong with that. I would hardly call that a partisan ad.

The fact of the matter is there are so many things—too bad Mr Bradley isn't here right now. The Ministry of Tourism has great programs for the marketing of our province. Even after the SARS recovery—and I know Mr Bradley has followed up on our program with the SARS recovery money. I'm pleased that he has. I think he's done a fantastic job. I think it's important that we market this beautiful province, whether it's in New York state or Quebec or Manitoba or Wisconsin. We have to get people in here to spend their money, and that should get them used to seeing what we have here: one of the most wonderful places in the world to live.

I always brag to my colleagues, especially to the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, Mr Miller, that I have the best riding in the province for tourism. He argues against me every time. I understand this year the bikers are all going to go up to Parry Sound-Muskoka and I'm disappointed. I thought they should have come to Simcoe North and had their convention there because I happen to think my riding is the best riding across the province as far as being an overall good, valuable riding. It's very diverse. I hope Minister Bradley, the Minister of Tourism, will continue to spend money on SARS recovery funding and all those sorts of things. Again, a lot of partisan ads have gone into OTMP. Maybe it's a bad thing, but I hope the minister will pick up on that.

Then you had your town hall meetings. I actually had my own town hall meetings and they were very well attended. I didn't use the expensive brochures that Mr McGuinty supplied. I understand that the consultant who ran those town hall meetings actually cost the taxpayers of Ontario over half a million dollars. Is that true? Maybe somebody can correct me in the Q and A after, but I think half a million of our hard-earned taxpayer dollars, from our working families here in Ontario, to be paid to a consultant to have town hall meetings is far too high. I think he could have done it in a much more orderly manner that would not have cost quite as much money. But we're not going to go there today, OK?

Then we have all the partisan ads about informing the public on things such as black bears and the spring bear hunt and the difficulty Ontario had with that last year. The Ministry of Natural Resources I think has done a remarkable job of trying to send out an educational program to all the different people across our province,

whether they live in a rural community or whether they're tourists or cottage owners actually visiting a rural community here in our province. The MNR has spent literally tens of thousands of dollars on those ads. I don't think that's what you call a partisan ad. I don't think that's a problem.

I see the Minister of Agriculture is here, and we had some good news today on BSE. Anything to help the farmers at this point is fantastic, and I applaud the minister, the federal minister and any of the farming organizations and the cattlemen's associations etc that had anything to do with getting the border reopened.

I'm going to keep speaking for a while, Mr Speaker, so whenever you want to cut me off, that's fine, but I'll be speaking the day after on the next part of the bill. But I do want to applaud you on that, Steve, because our farmers have had a really difficult time. We've had guys going to the welfare offices, and I can tell you that it's really important.

To get back to the partisan ads, I want to get back to the Ontario Trillium Foundation brochure. That's the one that came to my mind recently.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: That's a partisan ad. It's a Liberal partisan ad. I just cannot believe that, after talking about

partisan ads from previous governments, now we have the Ontario Trillium Foundation. We have to stop this kind of thing. I think if you're going to have eight Liberals in pictures in the Ontario Trillium Foundation newsletter, we should at least have Shelley Martel doing something really neat in Nickel Belt, or my buddy Yakabuski doing something in Barry's Bay. I think everyone deserves that opportunity. I was very upset when I saw that partisan ad in the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which went to all kinds of people across our province; it's in all of our constituency offices. I think it's partisan. I'd like my picture in the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Tim Hudak used to get his.

I think we have to get back to one other thing.

Interjection: Garfield, you've got 15 seconds.

Mr Dunlop: I can't be done in 15 seconds; it's going to take me 10 minutes yet. Can we stay to 10 after? Can I have unanimous consent to stay to 10 after? Were you going to cut us off, Speaker?

The Deputy Speaker: I was listening intently to the member for Simcoe North, but now that he has drawn my attention to the clock, it is after 6 of the clock. This House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow afternoon.

The House adjourned at 1801.

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