



Legislative Assembly
of Ontario

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de l'Ontario

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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 21 April 2004

Mercredi 21 avril 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 21 April 2004

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 21 avril 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

**CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH
SERVICES**

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I would like to take this time allotted to me today to draw your attention to the issue of children's mental health. Children's mental health services in Ontario are simply not meeting the requirements that exist; 18% of children under 19 have a diagnosable mental health disorder. We only have the capacity to serve about one in four of these children. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15- to 19-year-olds in Canada. This tragedy must be addressed. When children with mental health disorders go untreated, the problems don't go away. They only get worse as the child grows into adulthood.

The Phoenix Centre for Children and Families in the city of Pembroke in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is currently facing a funding crisis as it tries to cope with the growing demand for children's mental health services in Renfrew county. Because of a lack of funding, the waiting times for children and youth to access services has become so long as to essentially deny them the help they need when that need is most critical. Without new investments now, more and more children will fall through the cracks today. Sadly, many will re-surface as adult cases tomorrow.

Our party pledged significant new investments in children's mental health services last year. I call on the new Minister of Health and the Minister of Children's Services to commit to adequate funding in the upcoming budget. Our children are depending on you.

CALABRESI CANADIANS

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): As you know, a great number of the Italian immigrants who helped build this province have come from the Calabria region in southern Italy. In fact, we have four or five members in the Legislature who have their roots in Calabria, including the Minister of Finance, the member from Thornhill and others. This is a very special week for Calabresi who are here in Toronto and the GTA. This weekend in Woodbridge, we are going to see La Fontata for the first time in Canada. It is an Easter time cele-

bration that takes place in small villages in Calabria. It is going to be brought to Woodbridge this Saturday. It's going to involve Immaculate Conception Church and St Margaret Mary Church in Woodbridge. I invite all Ontarians to partake in this wonderful festival.

We also have another group, from Vibo Valentia in Calabria, who are here as professional interpreters and are going to be visiting the Legislature today. They're going to undertake an English exchange program along with the Federation of Calabresi of Ontario. I say thanks to the Calabresi Canadians. Viva Calabria, viva Italia, viva Canada.

BSE

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): As I rise in the House today, I would urge all members to look on their desks to find a copy of this statement with an "I Love Canadian Beef" bumper sticker attached. You'll see it here.

A couple of weeks ago, while driving to Toronto from my riding, I noticed that although these bumper stickers have been in circulation for quite some time, very few cars and trucks have them on their vehicles. This was especially disappointing as I drove through Grey, Bruce and Dufferin counties, three regions that are highly dependent on their agriculture industry. As I approached vehicles on the highway, I expected to see the stickers as a sign of support for our ailing agriculture industry, but they were very few and far between.

I know that some people might be of the attitude that this is a just a sticker and is not going to help solve the BSE situation, but what it can do is raise awareness and act as a conversation starter. This issue needs to be kept on people's minds. People need to continue to pressure their federal member of Parliament to get the border reopened. Today I would like to put out a challenge to all members to take the sticker that has been provided and place it on your bumper or car window.

Further to this topic, on May 7 from 11 am to 5 pm, I will be hosting an event at Barry's Service Centre in Rockford. At this time, the president of the Grey county cattlemen's association, Mr Ross Laycock, and I will be cleaning people's windshields and offering to place these stickers on their bumpers. The local 4-H club will also be on hand grilling up burgers. I would challenge all other rural members to hold a similar event.

These stickers are also available in my constituency office in Owen Sound. I will personally take the time to

apply a sticker on any constituent's vehicle if I'm in the office when they come in.

HOSPITAL WORKERS

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): Hospital workers in this province had a very difficult time over the last eight years. There's no question that they were overworked and unappreciated by the previous government. We heard nurses described as Hula Hoop workers and no longer necessary, yet they continued to do their job with pride, even with lower numbers. The service provided to this province is probably best exemplified by their service to us during the SARS crisis.

We've seen lab technicians toil through the eight difficult years, where the results that they determined from tests were of vital importance to our citizens.

Quality health care requires good building maintenance. We've seen our maintenance staffs in our hospitals ensure that the oxygen flows and the heat's on in the building.

Health care is so much more than just doctors and nurses. Clerical staff, the first encounter you often have in the hospital, are a tremendous service.

Food preparation: Quality health care requires food that's nutritious and attractive. We've seen that delivered.

Cleaners: In our hospitals it is a fundamental fact that the buildings need to be cleaned. They're often unsung heroes who ensure our hospital are in the condition that they are.

There are other support staff whom I omit inadvertently, but we have been truly blessed with the quality of people in Ontario who serve in our hospitals and provide the front-line service to our patients. So I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of myself and our government to say "thank you" to the hospital workers in Ontario.

BEACHES EASTER PARADE

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is indeed my privilege and honour to stand here today to talk about a cultural institution in the Beaches, the Beaches Easter Parade. This year was an absolutely terrific year. It is the brainchild of the Toronto Beaches Lions Club.

There were tens of thousands of people who lined Queen Street, from Victoria Park all the way to Woodbine Avenue. The parade was led off by our very own grand marshal, Frances Lankin—no stranger to this House. She was well received by all of the crowds and is truly an inspirational person in our community. The parade director was Douglas Ferguson, who masterminded the entire parade and saw that it went off without a hitch.

There were floats, bands, marching groups, bagpipers and travelling minstrels. There were assorted politicians as well, and they didn't get booed all that badly. There was, of course, the Easter bunny, and lots of chocolates for the kids.

It took over two hours to traverse the entire parade route and people lined up literally for hours to make sure their children got a good seat. Tens of thousands of people watched it. I will tell you, it is a showcase for our wonderful Beaches community. People come from Toronto and indeed some from other places in Ontario just to experience the very unique flavour of the Beaches community.

I thank the Toronto Beaches Lions Club for another job well done, and to all of the people who came out, please come back again next year. It keeps getting better and better.

1340

BRUSH-A-MANIA

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): Wednesday, April 21, 2004, has been proclaimed Oral Health Day in the city of Toronto. This will be the fourth year that the Toronto Academy of Dentistry has worked with the Rotary Club of Toronto—Don Mills to organize Brush-a-Mania.

Each year an Ontario Dental Association member dentist and a Rotarian have gone to a local elementary school to talk to the students about oral hygiene. All of the students across Toronto then brush their teeth simultaneously for three minutes. The students record each time they brush their teeth for three minutes over the following six weeks and receive a Brush-a-Mania Club member certificate upon completing 100 brushings. Over 85 schools and 30,000 students will be participating this year.

I'm sure all members will join me in wishing Dr Raffy Chouljian, chair of this year's event, and all the volunteer dentists and Rotarians great success in the 2004 Brush-a-Mania.

There's no question the children of Toronto will have brighter smiles on their faces today, in part due to Brush-a-Mania and in part due to the great victory of our Toronto Maple Leafs over the Ottawa Senators last night. Bring on the toothpaste and bring on the Philadelphia Flyers. We'll clean our teeth, we'll clean their clocks and our children's smiles will be bigger and brighter in Toronto as the Toronto Maple Leafs go for the cup. Brush, kids, brush, and go, Leafs, go.

SMALL BUSINESS

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): My statement today involves the ability of small businesses in Ontario to continue to grow and prosper. This government in six short months has cancelled \$4 billion in tax decreases that would have benefited both individual taxpaying citizens as well as many of Ontario's small business owners. This government's economic position seems to be that higher taxes on small business create jobs and prosperity.

As I know this House is aware, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has strongly opposed the

elimination of Bill 140, which allows municipalities to increase small business taxes all over Ontario. It seems that this government's position is that the CFIB is wrong on this issue and that your higher-taxes-lead-to-economic-growth strategy is better thought out than their lower-taxes-lead-to-economic-growth strategy.

The small businesses in my community and around Ontario want to know that in the budget of May 18 this government is not going to develop a pattern of raising taxes on the backs of small businesses to pay for their many campaign promises. The future of Ontario's economy depends on your answers.

INTER-CULTURAL NEIGHBOURHOOD SOCIAL SERVICES

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): During National Volunteer Week, I congratulate the volunteers of ICNSS, Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services of Mississauga.

Each year, ICNSS has more than 360 volunteers contribute more than 40,000 hours of volunteer work. The agency and its volunteers serve newcomers to Canada throughout Mississauga and Peel region.

ICNSS staff and volunteers help immigrants and refugees settle and feel welcome in Canada. The ICNSS client base is now at more than 30,000 clients, 85% of whom are immigrants and refugees. That number continues to grow through the benefits of the efforts of ICNSS volunteers.

Newcomers gain experience in a Canadian work environment and integrate into the Canadian cultural mosaic. Programs and services offered through ICNSS include Peel Community Mediation Services, job search workshops, multicultural settlement and education partnerships, the host program, day programming for seniors and preschool programming.

Volunteers come from across the spectrum in our community, and I have personally had the opportunity to volunteer my own time with ICNSS.

I extend the Legislature's thanks to all volunteers at ICNSS for their hard work, dedication and compassion to others.

HIGHWAY TOLLS

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Dalton McGuinty promised to roll back tolls on Highway 407, a promise that was echoed by the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Finance. They specifically promised that regular weekly users of the 407 would save between \$160 to over \$1,100 a year as a result of this Liberal promise. Ask Minister Takhar today how things are progressing on that promise. We all know the answer. He is not progressing, and it won't happen. The fact of the matter is, he's hired a number of outside lawyers because he didn't believe the answer that his own civil service was giving him. So we ask the minister, where are those loopholes that you say are in the contract?

Mr Takhar wasn't willing to negotiate in good faith, and as a result of his tough-guy approach there was actually a toll increase. And as a result of this minister's mishandling of this file since I last raised this issue, users of the 407 are paying \$1.8 million more for that highway. Not only will the Liberal promise to roll back the tolls not be taken, the fact of the matter is that Dalton McGuinty and his Minister of Transportation will be remembered for increasing the tolls on Highway 407. Shame on them; one more broken promise that they can point to and the people of Ontario will not forget.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Members may observe that in our east gallery we have the Honourable David Peterson, former Premier of this great province, MPP for the 32nd and 33rd Parliaments. We welcome you.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated April 21, 2004, of the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LE PATRIMOINE DE L'ONTARIO

ONTARIO HERITAGE AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

M^{me} Meilleur propose la première lecture du projet de loi suivant :

Projet de loi 60, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario / Bill 60, An Act to amend the Ontario Heritage Act.

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

Minister?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Je prends la parole à l'Assemblée aujourd'hui pour dire que le patrimoine de l'Ontario est menacé et que le gouvernement McGuinty compte prendre des mesures pour remédier à la situation.

I stand in the House today to say that Ontario's heritage is at risk and that the McGuinty government is proposing to do something about it.

The Speaker: It's my understanding that you will make your statement as a minister later on.

1350

ONTARIO RECREATION FACILITIES ASSOCIATION ACT, 2004

Mr Brownell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr4, An Act respecting the Ontario Recreation Facilities Association.

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

Pursuant to standing order 84, this bill stands referred to the standing committee on regulations and private bills.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

LOI SUR LE PATRIMOINE DE L'ONTARIO ONTARIO HERITAGE LEGISLATION

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Je prends la parole aujourd'hui devant cette Assemblée pour dire que le patrimoine de l'Ontario est menacé et que le gouvernement McGuinty compte prendre des mesures pour remédier à la situation.

I stand in the House today to say that Ontario's heritage is at risk and that the McGuinty government is proposing to do something about it.

The current Ontario Heritage Act is weak and outdated. For the first time since the Ontario Heritage Act was introduced in 1975, the provincial government is proposing comprehensive amendments to bring Ontario's heritage legislation in line with leading jurisdictions in Canada and around the world.

Aujourd'hui, nous présentons des modifications à la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario qui changeront sensiblement la façon dont l'Ontario perçoit et protège son patrimoine.

Des bâtiments et des lieux patrimoniaux uniques et irremplaçables disparaissent à un rythme alarmant sur les assauts des bulldozers et des boulets de démolition.

We pay the price in lost economic potential and the erosion of the cultural identity that defines and enriches the quality of life in our province. Without strong and expanded heritage protection laws, valuable heritage resources and the opportunities they represent will continue to be lost.

In Ontario's communities, our heritage is reflected in landmark buildings, small-town main streets, historic

neighbourhoods, scenic landscapes, archaeological sites and many other unique and special places, including aboriginal sites.

Le patrimoine de l'Ontario constitue le riche héritage que nous ont légué les générations passées pour que nous le protégeions dans l'intérêt des générations futures. Notre patrimoine exprime notre expérience et nos valeurs collectives. Il reflète ce que nous sommes et montre ce que nous pouvons faire.

The McGuinty government values and is committed to conserving Ontario's heritage for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations. A stronger Ontario Heritage Act will prevent the demolition of Ontario's precious heritage land mass. A stronger act will also provide more tools and flexibility to protect local and provincial heritage and would make Ontario one of the leading jurisdictions in heritage conservation.

Nous avons écouté les avis des intervenants du domaine et les modifications que nous proposons reflètent ces avis. Voici certaines des principales modifications que nous proposons aujourd'hui à la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario.

Some key amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act we are introducing today include new municipal powers to prevent demolition of heritage buildings. This most important change will give municipalities tools to prevent rather than delay the demolition of heritage properties. This amendment will also ensure that increased demolition controls will be balanced with the landowner's right to binding appeal.

Une autre modification importante que nous proposons à la loi confèrera à la province de nouveaux pouvoirs lui permettant de répertorier et de désigner les lieux patrimoniaux d'importance provinciale ainsi que de prévenir la démolition de ces lieux.

The proposed amendments also provide for clear conservation standards and guidelines to be established for provincially owned heritage property.

Other proposed amendments will provide greater clarity in the municipal designation process and provide better planning tools for protection of heritage conservation districts.

La loi modifiée accroîtra la protection accordée par la province aux lieux patrimoniaux maritimes les plus importants et vulnérables.

The amended act will increase provincial protection for the most significant and fragile marine heritage.

There are also enhanced provisions to conserve unique archaeological resources, such as increasing fines for the illegal alteration of sites.

The amended act will also update provisions for the province's heritage agency to give them greater ability to deliver their mandate.

Les modifications proposées à la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario stimuleront la fierté des citoyens et des citoyennes ainsi que le développement économique local.

These proposed amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act will help build strong and vital communities and improve the quality of life for all the people in Ontario.

ROUGE PARK

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources):

For the second day in a row, it is my pleasure to stand in the House to affirm that this government is acting on its commitment to increase green space in the province, protecting more of our priceless natural heritage and contributing to a cleaner, healthier natural environment for the people of Ontario.

I'm proud to announce today that the province is transferring more than 1,400 hectares of provincial lands for the expansion of Rouge Park. With this transfer of land, we can say now with certainty that Rouge Park is the largest natural park in an urban area in North America: 50 square kilometres in area; home to hundreds of plant species, some of them rare; an important habitat for bird and other wildlife; rich in historic and cultural significance—and all of this right on the doorstep of millions of Ontarians.

The ambitious plan to assemble these lands into an urban natural area known as Rouge Park was launched in 1990 by former Premier David Peterson and then-Natural Resources Minister Lyn McLeod. So, Mr Speaker, as you have already acknowledged, it is very appropriate for me, 14 years later, to acknowledge the contribution of David Peterson and welcome him back to our Ontario Legislature.

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): He looks just as young today.

Hon Mr Ramsay: He does, to the member for St Catharines, absolutely.

Since 1990, the vision of what this park could be has attracted the support of all levels of government, numerous agencies, groups, organizations and surrounding communities.

The wide-ranging local interest and support for protecting this special area is reflected in the composition of the Rouge Park Alliance. The alliance is a voluntary partnership involving the municipalities in the Rouge River watershed, the province, the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, the federal government, the Toronto zoo, the Waterfront Regeneration Trust and Save the Rouge Valley System Inc. I want to acknowledge today the dedication and hard work of the alliance members. They've shown what can be accomplished when different groups and interests pull together to achieve common goals. My ministry remains committed to continuing its strong support and contribution as a key partner in the Rouge Park Alliance.

This government understands the important role of green space and natural areas to our quality of life, particularly here in densely populated southern Ontario. As I said in the House yesterday, we know that natural areas contribute to cleaner air, cleaner water and a cleaner environment. We know they contribute to healthier and stronger communities and a healthier and stronger economy.

The Greenbelt Protection Act, introduced last December, would provide us with the means to protect in-

creasingly precious green space in an area of southern Ontario that includes Toronto, Durham, York, Peel, Halton, Hamilton, the Oak Ridges moraine, the Niagara Escarpment plan area and the Niagara tender fruit and grape lands. As a key component of that proposed greenbelt, this unique natural area known as Rouge Park will be a permanent, sustainable legacy and a source of great pride for future Ontarians.

1400

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I'm very happy to rise today to speak about one of the jewels of Ontario, the Rouge Park. For those in the Legislature who are not familiar with it, it actually has a long history that all parties recognize. As a matter of fact, it was 1967 when the first 157 acres were donated to the Rouge Park. Not only that, but it was a partnership, one of the first partnerships established with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to manage that land. All governments have contributed to it.

The enlarged park opened officially in 1995. People should know that in 1999 there was a significant contribution added to the park. There were 668 hectares added and another 32 hectares at the mill dam, with a total value of over \$26.3 million in that contribution alone to that specific site. That amounted to a total of over 11,600 acres in that particular area.

The lands were transferred to the Toronto Region Conservation Authority with the understanding that it would be a protected area and they would remain with the management as long as it was under their authority and that it could not be sold off.

As well, I'm sure all of you would like to know that in November 2000—I think we're seeing some of the response from that of the funds being utilized—there was \$100 million through the Living Legacy fund established for just such acquisitions. That fund from November 2000 was to be used to enhance protected areas for conservation, for youth and stewardship programs—all you have to do is look at the Rouge Web site to see the number of schools participating in that to know its benefit—to regulate areas and, most importantly, to acquire more natural areas such as the ones announced today. The acquisition would probably have been done through ELAP, the ecological land acquisition program, which the previous government had started.

Another program which was announced in 2000 as well was the natural areas protection program, where \$20 million was established for sites such as specifically the Rouge, the Lynde Marsh and a number of others, for which I hope we'll hear about programs later on.

Some of the things I hope the minister is looking at are: resolving problems such as the ones between the mountain bikers and the hikers in that area; establishing more funds for managing that specific site.

Lastly, one of the key things to do that would assist the Rouge is to move forward with the healthy waters, healthy fish program and protecting the headwaters of the Rouge. We're very thankful that there are another 1,400 hectares added to that site.

ONTARIO HERITAGE LEGISLATION

LOI SUR LE PATRIMOINE DE L'ONTARIO

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to respond today to the amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act and, I would say to the minister, preserving our heritage and our history. On this side of the House—it all began basically under the Conservative government, as you would know, in 1975. In fact, it continued throughout our mandate. In 2002-03, there was a broad policy that gave tax relief to people in applying to improve their properties that were historically designated. In fact, the amount was over \$6 million.

In my time on local council, I actually served on the local architectural conservation advisory committee. In fact, today I'm working with a group protecting old neighbourhoods in the community of Bowmanville. My riding is, of course, a historic part of Ontario.

The members of the committee, the LACAC committee—Janie Dodd as well as Mavis Carlton and, today's chairman, Vic Suppan—would all be impressed by this. But what is really missing here—once again, there is a lot of fanfare on this, but, quite honestly, there's nothing in their platform. It's a complete surprise. The only platform material I was able to find was that in 1999 they had a small page that said they would fund up to \$2 million of museum and heritage programs in Ontario.

What is completely failing in this commitment by the minister today to do the right thing is that she's not providing any resources to do the right thing. In fact, I put it to you that if you look at the history—and history is the greatest teacher—in this particular case, you should know that under the Peterson government, under their regime, Bill Wrye, Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, authorized the complete destruction of original land records, from 1947 to 1968. This was held in very serious concern by members of the heritage community at that time. So your legacy is lacking.

In the current statement the minister made today, there is no substance in terms of any funding for local advisory committees. The minister should know that at the end of the day this is a property rights issue. To force people and neighbourhoods into conformance without the appropriate tax policies is completely the wrong message to be sending. If you want to protect heritage, don't exempt the property rights of individuals; work with the community. I'll be happy to work with you, but, Minister, there's got to be some money in the budget. Speak to Mr Sorbara.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): This is indeed good news—I'm talking about the heritage. Demolition control has been requested by municipalities for years and years.

C'est une bonne nouvelle. Notre expérience à Toronto et dans toutes les autres villes de cette province est une expérience de frustration. We have been frustrated as we helplessly watched our heritage, our history, being demolished and razed to the ground. We have been powerless. All we could do is delay; we couldn't stop. Today

there is the first inkling that we will actually be able to stop the demolition of our heritage.

I want to commend the minister, and I want to tell you that if this had been in place when we were going through all the machinations around the first Parliament, it wouldn't have taken a year; it would have taken a few minutes in order to save that priceless property.

There are two things I want to bring to your attention, and I hope they are not only in the bill when we finally see it but also in the regulations. First, you have said there is a right to appeal; you haven't said to which body. If that is to the OMB, I do have some frustrations with that body, and I want to tell you that probably many members in this House do. If it is not—and even if it is—you have to have the strongest possible provincial policy statement that will override all the other statements that are before the OMB, because if they are to be mixed, then I will tell you they will pick the developer over our history. The second thing we need to have is some commitment to money in the budget, because the cities have been downloaded unmercifully. They do not have the money to be equal partners, to pay to protect our heritage and to adopt standard designation procedures which should be uniform across this province.

Madam Minister, we salute your first step. We are hoping the additional steps will make this a bill we can all support and of which we can all be proud.

ROUGE PARK

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I rise to respond to the Minister of Natural Resources' announcement and, with all of us here, to welcome former Premier David Peterson to the House. I'm sure he would agree with me that former Premier Bob Rae should be seated by his side today in the gallery. You will recall that in 1990, just before the election, the then Premier Peterson announced a plan to acquire this land. Then there was an election—remember?—the Bob Rae government won, and we proceeded to buy up that land and turn it into a park. I just wanted to remind you. I thought that was conveniently left out today.

Indeed it is true, and it is good to see that the present Liberal government is following on the work we did on the park and extending it today, and I congratulate them on that. It's more green space that will benefit all of us.

The minister mentioned the greenbelt legislation, and I want to come back to that. I asked him a question in the House on the Castle Glen development in the Niagara Escarpment area. I want him to talk to his colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs, because he will not respond any more to questions about this development, the first new town to be built on the Niagara Escarpment since the 1970s, when protection was brought in for the Niagara Escarpment. It's going to be built. It's before the OMB, and not only that, but maybe for the first time in history—I don't know—the OMB has decided to deal with this particular development plan in a piecemeal fashion, which is just beyond the pale. It is absolutely outrageous and shouldn't be allowed.

1410

The minister says he can't comment because it's before the OMB. He indeed can comment. He can bring in a minister's zoning order to stop all development, to stop the hearing and, in fact, to bring the Niagara Escarpment into the greenbelt legislation. I'm a little confused about a line in the statement today, because right now it isn't a part of it, otherwise this development wouldn't be allowed to go ahead.

I'm calling on the minister today, if this commitment to the greenbelt and to expanding parks across this province, which I applaud—I think it's great, I think it's good, I want to move forward and get that greenbelt legislation passed so we can make necessary amendments and move on with it. It's very important. But there are some real problems with it. That Castle Glen development is one. As you know, some leapfrog development in the Simcoe area is another. New highways are being built. There are certain things we have to look at. I hope the minister will stop that Castle Glen development dead in its tracks.

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS JERSEY

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I know there have been many rulings that you have made about decorum in this House and what is and isn't appropriate to be worn, and I know there are many difficult days. Trust me, if anybody knows that, I do, as Premier of Ontario. But none could have been more difficult for the incumbent Premier of Ontario than last evening's hockey game, so I decided to lend a little bit of class to these proceedings.

On a point of clarification, Mr Speaker, I know the Premier will want to know that this is a gift from Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment and does not contravene the Members' Integrity Act.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is this on the same point of order?

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I would like to ask for unanimous consent for the Premier to put on the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey shirt.

The Speaker: First, the rule is that it not be a prop, and then I'd ask if we have unanimous consent that the Premier wear it.

I heard a no.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): On the same weighty matter, I propose that by way of unanimity we introduce a bill in this House that will compel the amalgamation of the Maple Leafs and the Ottawa Senators. With that firepower and that goaltending, we could take on the world.

The Speaker: I'm sure the Premier will prepare that bill and present it to us a little later on.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I would like to ask all members to join me in welcoming this group of Legislative pages serving in the first session of the 30th

Parliament: Jennifer Barrow from Brampton West-Mississauga, Jessica Collins from Simcoe-Grey, Joanna Concessao from Don Valley East, Jordan Edwards from Timmins-James Bay, Michael Fattori from Durham, Kirsty Flemming from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, Conner Hodes from Perth-Middlesex, Conor Kyte from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Lachlan Montague—I'm sorry if I pronounced your name improperly—from Cambridge, Natasha Persaud from Eglinton-Lawrence, Sameer Rabbani from Scarborough Centre, Evgeniya Serdetchnaia from York North, Maggie Shi from Kenora-Rainy River, Joseph Singh from Scarborough East, Kristina Siverson from Etobicoke Centre, William Stransky from Algoma-Manitoulin, Adrianna Swart from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant, Cassandra Weston from Trinity-Spadina, Kevin Wiener from St Paul's, and Sammy Woldeab from Beaches-East York.

They will be serving five weeks, from April 19 to May 21. Let us all welcome them.

ORAL QUESTIONS**TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE**

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. On Monday I asked you a very serious question on a matter that has to do with a very important issue of public safety related to the repair, inspection and maintenance of Ontario's bridges. On that occasion, you responded with a very glib, partisan and incorrect response, with the same look on your face as you have now, as though it's not important. I'm going to give you another opportunity to take on the responsibility you have as Minister of Transportation for the safety of Ontario's public and to stand in your place today and tell the House: Do you or do you not have a policy to deal with the safety of Ontario's bridges?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Safety is our number one concern. I'm surprised the member for Oak Ridges is asking me this question. His was the government that actually downloaded the bridges on to the municipalities without giving them any tools to deal with it. Not only that, but they had absolutely no plan. They did the same thing with GO Transit. They took over GO Transit because they didn't have a plan to start with. That is what their government's record is. We are absolutely committed to working with the municipalities to give them the tools to deal with these issues.

Mr Klees: The minister should read his briefing notes. The fact of the matter is that there were 684 bridges downloaded and there are some 24,000 bridges in the province. I'm asking you to stop playing political games about downloading. I'm asking you to stop laughing about this very serious issue of safety in Ontario. What are you going to do to ensure that the safety of the people of Ontario is taken to heart? You may be playing to your

front-benchers and backbenchers on this issue. If a bridge collapses tomorrow, it'll wipe that smile right off your face. Tell us in this House today, do you or do you not stand for the safety and protection of the people of Ontario? Do you have a policy to deal with this matter in the province?

Hon Mr Takhar: I am surprised at the tone of this question. I want to know if these bridges started falling apart in the last six months, or have they been falling apart for the last eight and a half years? That government didn't do anything at all. We are absolutely committed to working with the municipalities and giving them the tools. We are going ahead and examining all the bridges to see what needs to be done.

Mr Klees: That's precisely why I'm putting the question to you, because as a result of consultation over the last number of years with municipalities across this province, we fully understood the problem. We fully understood that there was a safety issue and we agreed that we would put in place a policy that would deal with this issue. Rather than sit there and say it's not your responsibility when that first bridge collapses and there are deaths in this province—then it will be too late—stand in your place, assume the responsibility you have as the government and as the minister and commit to us now that you will deal with this issue. Tell us today, rather than playing this partisan glibness with this important issue.

Hon Mr Takhar: I want to assure the member for Oak Ridges that we take our responsibility seriously, but they never did it for eight and a half years. There was absolutely no consultation with the municipalities. When we met with them, they told us that they downloaded these bridges without giving them any tools to deal with them. We are working with them, and we will provide them with the tools to deal with it.

1420

TRANSIT SERVICES

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Transportation as well. The House will recall that about three weeks ago, with great fanfare and self-congratulatory enthusiasm, the government announced provincial funding for transit for the city of Toronto—a special deal for Toronto.

For some time the region of Waterloo has been planning and promoting a visionary light-rail transit project which would have enormous economic and environmental benefits for the 21st century in our area. My question is, why has the government cut a special deal for transit in Toronto and has yet to announce support for Waterloo region's LRT?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Mr Speaker, I will ask the minister of infrastructure to address this issue.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): We make no apologies for supporting municipal transit in this province. I think you will see—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Caplan: No, GO Transit. We're in negotiation and discussions with the federal government on a range of transit options. In fact, I can tell you it's not just transit but will be a full transportation picture. Part of our plan is a greater Toronto transportation authority to co-ordinate the kind of investment we need.

I have met with officials from the region of Waterloo, I'm meeting with officials from Ottawa and we are coming up with a comprehensive transportation vision for this province. Unlike your government, sir, which downloaded transit on to municipalities and completely abandoned a provincial role, our government is taking a proactive approach to insuring that we get people in this province moving.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Mr Arnott put that question to the Minister of Transportation. Apparently we have a new Minister of Transportation. I'd like to go back to the original one on the same issue of the imbalance of Liberal regional transportation commitments.

There is a region in this province that is crying out desperately for funding that was committed by the previous government, and it has to do with the proposed expressway linking the Queen Elizabeth Way to the Lincoln Alexander Parkway. Minister, I'd like to ask you this question: Will you honour the 75% commitment of funding that we made so this important project can get on and actually come to fruition? Will you confirm that today?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. He passed it on to—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The minister passed the question on to the minister of infrastructure renewal. Maybe the minister could respond.

Hon Mr Caplan: I would say, to be fair, that the first question was about municipal transit and the supplementary doesn't have anything to do with the original question. But I will answer it because we are frankly very interested in talking about these issues. Unlike the previous government, which did download a lot of the problems on to municipalities and did not give them the ability to do it, we are committed to the Red Hill Creek Expressway. We have been very clear about that, and there should be absolutely no doubt in anybody's mind that this government remains committed to it.

I would say that we have incredible advocates in our caucus for Hamilton, and I would say to the member opposite that they could take a page out of the book from some of the members, past and present, in this government.

The Speaker: Second supplementary.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): When I was the Minister of Transportation, I can remember delivering cheques to Mayor Bob Chiarelli: \$13 million for new buses; \$19 million for new park-and-ride

stations; \$45 million for new arterial roads in the city of Ottawa.

It's embarrassing in the city of Ottawa. The city of Toronto has received significant help for their transit system. We have the minister, Jim Watson, saying "It's our turn now." Then he says, "It's coming soon." Then he says, "I'm not sure it's coming soon." When is Ottawa going to get its fair share?

Hon Mr Caplan: It is amazing that that member would even ask that question, given the history and the lack of support for the city of Ottawa when you were minister, my friend. That is an absolute joke. I want to assure you that I'm not going to pre-empt any announcements that are coming up, but there will be something very soon about a transit announcement for the city of Ottawa. I'm very proud that that's going to be happening. We are in negotiations and discussions. I've got to tell you, we will be there.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. It doesn't seem like the opposition is prepared to listen to the answer, so I'm going to ask for a new question.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. This is the report of the honourable Mr Justice Archie Campbell, the SARS Commission interim report. In it, Mr Campbell says that the government of Ontario was asleep at the switch on SARS. He said that it was a devastating breach of the trust that the people of Ontario put in their government.

Now, you have promised to move on some of the recommendations, but some isn't good enough. Mr Justice Campbell says that local public health units need your funding share for public health programs to increase from 50% to at least 75% of the cost of the programs.

Will you do the right thing today and commit your government to increasing your share of the cost of public health programs to at least 75%?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to thank the leader of the NDP for the question and take the opportunity as well to thank all those who have presented reports to the government. Let me say that we look forward to fully considering the very sound advice found within those reports.

We have not been sitting on our hands. We have, with respect to ensuring we have a more vigorous and robust public health care system in the province of Ontario, done a number of things. First of all, we've enlisted the leadership of Dr Sheela Basur, who's performing remarkably well, as expected. We have launched Canada's only mobile acute care unit, the first of its kind in the country. It can respond anywhere in the province within 24 hours. We have also created five rapid response teams that can be deployed anywhere in the province. We are finalizing a provincial pandemic plan, and the Minister of Health tells me that within the next

couple of months, he will be putting forward a more comprehensive plan to help revitalize public health for all Ontarians.

Mr Hampton: Well, I did not hear an answer. This is what Mr Justice Campbell says: "Increase the funding to 75%." This is what the report, which was received in December, says—this is the expert panel's number one recommendation—"Increase the funding to 75%."

This is not a difficult question. Mr Campbell says that this is not a debatable issue, that issues like SARS and other serious public health problems can arise again very quickly, because the system is so desperately underfunded.

I ask you again, Premier, will you commit to doing the right thing: Will you increase your government's share of public health programs to at least 75%? Make that commitment now.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I know the member would want to ensure that all the information, by way of the recommendation, was made available to the House. In that same report, it in fact reads beyond what the member has referenced. It reads as follows, "Implementation of the new cost-sharing agreement should be phased in within two to five years."

Justice Campbell has made it clear that public health has been neglected for at least a generation in the province of Ontario. The solution is going to take hard work and determination. It is going to take a little bit of time. We have already made significant steps forward. We look forward to taking all of these recommendations into consideration. As I said, we look forward over the next couple of months to putting out a comprehensive plan to revitalize public health for all Ontarians.

1430

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: Ontario drivers are discovering that your motto "Choose change" means having their pockets picked by big insurance. They don't understand the McGuinty math when you tell them they should be getting a 10% decrease in their auto insurance premium, but then they open up the notice from the insurance company and it's a 15% to 20% increase. You said that notices after April 15, insurance that is renewed after April 15, will contain these reductions, but it's not happening. Can you explain the McGuinty math where your promise of a 10.2% reduction turns into a 15% or 20% increase in someone's auto insurance rate?

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

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): The only person in this room who lacks credibility on auto insurance is the member from Kenora-Rainy River. He is the leader of a party that once proposed public automobile insurance, was elected to power and immediately abandoned it for all the right reasons. Once again, in the last election campaign, he proposed public automobile

insurance. That was uniformly rejected, appropriately, by the voters of this province.

I want to tell him once again that what we said during the campaign was that we would bring forward measures to reduce rates, as we inherited them, by on average 10%. As of April 15, a few days ago, 55% of the market has reported rate reductions. The average from that 55% of the market is precisely 10.15%.

Mr Hampton: I don't think the Minister of Finance is any better at McGuinty math than the Premier is. Yesterday, Premier, you stood up and you told people that those who have insurance policies with Pilot Insurance would get a 10.2% reduction. Well, here's Mr Keith Simpson of Simcoe. He heard your notice of a 10.2% reduction. Then he gets his renewal notice from Pilot Insurance and they say that, even though his insurance isn't going to be renewed until May 24, surprise, surprise, "You get a 17% increase in your rate." To add insult to injury, the renewal notice reads, "The insurance company has had a premium increase through no fault of your own," Mr Simpson, no fault whatsoever.

I ask you again, Premier: This is what you promised. He heard your 10.2% promise, but he gets a renewal notice saying a 17% increase. How does this math work?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I would be delighted if my friend from Kenora-Rainy River would send me over the details of that case. What the Premier said yesterday, and what I said yesterday, was that on October 23 we inherited responsibility for government. That date represented a high-water mark in insurance premiums after years of increases under the previous administration. We took action that day. The result of those actions means that virtually all of the market will be reducing their rates from what they were on October 23 by 10%. After that, in the second phase of our reforms, with greater competition in the market and the ability of consumers to customize their premiums, we expect yet another 10% reduction in insurance premiums. So we will have the best possible system on the continent.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Transportation, if he'll answer the question. If the minister had looked in his briefing notes, he would have seen that Ontario had its largest expansion of road construction and maintenance in many years under our government. In fact, he will have seen the commitment of \$1 billion a year for 10 years, \$10 billion of commitment to Ontario road construction, and we were two years into that program.

I'd like the minister to tell us today, after having completed dozens of major projects around this province and initiated many dozens more, whether he knows of decisions within his ministry to either terminate or intentionally delay any of those projects that have been currently underway?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I am not aware of any projects that are underway being delayed. But we are reviewing all the programs of

the ministry, and we're going to set the priorities that are right for the province.

Mr Klees: Really? Well, I think the minister should spend a little more time with his briefing notes because there are many of those projects, as we understand, around the province where direction has been given intentionally to slow down progress. I'm going to give him one: Oakville and Third Line and the QEW. In fact, there are some problems with the contractor as a result of an imposition of conditions put in place by MTO that will extend that project being completed by two years.

Minister, if you don't know about this one, how many other projects in your ministry don't you know about? What is the implication here to construction, what is the implication to the road-building industry in the province of Ontario, and what is the implication to gridlock in the greater Toronto area and right across the province?

Hon Mr Takhar: There are two things that are really important to us. One is safety on the highways. We're going to make sure that highways are designed safely, that any intersections are designed safely. We're just not going to go ahead in a piecemeal approach to this issue. The other is, we are going to handle gridlock, but we're going to handle it in a region-wide approach, and we're going to set up the GTTA to handle those issues.

SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. As the minister is aware, there are many pressures facing programs and services for children and youth in Ontario. One such pressure that's threatening to affect thousands of children in my riding and area is the pressure our local region's children's treatment centre, KidsAbility, is under to continue providing needed services to children with disabilities.

I understand that years of funding deficiencies for these types of children's services under the previous government and the overarching budget deficit facing the province have created a great deal of pressure on your ministry, but can the minister tell the Legislature what actions she is taking to ensure that KidsAbility and other children's treatment centres can continue to provide the programs and services offered to children with disabilities in this province?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to reassure the member from Kitchener Centre that children's treatment centres are extremely important to the province. Our ministry acknowledges that. I would also like to thank him for his tenacity in pursuing this issue and other issues in his riding. In fact, my ministry is in conversation and discussion with KidsAbility in order to enhance the programs that are offered there. We will get back to you very soon about the results of those discussions.

1440

Mr Milloy: I'd like to thank the minister for her comments. KidsAbility is not alone in terms of organ-

izations dealing with children who suffered under the cutbacks imposed by the previous government. With your new mandate and ministry, can the minister tell the Legislature what steps she's taking to help children and children's organizations throughout the province?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: We have short-term and long-term goals. In the short term, we just relieved the children's aid societies of their \$80-million deficit. In exchange, we have letters of agreement that they will improve their accountability and their services to children. We're working with them to do that. We had given, for the first time in 10 years, the federal money that was intended for the last 10 years for child care to child care. As well, we have increased the spending for children with autism by \$40 million a year.

In the long term, we have to integrate the children's and youth services across all of the different programs across the province. Children's mental health, as you mentioned in the first part of your question, is part of this. The experts across the province are saying, "Yes, money is one issue, but lack of coordination and lack of integration is another."

If we can meet our goal of increasing domestic adoption from the children's aid societies, we can solve a lot of problems, because a lot of those children end up in our youth justice systems, and we can solve a lot of the problems on that end as well.

MID-PENINSULA HIGHWAY

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question for the Minister of Transportation: On September 26, 2003, your Liberal candidate in Erie-Lincoln, Vance Badawey, told voters that the mid-peninsula corridor had to be built immediately. Is that a true statement?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Actually, I couldn't hear the question. Can he repeat it again, please?

Mr Hudak: My apologies. I think there was some heckling. I'm glad to repeat the question. Your candidate in 2003, Vance Badawey, campaigned for the Liberal Party, saying that the mid-peninsula corridor had to be built immediately. Was that a true statement?

Hon Mr Takhar: I think this question has been addressed in the House several times. We are committed to building the mid-peninsula highway, but we're going to go through full environmental assessment. This member has submitted those questions, and we have given him answers in writing as well.

Mr Hudak: The problem people in Niagara have is that your candidate said one thing during the election campaign and now, after the election, you're saying something entirely different in the Legislature. Does the Minister of Transportation believe that there is a demonstrated need for the mid-peninsula corridor?

Hon Mr Takhar: Actually, it's strange. There are two colleagues who sit there next to each other, and they both have different opinions about whether this highway should be built or not, but the whole purpose of the envi-

ronmental assessment is to make sure whether this highway is needed, when it's needed and where it's needed. That's why we are going ahead with the full environmental assessment.

FABRY DISEASE

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, I have a constituent who has a son who suffers from the rare Fabry disease. For the last 90 days, young Fabry patients have been receiving treatment free of charge from the company which provides Fabrazyme, the necessary drug, due to an arrangement with Ontario's hospital system. Unfortunately, the 90-day period is about to expire on April 25. This treatment would be extremely expensive for the parents to provide out of pocket, and I know my constituency office has been working with your ministry to try and resolve this situation.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Record reported that you would provide an answer within 48 hours, and the 48 hours are up. I wonder, Minister, what is going to happen with this drug?

Interjections.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): With all due respect for your instinct for partisanship, my answer was, of course, going to acknowledge that on this issue, as I said to the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, I clearly think that the region has been very well served by political representation from a variety of stripes.

What I'm pleased to be able to tell the House today is that we're also served by an active, good corporate citizenship in the announcement that I'm able to make, which is that the manufacturer of the drug has agreed to extend the period of compassionate provision without charge of the drug until reviews are completed. I'm pleased to be able to say that to the House today and to thank the four members who have all been very active on this file.

Mrs Sandals: Thank you, Minister. That's great news for my constituent and for the constituents of a number of other members. I'm sure the follow-up question I will be getting is, "What are the next steps in the approval process?" because they're going to want to know where this goes long-term.

Hon Mr Smitherman: The subject of this drug, Fabrazyme, as well as Renagel, another drug that is giving support to people with Fabry disease, is currently under an expedited review. We recognize that these drugs are providing extraordinary benefit to people in Ontario, but the scientific tests are of course crucial to the integrity of our process. I can tell the member and all members who are interested that we are reviewing it on an expedited basis and are looking forward to the opportunity to be able to have a product that will continue to provide relief to people who are challenged with Fabry disease.

ENERGY CONTRACTS

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is to the Premier. Your hydro announcement the other day promises to bring back to Ontario one of the most unloved parts of the Conservative hydro scheme. That is the door-to-door electricity marketers, the shady hucksters who swept like locusts through Ontario, knocking on people's doors, trying to manipulate them into signing electricity contracts where the price was going to be much higher. If you remember, Premier, when you were on this side of the House, that's when we started receiving complaint after complaint of people being fed deceptive information, people being lied to, people actually having their signatures forged on hydroelectricity contracts. Premier, why you want to bring these hucksters, these manipulators, back to go after the people of Ontario once again?

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

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The plan is to have a regulated price that uses the assets associated with the original hydroelectric and nuclear to keep the price regulated. It is the studied view of those who have looked at this that there will be no opportunity for those retailers with small consumers. Where they will have an opportunity is with mid-sized businesses, small businesses and farmers, many of whom have advocated openly to have this kind of opportunity of arbitrage.

The second point the member should bear in mind is that we've also undertaken to look at the consumer protection aspect of this for those mid-sized businesses. I would suggest that the real lack of integrity on the question and the way it was put and the real huckster on this is the member opposite, who put the question in a way that completely ignores the announcement.

Mr Hampton: Coming from that minister, I consider that comment a compliment. Minister, I remember Jean-Marc Lalonde, the member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, standing in this Legislature pointing out how people in his riding had actually had their signatures forged on these contracts. I remember that. I remember other members. I remember the Conservative Minister of Energy of the day saying, "Oh, our consumer protection laws are going to make sure this doesn't happen." This was rife across Ontario: people being lied to, people being fed deceptive information and people having contracts forged.

Can you tell us, what is the possible rationale for inflicting this kind of hucksterism and dishonesty on the people of Ontario once again?

Hon Mr Duncan: The member likely wasn't aware of the announcement. We are going back to a regulated price for small consumers. We're getting rid of the wholesale spot market for small consumers, unless that consumer chooses to stay on it. Therefore, there will be no opportunity for the kind of arbitrage that occurred under the previous regime with small consumers. There

will be an opportunity for larger consumers—and when I say "larger," I mean small businesses and others—who may want to take advantage of arbitrage and plans that can be offered for those larger consumption volumes, to take advantage of that. This government has proposed a regime and will bring forward legislation that has a regulated price, a default price for small consumers that will be stable, predictable and will ensure a reliable supply of energy, something that party never had the courage or the foresight to do.

1450

PHOTO RADAR

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question is also for the Minister of Transportation. Your trial balloon on the NDP tax-grab photo radar is still floating around out there. Can you tell us today your position on photo radar?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): We are always interested in improving the safety of highways, so we are always prepared to look at any measures that will improve safety on highways. That's where this issue falls.

Mr Dunlop: I think I need to refresh the minister's memory on what two of his closest friends had to say about photo radar. On December 17, 1994, Monte Kwinter, your seatmate, and now the minister responsible for community safety—what I mean by "community safety" is the policing of school zones, construction zones, hospital zones and our highways and streets. This is what Mr Kwinter had to say in the Toronto Sun: "All it's really done has made the coffers of the treasury swell with amounts of money that are starting to verge on the obscene." And just this year, your Ottawa Senators Premier, Dalton McGuinty, told reporters on the cabinet scrum, "It's a revenue generator, absolutely." Do you agree with your cabinet colleagues that photo radar is just another way for you to pick the pockets of hard-working people in this province and that it's not about community safety?

Hon Mr Takhar: As I said before, we consider highway safety a top priority. I want to quote from what Mr Runciman said once: "Maybe we should take another look at photo radar in those areas to monitor that sort of thing, because police can't be there 24 hours a day and that's part of the problem." So I'm sure if he's going to listen to his colleagues, I am very delighted to listen to my colleagues.

RENT REGULATION

Mr Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Honourable John Gerretsen. During the October 2003 campaign, we made a strong commitment to bring forward a real protection for tenants, a commitment that was especially welcome in my own riding, the district of Etobicoke North. Yesterday, the minister made an im-

portant announcement regarding changes to the Tory rent control system, including the suspension of the 2% component of the annual rent guideline. Can the minister tell us why he has taken this step and how this will benefit Ontario's renters?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): Yes, the member is correct. We will be introducing legislation that will, in effect, eliminate or suspend the automatic 2% base into formula that would normally go into effect in August of this year, during the time while we're going through consultation of the new tenant protection legislation that we want to introduce, and that consultation will take place in a number of forums, with stakeholder meetings, through e-line and town hall meetings. It's important to note, however, that this 2% time out—as we like to refer to it—will be in effect during the time that the consultation takes place. It does not affect the rent control index, which will still remain in effect for landlords to implement in the year 2005.

Mr Qaadri: The minister will know that this announcement was welcome news in many quarters. Even the members of the third party—as yet unrecognized—congratulated the minister on this initiative. There has, however, been criticism that the real issue is the lack of affordable housing. What measures is the government taking to deal with the broader issues of tenant protection and housing?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: We are certainly encouraged that the third party will be supporting this legislation, because we realize that they feel it's a very important step as well. Rent control review is only one aspect of our comprehensive housing program. We're also looking at the 20,000 new housing units that will be brought on-line through the minister of infrastructure. We're looking forward to that. We will also be implementing, during our term of office, housing allowances for 35,000 needy families. We also introduced some time ago the rent bank of \$10 million, which will help needy families as well who are involved in emergency situations.

This government is committed to making sure there is affordable housing available for everyone, and the rent control legislation consultation process we're going through right now is only one part of that.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. You will be well aware, Minister, that the design and engineering studies have been completed on the provincial highway between Arnprior and Renfrew. Would you commit now to a construction schedule for that provincial highway to Renfrew and beyond?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): As I answered before, we are looking at all our priorities. We will look at that highway as part of those priorities and determine whether it needs to be done.

Mr Yakabuski: I would certainly expect a little bit more of a timetable from the minister; however, that's

been about what we've been getting lately. But will you commit that that highway, when extended—if extended—by your government, will not be a toll road?

Hon Mr Takhar: We have already made commitments to the effect that we have issued some criteria with regard to tolls. We have said that we will not toll any highway that doesn't have an alternative route and we will take tolls off if the highway is paid off. We have also said that it has to be cost-effective and economically justified before we would put on any tolls.

ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): My question deals with the important role that education and training programs play for troubled youth. These are youth who may encounter systemic problems of poverty and unemployment if a solution to their alienation is not found. I therefore have a question for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It is a sad and frustrating fact that there are many youth who do not comfortably fit into the secondary education system. These same youth either drop out of high school before they graduate or have no desire to advance to college or university programs.

I was reminded of this as I toured the Carpenters and Allied Workers Local 27, which is part of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. During my tour, I was excited to hear about our government's commitment to apprenticeship training programs. This is just one example of the many programs that are available to exceptionally talented high school and college students in our province.

Minister, could you briefly explain what our government is offering youth who may not feel that a traditional education system is beneficial to their future goals?

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I thank the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale for that question, because I think it's really important that our young people recognize that there are programs for them, whatever their choice of career should be. We do have the Ontario youth apprenticeship program in place, and there are 13,000 young people in high schools in this program right now. They are involved in 70 different skill trades. The most popular are cooks, carpenters and early childhood educators. I'm pleased to say I have visited some of these schools and I've also seen young women who are in auto body mechanic work. We have a \$7-million budget for those programs this year. I would encourage all the young people of Ontario to see these as viable opportunities.

1500

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): My question is also to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The help of our government in providing for youth

to fulfill their potential is an important initiative, but if our economy is going to thrive we must help our internationally trained professionals reach their full potential. The issue of access to trades and professions for internationally trained individuals is not going to go away. These individuals need to be able to access their profession of choice for the benefit of themselves and for our economy.

Before the election and since forming the government, we have raised the issue of barriers that internationally trained individuals face, but now it is time to take action. Minister, what action are we taking to address this important issue?

Hon Mrs Chambers: Again, I'm very eager to let the people of Ontario know what programs are there for them. In January, I made an announcement of \$4 million for programs that will help to bridge the requirements that internationally trained individuals come to this wonderful province with against those requirements that the regulated professions and trades have identified.

We have approximately 120,000 people choosing Ontario as their home every year. Of those new immigrants, approximately 70% are coming in with post-secondary education. We don't want to lose those skills. Under my leadership, my ministry has been working with the 38 regulated professions, all the skilled trades, and we are committed to a report card within the first year of this initiative and we are committed to a variety of written programs for these individuals.

WATER QUALITY

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, on April 5 I faxed you a letter regarding the Pine Grove Trailer Park, which is a private trailer park in the unorganized community of Cartier in my riding. Your ministry officials have met with the owner, Judith Stojanovic, regarding her obligations under regulation 170. She has called me because she can't afford the tens of thousands of dollars to install a new water system, a treatment system and to pay for ongoing monitoring. The tenants in the 11 residential trailers that she has are on fixed incomes, so she can't afford to pass the costs on to them. She has no choice but to close down the trailer park and evict the tenants because she can't afford to meet the costs of the regulation.

My question to you, Minister, is this: Is your government going to pay the costs of the water upgrades in rural trailer parks so that tenants can stay in their homes?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I always take this opportunity, first of all, to say that this government is committed to ensuring that there are regulations in place so that Ontarians know when they turn on the tap that the water is safe. With respect to the particular situation in the Cartier community, I am familiar with it. It is a system that relies on surface water as opposed to groundwater. If it was groundwater, they

would have an additional year in order to comply. They do fall under regulation 170.

I've indicated on a number of occasions in this Legislature that regulation 170 is flawed. I've indicated that I have directed staff at the Ministry of the Environment to provide me with recommendations so that people in Ontario will be able to comply with provincial regulations and yet access safe water.

Ms Martel: Minister, your staff may be reviewing this matter, or you may be, but I can tell you that your staff are still asking trailer park owners to comply, and they're asking her for a response now. This is a really serious issue across northern and rural Ontario. We have owners who cannot afford to pay the costs associated with this regulation. Some may want to try to pass those costs on to the tenants, but given how high those costs are, we don't want them to do that. Many tenants in small trailer parks are on fixed incomes, so it's impossible for them to find an affordable place to live. Many of them have trailers that are fixed so they can't be moved to another location even if the tenant could find another location. This is an urgent issue for people in the Pine Grove Trailer Park. Is your ministry going to cover the cost of upgrades so these tenants are not evicted and can stay in their own homes?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: Ensuring that Ontarians have access to safe and clean water is an urgent issue for this government and we don't intend to turn away from that. I have asked staff at the Ministry of the Environment to bring me a plan that will enable people across rural Ontario and northern Ontario to be sure that the water they access is safe. We're talking about surface water. Surely I don't need to remind the member opposite what can happen when people don't access safe surface water. We are not going to turn our backs on the responsibility to ensure that water sources in this province are safe. The ministry will provide recommendations that will ensure that constituents like yours will be able to meet those regulations.

HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. For more than 20 years there has been talk of a new provincial highway between the cities of Guelph and Kitchener, replacing the existing one. This new highway is needed immediately for reasons of safety and the efficient flow and movement of traffic. It's an important part of our Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan. Minister, I know you've got a copy of it because I had a page send it over to you just a few moments ago. This plan is supported by our local municipal councils in Waterloo region and Wellington county. My question is, when will the minister commence construction on this new highway that we need so badly?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): The honourable member is right. He just sent me these details, and I think it takes about 10 years to

construct a highway. But let me tell you, I had the chance to go and visit the Kitchener-Waterloo area. I went there on January 28 to open the transit terminal in the honourable member's riding, but he wasn't there. I had the chance to discuss these issues—

Interjections.

Hon Mr Takhar: Actually, he was invited but he wasn't there.

I had the chance to discuss regional transportation issues with the council members there. We are having discussions with them. As time goes on, we will have our study formed on that front.

Mr Arnott: Another important feature of the Waterloo-Wellington transportation action plan is the need for immediate repairs and upgrading of the provincial highway between Fergus and Mount Forest through my home town of Arthur. Again, I have twice raised the need for these highway repairs in this House since last October. Surely the minister is aware of this important issue. The county of Wellington passed a resolution months ago calling for the ministry's action to fix this stretch of provincial highway. Will the minister inform the House, when exactly will he fix this highway?

Hon Mr Takhar: I will check the schedule and get back to the honourable member.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Over the last six months, you have made substantial announcements in regard to affordable housing, and that has been good news for the communities that have benefited from that. But over the last week, we've seen article after article talking about the need for affordable housing, not just here in Toronto but throughout the province. When can we expect to hear more about affordable housing from your ministry?

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I want to thank the member for the question because affordable housing is a pressing issue and a pressing need in this province. After practically a decade of inaction, I was very pleased a couple of weeks ago to be here with the federal infrastructure minister, the Honourable Andy Scott, who heads up CMHC for the federal government, to have an announcement that was long overdue: some \$56 million in new projects in 13 communities, upwards of 2,300 units of affordable housing.

1510

I have some details. There were 102 affordable housing units in London, 105 affordable housing units in Kingston, 94 in Wellington county. Those dollars were languishing in the provincial treasury for many, many years. We unlocked them. We're taking responsible action to ensure that needy families have access to affordable housing. I'm working with my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on other pro-

gramming as well. It is an exciting time for affordable housing in the province of Ontario, and I thank the member for the question.

Mrs Van Bommel: Thank you, Minister, for that answer. It is true that a lot of needy families have had to fend for themselves while the previous government virtually ignored affordable housing. I know that our government has made a very strong statement regarding affordable housing. Minister, could you tell me what that would mean to the Ontarians who need that kind of housing?

Hon Mr Caplan: I'm delighted to, and I concur with the member's observation that it was a provincial disgrace that the former government had decided to abandon affordable housing entirely. In fact, those announcements that I just talked about, that commitment, is about eight times more funding and support for affordable housing than we saw over the last number of years.

Right now, my ministry is working with housing providers, with municipalities. We are prepared to work with members of the opposition who I know care passionately for the construction of affordable housing to turn that around, because this government is back in the affordable housing market. My colleagues and I are working with our federal colleagues to enhance the Canada-Ontario affordable housing agreement. The province will match, over time, the federal contribution. We look forward to being a full partner with—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. New question.

LEVEL CROSSINGS

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, recognizing that you do not invite the sitting members when you visit a riding, I'm not sure whether you have visited the town of Ingersoll in my riding.

The town of Ingersoll is divided by the train track running through the centre of town, with only level crossings to get across from one side to the other, so when a train goes through town and it stops or a mishap occurs, the emergency vehicles cannot get from one side to the other to help people in need.

The county of Oxford has sent you a business plan outlining the provincial financing needed in order to build an overpass over the railroad track to protect its citizens. Minister, can we count on your support for this project to protect the safety of the residents of our community?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I'm sure this need didn't just arise in the last six months; this need has existed there for the last eight and a half years. But safety is of paramount concern, and we will be prepared to look at anything favourably that improves safety in the province.

Mr Hardeman: We thank you very much for that comment. I do want to point out that this project has been

on the books for many years and the community has been working on it for some time.

Minister, 43 trains go through Ingersoll every day, so the residents find their safety in jeopardy frequently. As I said, this project has been on the books for many years. As time goes on, the people get more and more concerned that more lives will be lost because of the level crossings and no overpass over the tracks. Are you willing to let public safety suffer while you're taking your time deciding whether you are going to help the people?

Hon Mr Takhar: I am glad the member admitted that this project has been on the books for several years and they have ignored safety for eight and a half years, but what I said is that safety is our paramount concern and we are prepared to look at any project that will make the city safer.

CERTIFICATS DE NAISSANCE

M. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): Ma question est pour le ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises. On a rapporté que le Bureau du registraire général de l'état civil avait des difficultés à délivrer des certificats de naissance en français avec les accents. De nombreux francophones de ma circonscription ont exprimé leur inquiétude à ce sujet.

Monsieur le Ministre, que comptez-vous faire afin de vous assurer que le Bureau du registraire général puisse délivrer des certificats de naissance avec les accents sur les mots français ?

L'hon. Jim Watson (ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises): Merci à mon collègue le député d'Ottawa-Orléans. C'est un jour historique pour moi, parce que c'est ma première question en français ici à l'Assemblée législative. Ça me permet aussi de pratiquer la langue de Molière avec ma professeure de français ici, M^{me} Meilleur.

L'ancien gouvernement a mis en place un système afin de produire des certificats de naissance, et c'est incroyable que le système était incapable de fournir les accents sur les noms. Le gouvernement McGuinty ne pense pas que c'est acceptable, et je suis très fier aujourd'hui d'annoncer que mon personnel au ministère a corrigé le problème.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

Applause.

L'hon. M. Watson: Maintenant, quand les francophones demanderont un certificat de naissance, ils pourront le recevoir avec les accents. Notre gouvernement est en train de corriger les autres—

The Speaker: Thank you. I want to give the member a chance to ask his supplementary, because I had stood up before the clapping. Supplementary?

Mr McNeely: Merci, monsieur le Ministre. Thank you, Mr Speaker. I'm satisfied with that response, and I have no further question.

PETITIONS

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by hundreds of my constituents and by constituents from ridings around mine.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I affix my signature to this petition.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): “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.”

I'm happy to affix my own signature.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

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

“Whereas the Sudbury Regional Hospital is a regional referral centre, serving patients from across northeastern Ontario;

“Whereas the burden of raising money to pay the local share of the hospital reconstruction costs has fallen primarily onto local residents;

“Whereas city council and local residents have already committed more money to the project than we were required to;

“Whereas imposing a private mortgage scheme on the hospital to pay more costs at the local level would be disastrous for patients, hospital programs and staff;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We call on the Liberal government to fund 85% of the capital costs of reconstruction at the Sudbury Regional Hospital.”

I agree with the petitioners, and I have affixed my signature to this.

HIGHWAY 518

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from the constituents of Parry Sound-Muskoka. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Highway 518 between Highway 69 and Highway 11 serves the residents of the communities of Haines Lake, Orrville, Bear Lake, Whitehall and Sprucedale; and

“Whereas Highway 518 is in a deplorable condition; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has previously assured local residents of its intention to upgrade and improve Highway 518;

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

“We request that the Ministry of Transportation immediately proceed with the reconstruction of Highway 518 between Highway 69 and Highway 11.”

I support this petition and sign my signature to it.

1520

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to uphold parliamentary tradition and hold a public presentation and debate of the 2004 budget, and every budget thereafter, by our publicly

elected members of Parliament inside the legislative chamber.”

I’ve signed my name to this petition, as I agree with it.

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I’m pleased to present petitions from people at the Crystal Beach Tim Hortons. I know this issue has had some developments, but I would like to still read their petition. 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.”

Beneath Sharon Guilmette and Dan Knutt’s signatures, I affix my own.

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I have a petition.

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government has made a commitment to the Canadian Federation Of Students to freeze tuition fees for at least two years; and

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government has also promised students that this tuition freeze will be fully funded; and

“Whereas the increases in federal transfer payments to the provinces for post-secondary education have not kept up with inflation and today comprise a smaller portion of the Canadian health and social transfer fund than they did in 1995; and

“Whereas today federally-funded programs for post-secondary education is about \$3 billion less than what it would have been had funding not been cut ...; and

“Whereas the federal underfunding”—this print is getting smaller—“... makes improving access to and enhancing the quality of post-secondary education ...;

“We, the undersigned”—these are over 2,000 students from Carleton University—“call on the federal government to immediately inject \$3 billion into the Canada health and social transfer for post-secondary education and request that these monies be accounted for separately through a post-secondary education fund.”

I affix my signature to this as well.

TAXATION

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it 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.”

It’s signed by a significant number of my constituents, most of whom are residing in the New Hamburg area.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): A petition that I have 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,” if not centuries; “and

“Whereas the previous government in 2003 showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of Ontario by presenting an budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory”—I believe owned by Belinda Stronach—“and;

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

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Is that part of the petition, or did you just make that up?

Mr Wilkinson: I’m just clarifying, Mr Hardeman.

“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 this legislative chamber.”

I’m very proud to affix my name to this petition.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I’m pleased to read this petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign my name to that.

SENIOR CITIZENS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): The riding with the longest name because our people have the biggest hearts and the biggest hopes and the biggest dreams.

They keep coming in. The Joan Faria petition reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

I’m pleased, along with member Hardeman, to submit that.

TAXATION

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here and it’s about the tax on \$4 meals. I know the Premier has already announced that he’s not going to do it, but these people signed the petition with the expectation that I would present it here in the Legislature on their behalf. So I will do that, Mr Speaker.

"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 an 8% tax on basic meals under \$4."

All these people signed this because they're totally opposed to the tax.

GO TRANSIT SERVICE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the city of Mississauga has, within a generation, grown from a linked collection of suburban and farming communities into Canada's sixth-largest city, and tens of thousands of people daily need to commute into and out of Mississauga in order to do business, educate themselves and their families and enjoy culture and recreation; and

"Whereas gridlock on all roads leading into and out of Mississauga makes peak period road commuting impractical, and commuter rail service on the Milton GO line is restricted to morning and afternoon service into and out of Toronto; and

"Whereas residents of western Mississauga need to 'commute to commute,' driving along traffic-clogged roads to get to overflowing parking lots at the Meadowvale, Streetsville and Erindale GO train stations;

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

"That the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation and highways, instruct GO Transit to allocate sufficient resources from its 2004-05 capital budget to proceed immediately with the acquisition of land and construction of a new GO train station, called Lisgar, at Tenth Line and the rail tracks, to alleviate the parking congestion, and provide better access to GO train service on the Milton line for residents of western Mississauga."

I am especially pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

1530

WATER SERVICES

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I have a petition on rural community water testing.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock is made up of many small communities; and

"Whereas not all citizens live in larger cities such as Toronto, where access to municipal water service is taken for granted; and

"Whereas smaller communities have little, if any, access to municipal water services; and

"Whereas Ontario's smaller villages and hamlets are home to many community buildings such as churches, community halls and arenas; and

"Whereas those responsible for halls, churches, arenas and other community facilities take pride in ensuring these buildings have access to the highest quality potable water;

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

"That the implementation of regulation 170/03 as it relates to community halls and similar facilities be delayed; and

"That the province of Ontario ensure halls, churches, arenas and other public facilities on private wells comply with water safety standards that are reasonable and appropriate."

This is signed by many people in my riding.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Shafiq Qadri (Etobicoke North): I have a petition addressed 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 this legislative chamber."

In the spirit of parliamentary democracy, I'm very pleased to affix my signature to this petition also.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

"Whereas as part of the landfill planning process, peer reviews of site 41 identified over 200 recommendations

for improvements to the design, most of which are related to potential groundwater contamination; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

I’m pleased to sign my name to this.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS AMENDMENT ACT (FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE), 2004 LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D’EMPLOI (CONGÉ FAMILIAL POUR RAISON MÉDICALE)

Mr Bentley moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family medical leave and other matters / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d’emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour raison médicale et d’autres questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Bentley.

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): I will be sharing my time with the members from Kitchener Centre, Sarnia-Lambton and my parliamentary assistant, the member for Oakville.

I am pleased to take part in the second reading of the proposed Employment Standards Amendment Act, involving family medical leave. This bill would, if passed, provide real, positive change for all of the people of Ontario. Specifically, it would provide positive change

for Ontario families, for employees, for businesses, for those involved in giving care and, of course, for those who are in need of care. It will allow employees to take up to eight weeks of unpaid but job-protected leave to look after a family member who is in the last stages of life. This is a development that has not been seen in the legislative history of this province. It is an extremely important development and will provide a very positive change for those giving the care and those most desperately in need of it.

Long ago, we stood as a society and said we were going to support people in the happy times of life; we were going to support them at the beginning of life, with maternity and parental benefits. This is a statement by the McGuinty government that we are prepared to stand with people in the difficult times of life. We are prepared to stand with employees and support their caregiving obligations; we are prepared to stand with those who need the care, and to support them at the most difficult time of life, the end of life.

This legislation would provide eight weeks of job-protected leave so that a caregiver could look after their mother, their father, their son, their daughter or their spouse during the end of life. This legislation will protect people’s jobs while they provide the care they must to those closest to them.

Comme j’ai dit l’autre jour, on ne devrait pas avoir à choisir entre perdre son emploi et demeurer au chevet de son père, de sa mère ou de son enfant qui se meurt. Une société humaine et bienveillante n’imposerait pas un tel choix, et en tout cas, ce gouvernement ne le fera pas.

This bill would recognize that our society, which is unfortunately not becoming younger, must do more to support its citizens at the end of life, the difficult times of life. It must support families by making it easier for family members to take the time to provide care or to support a loved one in their final days. Helping a dying loved one exacts a heavy toll upon family members. There is a tremendous emotional burden, the burden of seeing your father or your mother or your child in pain, the burden of knowing that they will soon be lost to you. That burden is made the greater when you are not able to take the time to be with your loved one during those last stages of life, not able to take the time because you cannot afford to lose your job, not able to take the time because you are forced to make the impossible choice: your job or to be with your loved one.

It is not too much to ask that caregivers be relieved of the burden of having to worry about their job at that very difficult point in time. Choosing between a job and caring for a loved one in the last stages of life is not a choice that a caring society asks people to make, and it is not a choice that this government will ask people to make.

Apart from the emotional burden, there is a very significant financial burden on people who are faced with this impossible choice between their job and looking after their loved one. Taking care of a seriously ill loved one can put immense strains on people. There was a

recent study of terminally ill cancer patients, a Statistics Canada report that look at terminal cancer cases in 2002. What that study found was that 40% of the caregivers placed in that impossible position with that impossible choice had to quit their jobs; 40% of people faced with a loved one in the last stages of life made the choice to be with their loved one. They chose the impossible choice. As well as the burden of losing a loved one, they were faced with the burden of losing their job. That is unfair, that is not right, and that is not a choice that the McGuinty government will force people to make. That study also indicated that 25% of caregivers had to give up all or most of their savings to look after a terminally ill loved one—25%, all or most of their savings. Once again, they lose everything. They lose their loved one. They lose their job in many cases. They lose their savings. As I said before, a society that is prepared to stand with people at the happy times at the beginning of life must now stand and help people at the difficult times, to support their decision to be with their loved one when the loved one is near the end of life. That is only right. It is just, it is proper, it is what we must do, and it is what the McGuinty government, with this bill, will do and will accomplish.

1540

Ontario leave is unpaid, much as other benefits in the Employment Standards Act which provide for leave are unpaid. But this leave has two aspects to it. It was designed to dovetail with the changes to the federal Employment Insurance Act. As members are aware, the changes to that act, which came into force January of this year, provide up to six weeks of employment insurance benefits for caregivers, following a two-week waiting period, to help ease the financial strain when they take time off work to be with their loved one who is in the last stages of life. That eases the financial burden. But except for federally regulated employees, the federal Employment Insurance Act changes do not protect the job. So for most Ontario workers, we have the financial benefit but no job protection. This act will make sure that job protection exists for those workers who would otherwise qualify for employment insurance benefits.

I might add that in designing this legislation, in determining the form it would take, we were certainly mindful of the requirements to qualify for employment insurance benefits. We were mindful of the medical certificate that is required for employment insurance benefits, because doctor certification would qualify employees for employment insurance benefits and the same certificate can be used for the job-protected leave under this legislation. There is a matching of the federal benefit with the leave that would be provided and protected with this legislation. With respect to the medical certificate, that is a requirement of the leave, but if it's not available when the leave must be taken, it can be provided afterwards—as soon as possible, but afterwards, because there are going to be situations where leave must be taken on an emergency basis.

The question might be asked, does this apply to part-timers? The answer is yes. Every worker covered by the

Employment Standards Act will be eligible for this leave. Unlike the 10-day emergency leave provision in the Employment Standards Act, which only applies to those whose employer has 50 or more employees, this benefit applies to every worker in the province covered by the Employment Standards Act.

The question might be asked, what if the worker doesn't qualify for employment insurance but is covered by the Employment Standards Act? This legislation would protect that worker's job while they take time to be with their loved one in the loved one's last stage of life. So this has even greater inclusivity than the federal employment insurance benefits legislation.

It's obviously good for employees. What about employers? What about the effect on businesses? In fact, this legislation will help businesses. What is not often understood is the cost that businesses bear through absenteeism, absenteeism caused by caregivers who have to take time off work to look after terminally ill loved ones. What is that cost? It has been estimated that the direct costs of absenteeism due to caregiver strain are \$1 billion a year in Canada. Indirect costs are another \$1 billion to \$2 billion a year. Businesses are already paying a very heavy price.

How do you relieve that price? It is thought, and it is sometimes suggested, that this will impose a burden of cost on employers, but in fact, when a worker has to quit to look after a terminally ill loved one—and the study cited shows that 40% do—the employer loses that worker's training, knowledge, skill and their knowledge of the production. There is an unplanned disruption of production.

This bill will encourage a more productive, long-term planning process. It will enable employers to do what the overwhelming majority either do or wish to do anyway, which is to help people in difficult circumstances. So this, in fact, is good for businesses as well as employees.

What about caregivers? Obviously this legislation is good for caregivers because it relieves them of that terrible choice, that impossible choice.

What about those who need the care? What about those who, in their last difficult days, would want to have those nearest and dearest to them close at hand? This legislation will make sure that can happen. Palliative care studies indicate that three quarters of people would like to be at home during their last difficult days but only a quarter are actually able to be at home. This will provide a means to accomplish the person's wish.

It's estimated in studies that 36% of people in their last days have to go to institutions because they don't have the care available at home and they can't remain at home. Our government is committed to making sure that, over the course of our mandate, we have greatly expanded home care. This will augment that and help people who are terminally ill be where they wish to be during their last few days.

1550

It is suggested, and it has been suggested by some opposite, that it doesn't do enough, that we should do more. I stand with those who suggest that the well of

compassion should never be full. But before the McGuinty government introduced this piece of legislation, there was no family medical leave benefit. Before the McGuinty government took this initiative, there was no benefit. No such benefit was introduced during the past nine years. For those who would suggest that this bill somehow does not look after others, I again join with those in saying that the well of compassion should never be full, but I also ask that all members listen carefully to the words of those who would criticize this bill because it might not do enough, and to ask the ones who might speak those words, what did they do when they had the chance? Did they introduce a family medical leave bill? No. Did they look after anybody else? No. Did they show the compassion they now seek from this government? No.

The fact of the matter is that words are easy, but words without action are like candles without wicks: They do not illuminate the way we must take. This government will light the way with this legislation. This government will show a more compassionate side to the people of Ontario than they have seen in the last nine years. This government will fulfill its commitment to look after employees when they're faced with that impossible choice of keeping their job or looking after a loved one. This government will stand with employees, employers and those who need the care and deliver on its commitment with the family medical leave bill.

In conclusion, as the—

Interjection.

Hon Mr Bentley: No, no—lots to say about this. There is so much to say about this and so many people who would like to speak in support of this piece of legislation. I know some of the members opposite are very anxious to join in the debate and speak in support of this. I am looking forward to hearing what they have to say about this piece of legislation, because once again, of course, it is legislation the likes of which we have not seen in this province. So those who would find it wanting might want to look first at their own actions and answer the question, where were they when the call went out?

In conclusion, let me say that this bill will protect the jobs of employees so they can look after their loved ones in their loved ones' most difficult time of need. It will look after the job that must be protected and not force the 40% of them who now must quit their job to give up their job to be with those they love dearest. It will support businesses, in fact, by encouraging a more productive approach to this very difficult challenge that faces employees and employers. It will support those who need the care, because during the time they need them most, they will have their loved ones beside them. It will support the people of Ontario as the McGuinty government works with the people of Ontario to build a more caring and more compassionate society for the benefit of all.

I yield my time.

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): It's a great pleasure to stand here in this place and speak in favour of Bill 56. I want to begin by congratulating the Minister of

Labour for all the hard work that he has done on this, not only in terms of Bill 56 but in terms of what's happening with the whole labour portfolio and labour issues. I think that to understand Bill 56 correctly, you have to put it in a bit of a broader context.

I want to speak of a recent meeting that I attended with the Minister of Labour because I think it provides the context to understand his approach to the whole issue of the labour portfolio and the bill that has come forward. It was in my area—actually, I was joined by my colleague the member from Guelph-Wellington. We had a meeting with a particular union. There were about a hundred people there. The leadership of this union was from across a large region. They were there to welcome the Minister of Labour, who was going to come and speak with them. Although I obviously have worked with unions in the past—I had worked with them during the campaign and after—I must admit that I went to this meeting with a little bit of trepidation. The people there were mainly the leadership of the union, and of course they watch governments very closely. I wasn't 100% sure what their reaction would be. I want to tell members that when I arrived I was quite relieved. I found out I had nothing to fear. I saw a group that was very anxious to hear about the government's plans and also to hear from the minister.

Then the minister arrived. I must say he was a bit of a celebrity. He came in, and people gathered around him. Do you know what? The minister went around informally and shook hands and introduced himself to every one of those union leaders. He talked to them, but more important than talking about his vision, he listened. He listened to their concerns, and he listened to their vision for issues surrounding labour relations.

I have to tell you there was a feeling of warmth in the room, and that feeling of warmth continued when the minister made a keynote address. I wish members of the Legislature had been there to hear his speech, because within his speech was a basic message. That message was that when it comes to these types of issues, we are not a government that believes in taking sides. We are not a government that tries to identify itself as favouring business over labour, as the previous government did, or favouring labour over business, as the NDP did. That's not our style. That's not our policy.

We are a government, and this is a minister, that wants to work for the best interests of everyone. We recognize that both labour and employers have real needs and concerns, and we want to work with both sides. This was the minister's message: to work with both sides to facilitate agreements, and also, as a government, to act as an honest broker when there are disagreements. In short, we see the key to economic prosperity and well-being in this province as true co-operation between labour and government. I'm happy to report that the reaction at this meeting was overwhelming. Every single union leader gave the minister a standing ovation and applauded his vision—not a vision that was big labour or big business, but a vision about co-operation.

This co-operative spirit is what lies behind this bill. Compassionate leave, as the minister so eloquently pointed out, is not simply about workers, it's also about employers. As I think the minister made reference, estimates put the direct cost of absenteeism in the Canadian workplace, due to high work-life conflict, between \$3 billion and \$5 billion per year.

You have to ask yourself, how much attention will someone who's worrying about a dying relative be able to give their job? If someone who is dealing with machinery has a relative at home who is seriously ill, might that employee pose a safety hazard? Employees who take job-protected family medical leave tend to return to their workplaces better able to focus on their jobs. I would argue that employees who have been given the opportunity to take time off and return to their jobs will return with a renewed sense of commitment and with the energy and focus required to perform the work they're assigned.

Up to now, as minister pointed out, many people have had to quit their job to have the time and energy to care for a loved one. This burdens them, and burdens their families, with financial worries and a heightened sense of anxiety. Many—and I'm sure members have encountered them; I know I have—are forced to spend much of or all their savings because they've lost their main source of income.

The measures contained in Bill 56, if passed, will provide a benefit by creating a more positive, loyal and productive workforce. I think the minister made reference in his speech to studies that show roughly 25% of working Canadians experience high levels of caregiver strain. Much of this comes from the difficulties of balancing their work life with the demands of caring for a seriously ill loved one.

Think about the remedy this bill would provide to those sorts of situations. Employees with caregiver strain are not happy employees, they are not good employees, and they shouldn't be there. They should be allowed to have the time off that they need, in this case eight weeks, to care for the relative who's seriously ill.

1600

I just want to spend a few minutes. I've just outlined some of the particulars of the bill. As I mentioned, if passed, the bill would provide up to eight weeks of job-protected unpaid leave for those taking care of seriously ill family members with a significant risk of death within 26 weeks. It applies to all employees covered under the Employment Standards Act, including part-time employees, which I think is very important. It entitles the employee to another eight weeks of job-protected leave if the family member is still gravely ill at the end of the 26-week period. In other words, it recognizes that sometimes these situations can go on past the 26 weeks, and we don't have to play a silly game of watching the calendar.

The benefit goes beyond the employee; it goes beyond the employer. One has to think about—and the minister spoke about it—those who need the care. Studies indicate—and the minister made reference to this—that

80% of Canadians would prefer to spend their last days at home, not in a hospital or an institution, yet, unfortunately, only 25% are able to do that. Part of the reason is, there isn't the availability of family members to give the care to these individuals in the remaining days of their lives. When you think about it, if we can encourage family members to take their responsibilities, not to have the stress of worrying about their job, and they can go and care for a parent or other relative at the same time in their home, this will relieve some of the stress upon our medical system. Certainly every member in this House is aware that our medical system is facing severe strain as our population ages. I think we have to look at home care as being one of the future solutions to the pressures that are put on our medical system, and see how this bill, if passed, will dovetail nicely into these types of strategies, which I think are supported by all members on all sides of the House.

Will there be costs to small business? Obviously, to allow someone to leave for eight weeks will incur some costs, but the government and the minister have thought about ways to mitigate some of these. First, people in a family, I understand, can split up the eight weeks, so a brother and sister caring for a family member could each take four weeks, for example. Second, employees are required to provide notice to their employer so that together they can work out a plan for the employee to leave. Thirdly, in many cases, as I mentioned earlier, the employee simply has to quit. If you want to talk about costs to employers, just ask yourself about a valued employee, someone with years and years of training and experience, who has to up and leave because of an ill parent. Think of the cost to that employer, in terms of losing one of his or her star employees and also having to retrain someone.

We live in a society that recognizes the need for workers to take a leave from time to time. One only has to think of the parental leave, the maternity leave, to know that we put an emphasis on giving people the right to take some time off when their families, their children, are at the beginning of their lives. What this bill does is it recognizes the flip side of the coin. It shows that when people are in their final days, when aging parents or relatives are near the end, people should have the right and the opportunity to care for them. It continues the cycle. It is a very worthwhile policy and, most importantly, to echo the very fine words of the minister, we have to make sure that we never create a situation where an employee has to face the difficult decision of choosing between their job, their career and a sick or dying relative, which is why I want to endorse Bill 56, and I'll be supporting it.

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): I'm pleased to rise to speak in support of Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, in respect of family medical leave and other matters. First all, I'd like to reiterate what this bill will do. If passed, it would provide up to eight weeks of job-protected, unpaid time off work for those taking care of seriously ill family members.

It has been my experience, since I've watched Minister Bentley, that he has been, by many people's account, a remarkable Minister of Labour. He makes some good, balanced decisions because he's well informed and a person of depth who is restoring balance and fairness to our labour laws in this government, something that has been missing for a very long time. The Ministry of Labour had become an entity that was about confrontation. It was an entity that was about breaking down and lessening the rights of people who work in this province.

This legislation reflects the need to adjust the laws to support employees who are dealing with the stressful implications of caring for very ill family members. In our society, with two-job families, the responsibility to care for family members who are seriously ill becomes extremely challenging. The nature of our aging population and increasing workplace demands contribute to very high stress levels in the people who are dealing with the dependant care of someone they love. These dependant care responsibilities constitute major time commitments for many workers. I know many women and men of various ages who run home from work, knowing that there is a parent who is seriously ill but who wants to stay at home. They are juggling their work and they're juggling their time and other family commitments and are stressed out at work because they're thinking about that seriously ill person at home. Yet they have to go to work because they're afraid of losing their job and can't afford not to go into work, or they call in sick once, twice a week. I've heard the stories, because many people have been at wit's end and have asked, "Is there no protection for this case?" for people who have to deal with these situations. Unless you are actually in that situation, sometimes one doesn't understand how much stress is on you as a person and on your whole family.

Work schedules do not include that additional time to provide necessary care and support for seriously ill dependants, and many times a lot of this rests on the women. They tend to be the caregivers at different stages of life. I have to tell you that in my experience the amount of courage it takes to care for someone who is seriously ill and deal with all the emotional stress of dealing with that person versus the fear that they're going to lose their job puts an incredible amount of stress on an individual.

We as a government wish to support those who choose to stay at home for a period of time to care for those who are seriously ill. As well, most people who are ill, given the choice, choose to stay in their homes for as long as possible, hoping that they're going to be supported by the people they love, rather than being institutionalized or being in an institutional environment of a hospital or in long-term care.

In the end, what is more important than caring for our loved ones? That choice is going to be supported by this government, and this legislation will protect the jobs of those family members who choose to be by the side of those who are in their final days, who are seriously ill.

That is, in the end, about a government that is supporting a compassionate heart instead of making life more difficult. Government does play a role in people's lives, and this is one of those roles whereby it is supporting and enhancing, if you want, the protection of people who choose to care for a very ill loved one.

1610

As the minister has stated, and as others have stated, this legislation dovetails with changes to federal legislation. Therefore, you have the six weeks of unemployment insurance benefits. It eases the financial burden that's caused by people not earning a salary. As has been stated, we have to be mindful of those requirements and the minister has been mindful of the requirements and of the rules of the federal legislation, so we are not going to confuse the mix by adding various changes that do not work in harmony with our federal counterparts.

What is amazing is that this benefit applies to every worker in this province under the Employment Insurance Act. I see some of the opposition members shaking their heads, as if this is some type of legislation that is not relevant. I sat across the aisle and watched the former administration, and I have to say that the former administration, when it came to any of these types of protections, had no interest in dealing with these types of issues. It deteriorated, in my opinion, the quality of life our workers had in this province.

This legislation is a win-win situation because what this legislation does is that it's good for those in need. I'm quoting from Minister Bentley's comments when this legislation was introduced: It's "good for families, good for employees and good for businesses. This legislation is the right thing to do for the people of Ontario."

We have a new era in Ontario, a new era that the people of Ontario chose on October 2, 2003, an era whereby government again has a heart, government again has compassion and government understands the need for quality of life for those who need our help. It's not about survival of the fittest, as had been the case as I watched for four long years when I was sitting in opposition; it was about the minimalist government syndrome and survival of the fittest.

We believe government has to have compassion, has to understand the struggles individuals go through when they have to care for someone who is very ill or dying and they have to hold down a job. Government has to have a way to support that. I applaud this legislation and fully support it and will be thrilled when this legislation is finally passed for third reading.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's my privilege to stand today and follow the member from Sarnia-Lambton in supporting Bill 56 as it's proposed. I also am pleased to join with my colleague the Minister of Labour, the MPP from London West, Minister Bentley, and my colleague the member for Kitchener Centre.

I'm pleased to take part today in second reading of the proposed Employment Standards Amendment Act (Family Medical Leave), 2004. I'm especially proud of this bill because we've talked as a government, and the

Minister of Labour has talked, about bringing back balance to labour and business in this province. I think a lot of people have thought about that and talked about that in the context of bringing back the balance between business and labour. I think what this particular act is doing is bringing back a balance between work and family, and that's very important. That's something that we need to consider. It's a very basic issue. It's about working together. It's about caring for each other, and it's really a life-and-death issue. It's about the quality of life, and it's about the dignity of dying.

It's a very strong step forward and, if passed, would say a lot about Ontario as a society. It says a lot about how we treat each other when we're going through the tough and the sad times that accompany the death of a loved one. It's an issue, in my opinion, that should rise above politics. It speaks to the values that we share, and one of those values is the relationship we share with our own family members. One thing we all have in common is that some day we will die. We all have to face that eventuality, and as we approach it, we will lose family members along the way. They will pass on.

A lot of the remarks I have heard today, and they've all been wonderful remarks, obviously are being directed at the caregiver who would be the recipient of this legislation. But I also ask you, as we debate this bill, to think about the person whose time to pass has come, to put yourself in that position and to think about that. As you face those final days, would it not be comforting to know that those who are caring for you as you pass through on that journey are also being cared for by members of society? That's exactly what this act does. At a time of great need and great stress, what we're saying as a society is that we will care for you, we will look after you during that period; in exchange, when my time comes, when your time comes, we will look after you.

For anyone taking care of a dying loved one, there is a huge financial and emotional burden that must be borne. Most of us have been through it ourselves, have been through the death of a loved one. It's an unfortunate situation. It's a situation that, however, is eventual for all of us.

Taking care of a seriously ill loved one puts immense strains on anyone who is faced with it. The emotional strain is obvious to all. The financial strain is also significant. Currently, people also need to be concerned about job security and the loss of income during that period. By taking the action that we're proposing today, we can at least eliminate two of those stresses; that is, job security and loss of total income.

According to a recent study of cancer patients, more than 40% of family members of patients surveyed had to quit work to care for their loved ones. That, in the society we have today, is simply not good enough. We can do better than that. This act asks us to do better than that. This act shows us how we can do better than that. Some 25% of those people who were looking after a dying loved one lost most or all of their savings during that period. That simply is cruel. We have the wherewithal

and the ability to put an end to that by supporting this act. About one in four working Canadians experience high levels of caregiver strain, due in no small part to the difficulties of trying to balance their work life with the demands of caring for a seriously ill loved one.

This government does not believe that anyone should be forced to make this impossible choice. But this is really a bill about a contract that Ontarians are prepared to make with each other. What we are saying is that when that sad time comes when you need to be with a loved one as they pass on, we want you thinking about your loved one; we want you caring about your loved one. We don't want you thinking, "I wonder if I still have a job." We don't want you thinking, "I wonder where the rent money is going to come from." We want you doing what we would all wish to do ourselves, and that is to continue to care for that loved one to the best of our ability.

This bill would reduce some of the emotional stress that caregivers face by letting them focus on what's most important: the life of their family member, and not their job at that point in time. Many who take it would be able to access the federal government's compassionate care benefits under the current EI system. This provides up to six weeks of benefits, after a two-week waiting period, to caregivers and helps to ease some of the financial burden.

1620

Family medical leave would, if passed by this Legislature, give employees caring for a dying family member a window of relief that will help them to focus on what's most important at that point in time. Then after the passing they're able to return to work with less emotional stress, being able to move on with their lives, being able to focus on their jobs, being able to focus on their careers, not having lost most of their savings and not having had to quit their job along the way.

We all talk about it during a time of passing. You hear people at funerals talking about it. You hear people at wakes talking about it. You hear it for a few weeks after the passing, and people say, "Well, it's time to move on." When that time to move on comes, I think people should be equipped to move on. They're dealing with an emotional loss, with the loss of a family member whom they have either raised or who has raised them and has taught them the very basic things we know about ourselves and each other. The very basic things that define us as a society have been passed on through family members. At that time, when you're thinking about that, you want to have the ability to move on with your life, to deal with that. You don't want to have to deal with the financial stress that might accompany that.

The same study that has been talked about also showed that 36% of dying patients had to be admitted to hospital, not because they wanted to be and not even because of medical necessity, but because their family could no longer provide adequate care for them at home because they were worried about losing their job, were worried about loss of income. They couldn't carry a job and the responsibility of caring for a loved one at the same time.

Think of that. Think about the debates that rage about this House and the conversations we have with each other and the campaigns we run. When we talk about health care, we talk about the stress our health care system is under. Think of the relief this could provide to our already stressed health care system if we were able to allow these people who are passing the dignity to die at home with their loved ones.

This government believes people have the right to die with dignity. For many people, this means being able to remain in their home as long as possible with the support of the people they love rather than in the institutional environment of a hospital or a long-term-care facility.

We all know the stresses our health care system is facing. As I noted, it's probably the number one topic around here. Some of those stresses and financial costs result directly from an aging population. Being able to stay at home obviously reduces the strain on an already overburdened health care system.

Providing dying people with the quality of care they deserve is a good enough reason all by itself. When you add to that the positive impact you can have on the health care system, when you add to that the dignity you're able to provide a person at the very toughest time of their life, this bill is a win-win-win situation all around for everybody involved. I'm sure most of my colleagues here agree.

Our doctors and nurses and other health care providers in Ontario provide a standard of care for dying patients that is second to none. They know. They deal with these people on a daily basis. That's their vocation. They will tell you there is nothing they could do as experts that could possibly ever substitute for the care provided by family members. This bill simply allows that care to take place.

If this bill is passed, patients nearing the end of their lives would be able to do so with better support from loved ones. Many may be able to stay in their homes a little longer than they're able to at present. This can make all the difference for someone facing their final days, being able to spend as much time as possible with loved ones, and not in a hospital room but in a familiar environment.

This bill, if passed, would support caregivers and provide the dignity of care that the dying deserve. It would, as well, be a boon to employers. A recent study found that 10% of caregivers reported high absenteeism from work, and not just from dealing with the loved one, the dying person, but from the emotional, physical and the mental fatigue that they themselves suffer. It's that stress that is brought about not just by dealing with the death itself, but also thinking, "Do I still have a job? Am I still going to have a job when this is all over? How am I going to make money? How do I keep the business going?" In fact, employees with high caregiver strain are 13 times more likely to miss three or more days of work in a six-month period and almost twice as likely to miss work because they were simply emotionally, physically or mentally fatigued. When employees in these situations

are at work, their emotional stress is disruptive to their own work and to their co-workers. You know how it is to deal with a person who's going through a loss. Imagine having to do a complicated job with that person. Imagine having to do a dangerous job with that person. Imagine having to do a job where you had to give that work you were doing every ounce of your attention, and knowing that that person's mind is simply not on the job; that person's mind is on the person they love who's sitting in a hospital room, or lying in a hospital room, in an environment that they simply don't want to be in.

Interjection.

Mr Flynn: It certainly is.

When employees in these situations are at work, their emotional stress is disruptive, as I've said. It affects productivity in the workplace and it affects morale in the workplace. So you see, employees also stand to benefit if this bill is passed.

In today's work environment, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many workers to find a good balance between their work life and their personal life. As I said at the start, the object of this bill is to start to restore that balance between work life and personal life. This has a direct impact on the bottom line of a business. The direct costs of absenteeism in Canadian workplaces due to high work-life conflict are estimated at between \$3 billion and \$5 billion per year. Indirect costs are estimated at up to an additional \$5 billion per year. Caregiver strain is a significant contributor to these costs. The direct costs of absenteeism to Canadian business due to high caregiver strain is estimated to be over \$1 billion per year. That's \$1 billion that Canadian businesses are having to spend. This act would simply start to give them the wherewithal to not spend that money, to allow that money to be reinvested in companies. You could also add about another \$2 billion per year in indirect costs associated with that absenteeism.

While family medical leave may have an immediate cost to some employers by having, obviously, to make other arrangements for employees away on this leave and to get the work of the business done, the employer would not have to pay that employee for the period they would be on leave. That's where the employment insurance kicks in. This cost, however, that may be borne by employers by having to make other arrangements would be comparatively minor, and the disruption it would cause is less than what is currently being incurred through employee stress, absenteeism, loss of productivity, and eroded loyalty. An employer that grants this leave, an employer that understands that an employee must take time off at a time like this is, in my opinion, the type of employer that Canadians want to work for.

I believe that Canadian business will support this. I believe that Canadian business is behind this. They understand that keeping employee morale up, that caring for a loved one during a period of strain such as this, is so important to an employee. If they support the employee at that time of loss or that time of potential loss, that employee will be loyal to that company. That employee

will want to work. That employee, in my opinion, will pay back in dividends for the time that they are granted that they currently are not allowed to take. If they are allowed to take it by the passage of this act, I think they will pay back in dividends to Canadian business for the positive support they received from this act and, at that point in time, from the employer.

1630

Now these costs are considerable. Employees with high caregiver responsibilities are up to six times more likely to experience stress at work, leading to reduced productivity and disruptions to other workers, as well as potential health and safety considerations.

As I've said, they are 13 times more likely to miss three or more days of work in a six-month period. It would seem to me that if that type of absenteeism is known, and we know that employees who are faced with a situation at home like this are going to respond in that manner, it would make more sense to me that the employer would make other arrangements, would want to make other arrangements, would want to assist the employee through that period.

They are twice as likely to miss three or more days' work in a six-month period due to fatigue.

This is interesting, I think: They are more than twice as likely to consider simply quitting their job, taking with them all of the knowledge, training and experience that not only have they earned and learned as employees, but that the employer has invested in. They take all of that with them when they leave. If they decide it's important enough for me to be at home with a loved one, and this act is not passed, it's obvious, and the results are quite clear, that some employees think it's simply important enough, and they walk away from their job.

Absenteeism due to caregiver strain results in direct costs to business, as I said earlier, of over \$1 billion a year, and indirect costs of an additional \$2 billion a year. So we're talking \$3 billion of costs right now that are associated with absenteeism and directly attributable to Canadian business. These costs are huge but avoidable, if we act responsibly as a society and recognize that we need to take care of the people who must take care of a dying family member.

Family medical leave would be the responsible thing to do, in my opinion, and that's why I support this act and urge all members of the House to support it. It would allow for unpaid absences, letting workers deal with a personal crisis on their own time, without disrupting the workplace and affecting productivity. It would allow workers to come back to work when they are better able to focus on their job, with less stress and obviously in better health. It would mean many employees would not be forced to quit their job in order to care for a dying family member. This now causes even greater disruption and cost to employers.

This bill, if passed, would result in fewer days lost in work places, when employees can no longer cope with the strain of meeting their personal and professional obligations. The impact of this is often taken for granted,

but as I said when I was talking about the \$3 billion earlier, its impact on business is significant and simply cannot be ignored. So we see it is not only the employees who would benefit from this bill if it were passed.

Some important issues have been raised by opposition members regarding family medical leave, and there are many ways we can provide support to caregivers. People have talked of tax relief. People have talked of tax cuts. But tax relief is of little use if you've quit your job. Tax relief is of little use if you're left with little or no income.

The minister has put forward an act that is worthy of support of all parties in this House. It speaks to the civility with which we treat each other as a society. I urge and beg your support.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have just had the pleasure of listening for an hour to three separate speakers speak on this issue, and not one of them has said the reality of this bill. This bill is being presented in this Legislature in the same way that it is being presented in the other nine Legislatures and the other three territorial governments in this country. It is not something that is unique to Ontario. It is not something that is unique to this party. It is something that was done first in Canada, and is now being followed through in each of the provinces and territories in Canada. In fact, places like Quebec have already passed this bill, and others will be debating it, much as we are doing here.

So I don't know. Here we are talking about compassion. Here we are talking about what the bill's going to do. The reality is, this bill is going to pass. It has to pass because you have to jig it all with the federal legislation. I hope all members of the Legislature will understand that this bill—what can I say?—needs to be passed. It should be done rapidly. To listen to a number of speakers say the same thing over and over again I would think would have to be one of the great travesties of this House.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, in respect of family medical leave. I'd like to thank the Minister of Labour for introducing this piece of legislation and to agree with my colleagues from Kitchener Centre, Sarnia-Lambton and Oakville, who have spoken very eloquently in support of the bill. I'd also like to thank the member from Beaches-East York.

The member from Beaches-East York is quite right in noting that this legislation dovetails very well with the federal legislation. That is quite deliberate. While the federal legislation allows for EI protection for family medical leave in certain situations, what was lacking was the equivalent legislation at the provincial level to make sure that when somebody takes a leave to take care of a terminally ill family member, they are assured their job is protected.

This is not a trivial issue. What all the data tell us is that with the current situation, many people, when they have to care for a terminally ill family member, are faced

with the difficult choice of being able to provide that palliative care at home, on the one hand, or of quitting their job. Many people in the past have had to quit their job to take up that homecare role at the end of life.

What this piece of legislation does is to protect the job so that the family member who is providing care is assured that they will have a job to come back to. I'm very pleased to support this bill.

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm honoured to stand in this building to speak in support of Bill 56. I believe, after listening to the details from the Honourable Minister of Labour, Chris Bentley from London West, that I cannot find myself in greater support for this bill. This bill for the first time ever talks about the balance between employers and employees. It talks about dealing with family issues.

Interjection: It's all a matter of balance.

Mr Ramal: Definitely.

For the first time ever in this House we have introduced a bill to deal with this family issue, to deal with the employee who has, without choice, a medical situation in his house, yet he has to go to work. He cannot go to work because he's thinking about the person he loves, who is living in his house. He's supposed to be looking after them, but he goes to work and cannot perform as he is supposed to.

Also as my friend, my colleague from Oakville who spoke a few minutes ago about the details of this issue said, it will become a safety matter. How can we go to work and work while thinking about our father, mother, sister, son or daughter, living at home and facing some health difficulties. I think this bill makes a balance, for the first time, between work and family situation. I'm honoured to stand today and support it. I hope all members of this House will support it. I was pleased when I heard the member for Beaches-East York speak well about his support of this bill. I hope all the members speak the same way as the member.

1640

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I am pleased to rise and comment on this important bill on family medical leave. I want to first comment in reply to the member for Beaches-East York. Yes, there may be variations of similar protection in other provinces, other jurisdictions, but most certainly we do not have that here in Ontario, and I want to commend the Minister of Labour, Minister Bentley, for bringing this forward.

Not every family currently can enjoy the opportunities that my family did to stay with a loved one who was terminally ill. We were able to do that because of circumstances within our family, those being mainly that we were self-employed and lived in close proximity to the person who was ill: my mother. But others don't have that opportunity, because they are in a workplace and there are competing interests, one of providing for their family and one of providing for someone who is very ill.

This bill will remove the circumstance where one must determine whether they are going to go to their workplace or stay at home. Their job will be protected under

this bill, and they can make the conscious effort to be with a loved one at a time of most need. This protection is one that people can avail themselves of if they so choose. I think it's incumbent upon us as a compassionate society—and Ontario prides itself on its diversity and compassion—to provide this for those who would require it. The bill, interestingly enough, allows for multiple persons to take opportunities in this regard, not simultaneously, but to divide those interests of being with a sick family member.

I leave those comments with you.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? Oh, I'm sorry. Minister, you have two minutes to reply.

Hon Mr Bentley: I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members for Kitchener Centre, Sarnia-Lambton, Oakville, Beaches-East York, Guelph-Wellington, London-Fanshawe and Chatham-Kent Essex for contributing their comments and participating in the debate. The number of speakers who have joined this debate and participated and the tenor and tone of the comments indicate that this is a provision that is needed in Ontario, a provision that the people of Ontario will benefit from and a provision that has its time now.

I'm looking forward to the debate as we proceed. I'm looking forward to hearing further comments and to hearing how this will positively assist and affect Ontario families. I'm looking forward to hearing how this will support employees in making that difficult choice that they make now without the support of job protection. And I'm looking forward to hearing how employers will be positively impacted by this.

I noted the comments of the member for Beaches-East York. I wish it were true that every other province was bringing in a similar piece of legislation. There are a number that have said they will not, but I was very pleased to hear his support.

We will certainly keep our comments to a minimum if we can have all-party support for this piece of legislation. It is important that it be implemented as quickly as possible so that people can take advantage of the federal benefits without concern for losing their jobs.

Thank you very much for the opportunity. I look forward to hearing further from the members of this House as we proceed on this important piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Now we are prepared for further debate.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I'll just say at the outset that I'm going to be sharing my time with the member from Whitby-Ajax.

I am pleased to join the debate on Bill 56. We do believe that this is a good first step for families and individuals who have taken on that very onerous, difficult and challenging responsibility of caring for a loved one who has become ill. Now these individuals do have the chance to remain and care for that individual for a short period of time.

However, I do agree with the member from Beaches-East York, who said that we need to keep in mind that

this provincial law is a complementary piece of legislation to the new federal rules that allow caregivers to claim up to six weeks of employment insurance benefits. So we welcome this legislation, and I know that caregivers and their families in this province welcome it as well. It is necessary, and we will support it.

However, as I've said, and as the member from Beaches-East York has said, this is complementary to the federal legislation, and regrettably it falls well short of the Liberal promise that was made to help Ontarians care for parents and other seriously ill family members, since it fails totally to provide any of these individuals who take on this responsibility with the support and resources that they require. So I want to focus some of my comments on this bill. There are some areas within the bill that I know require clarification, and I also want to share with this House how I believe, and our party believes, the bill can be improved.

First of all, let's take a look at the bill. What the bill is doing is amending the Employment Standards Act, 2000, to entitle employees to up to eight weeks' leave of absence without pay to provide care or support to specified family members. It applies if the family member suffers from a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within a period of 26 weeks or such shorter period as may be prescribed by regulation.

If we take a look at that legislation, we recognize immediately that there are significant shortcomings. It doesn't go far enough to provide the support and the resources that family members are going to need and even resources that the individual who is critically ill is going to require. So individuals will be allowed to take the time off to support the family member; however, one of the first shortcomings of this legislation is the fact that it applies only in the case of those family members who are critically ill—in other words, an individual who has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death occurring within a period 26 weeks or such shorter period as may be prescribed.

So what this bill does not do is apply to the other caregivers who may wish to be with their family during times of crisis. This may be cancer, this may be a cardiac problem, it may be an automobile accident, but during these times of crisis, if it's not going to mean that there's a significant risk of death occurring within this period of 26 weeks or shorter, it would not allow those other people to benefit from this legislation.

The other area where this bill falls short is that it doesn't deal with parents who may need to take time to care for their developmentally disabled child or their autistic child. I've heard the members in this House today talk about experiences, such as those envisioned by this bill, that create emotional stress for individuals. I can tell you, caring for developmentally disabled children, autistic children, people who are suffering from cancer, cardiac, serious automobile injuries or others also are stressful emotional situations. This bill does not provide reasons or the legitimacy for these individuals to care for

family members who may be impacted. So the bill falls far short of actually going that distance.

1650

As you probably know, our government put forward tax rebates to assist in the long-term care of some of the individuals I have talked about. This government, despite its promises, has not given us any indication or brought forward any legislation to help these individuals: the parent looking after the child or those who have suffered serious illnesses. So again, this bill falls far short.

The bill doesn't fulfill the promise, the commitment the government made to provide family leave for families and individuals who are going through that difficult period of providing care for loved ones who are ill. This bill only applies in situations where there is a significant risk of death. Furthermore, this bill does not provide these individuals who are going to take the time off with any support or resources that they are going to require during this period. We know that people who look after individuals with disabilities and caregivers have additional costs that add to the anxiety of this situation. That is why it is so important that the government provide the additional support and resources that are going to be needed.

In a recent press release, the Premier spoke about people's health being our most precious resource, and I would certainly agree with him. It doesn't matter how much you have in the way of material goods or money, if you don't have your health, you really don't have anything. It is really important that as we take a look at this piece of legislation and we take a look at what more this government needs to do, I believe they need to take a look at how they can support caregivers. They need to take a look at how they can recognize and understand the needs of the caregivers.

The other thing: If this government is now going to shift responsibility for the sick from the health care system to families—and I would agree that most families would prefer to be able to keep their loved one at home if at all possible. But if that is the case, we cannot assume that this individual is going to provide 24-hour care nor the comprehensive care that is going to be required for this terminally ill patient. The government needs to, and should, in conjunction with this legislation, follow through on its election promise to improve home care and long-term-care resources and services for people in the province of Ontario.

I was dismayed to learn today that not only are they not providing any additional resources to home care and long-term care, but this Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is clawing back from the long-term-care facilities additional money in the form of the property tax rebates, which means that residents are not going to have the services, the food or the programs they need and deserve.

At the end of the day, this government has promised that they're going to invest an additional \$6,000 per patient in a long-term-care facility. I can tell you, with the clawbacks that are now going on, which I understand

are going to be 50%, which is another broken promise, we're going to see a loss per resident in long-term-care facilities. It might be \$1,000, it might be \$2,000, and that's not what they promised. They promised to add \$6,000 and now they're clawing back.

The other day the minister said that they're still getting the same amount of money. Well, yes, they are, but what the minister did not say is that today in the province of Ontario we have more beds, which means more human beings occupying those beds. So that pie is simply being shared by more and more individuals. That's the same minister who was quoted in the newspaper and was pictured in the paper expressing compassion and sympathy for people in long-term-care facilities, and he is now clawing back money, which is going to impact on how many caregivers are going to be available for these individuals in long-term-care facilities, the food allowance, the services and the programs. This government is breaking its promises to the frail and the elderly.

I think it is important to also note that the Ontario tax system already has recognized the reduced ability to pay taxes through several non-refundable tax credits for people with disabilities and individuals caring for disabled or infirm family members. In fact, our budget of 2003 was going to add enhancements; we had proposed enhancements to those credits. I am going to speak to those later.

Now, what are some of the other areas of concern that we have heard about? The question that we are asked is, why is the bill limited to only eight weeks out of 26 weeks if that's the period that's being allowed for unpaid leave? For example, we have been asked what happens if the family member does not pass away within the eight weeks allocated or the further allocation that is permitted. I guess the question that the minister needs to respond to is, how long and how frequently can this leave be taken? If we are trying to relieve the anxiety and concern of the individuals who are caring for their loved one and the concerns of those who are terminally ill, there needs to be some assurance given to that caregiver and to that individual who is ill that there definitely will be access for up to the 26 weeks.

Under the "Entitlement to leave" section, we see that a certificate is required from a health practitioner stating that the individual has a serious medical condition with a significant risk of death. I guess the question I would have for the minister is, how does this apply in the case of individuals who are living in Ontario and who have family living abroad in other countries? It might be Greece; it might be India; it might be China; it might be Japan. I would ask the minister, is there going to be a standard certificate that is required? Because in this case, the certificate would need to come from someone outside the province of Ontario, outside the Dominion of Canada.

Another question we would have is, how do you intend to assist hospitals and health service providers during times when these very essential health service providers, such as nurses and doctors, might request to

take a leave of absence to care for a loved one? How will the replacements be found? How will you fill that service gap? We know that in this province already today we don't have enough nurses and we don't have enough doctors, so that might present a significant challenge. I hope that would be taken into consideration.

I have also heard that employers are seeking clarification around whether the proposed eight weeks can be added on to the existing emergency leave and whether there is a certain amount of time an employee must be employed for this leave to apply.

We know that according to a March 2004 Ipsos-Reid survey that was conducted with the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario, the conference participants at that event ranked elder care among the 10 top contributors to absenteeism and/or health costs in the workplace. This bill will respond to that issue, and I do believe this bill will be well supported by everyone, whether employees or employers.

1700

But I also think we need to recognize there are challenges and issues that need to be addressed and clarified. I have tried to bring to the attention of the minister some of those very legitimate concerns that need to be addressed to ensure that the proposed legislation achieves its intended goal without causing undue stress on individuals, perhaps on health care facilities and of course on employers. These are some of the details that obviously need to be resolved and ironed out before this legislation becomes law. If we do so, I think we can relieve some of the anxiety that caregivers may experience during a very difficult time in their lives and in the lives of their families.

I want to talk about what we had proposed. I have indicated that we certainly support this bill and we do believe it's necessary, but on the other hand, we are disappointed that the government didn't follow through on some of its other commitments. In our 2003 budget, we actually had proposed the improved tax support for people with disabilities and for family caregivers, because many individuals with disabilities and their caregivers today must cope with more costs than the general population. Any of us who have friends or neighbours with disabilities recognize that there are these costs. In fact, tomorrow we're going to talk about supporting a bill that asks for insulin pumps to be made available—again, a huge cost for people who live with diabetes.

Ontario's tax system already recognizes the reduced ability of people with disabilities and caregivers to pay taxes through several non-refundable tax credits for people with disabilities and individuals caring for disabled or infirm family members. So we did propose some enhancements to those credits.

First, our budget proposed to increase to \$6,637 the underlying amounts for the disability credit, the caregiver credit, the infirm dependant credit and the disability credit supplement for children with severe disabilities.

Secondly, our budget proposed to expand the caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit to include

spouses or common-law partners who are dependent by reason of a mental or physical infirmity, and to provide support to more caregivers living apart from dependent relatives.

Thirdly, our budget proposed that both the caregiver credit and the infirm dependant credit be reduced when the dependant's net income reaches \$13,050 and eliminated it at an income level of \$19,687. Currently, the caregiver credit is eliminated when a dependant's income reaches \$16,290, and the infirm dependant credit is reduced to zero for dependants with incomes of \$8,922 or more.

Taken together, these enhancements in our 2003 budget would have provided an estimated \$50 million in additional benefits to about 165,000 Ontario residents. This brings us back to the fact that this government needs to step up to the plate and provide similar support and resources for caregivers. You can give people leave without pay, but as I have tried to point out, that is totally inadequate.

I want to review again what's missing from the bill, acknowledging that this is a good step. It's a companion piece to the federal legislation. Unfortunately, it fails to meet the immediate and long-term-care needs of our population, whether they're young people, disabled children, or whether they are our older population.

Also, the bill neglects to take into account the serious emotional, physical and financial burdens one bears when an individual decides to take care of a gravely ill family member. Where are the resources that will allow family members to care for them? Where is the additional money for home care, long-term care? What is the government's plan of action to assist caregivers in these types of situations where they choose to take time off to help their family? These are questions that need answers, and they need answers now.

Yes, this bill takes us forward and certainly addresses some of the outstanding concerns we know about today. It will help Ontarians deal with stressful, difficult and challenging times. I do support this legislation. I trust we can move forward and pass this legislation but, in doing so, I hope the government, in very short order, perhaps in the next month or two—perhaps we'll see it in the budget. I hope we will see the additional support and resources that are going to be required to support the caregiver who is taking time off work. I also hope they'll move forward and allow individuals with family members who are seriously ill but not necessarily dying, or people who have developmentally disabled children—I hope that some allowance will also be given and some consideration to supporting those individuals as well. Maybe the government simply wants to build on our budget initiatives from 2003 and demonstrate that they also recognize this additional need for support.

We will be supporting this bill. As I said at the outset, it is a good first step.

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): I thank my colleague the member for Kitchener-Waterloo for her remarks with respect to this bill and the shortcomings in

this particular legislation coming from the Ministry of Labour. The member for Kitchener-Waterloo of course served with distinction as Minister of Labour and brought in some of the fundamental reforms that enabled economic growth to take off in the province of Ontario after 1995.

It's trite to say, but also true to say that the best social program is a job, and jobs come from economic growth. It's regrettable that we saw in the province of Ontario last month the drop in jobs; 25,000 fewer jobs for people in the province of Ontario last month compared to this month. I hope the people at the Ministry of Labour are having a look at their job statistics and looking at one of their fundamental concerns, which really should be much more fundamental than any other concern, and that is making sure there are jobs for people who labour in the province of Ontario.

We're proud of our record in government of creating more than one million net new jobs in Ontario over the course of the years of the Conservative government. Those jobs were vitally important for people to be able to support their loved ones and their families in the province.

This bill provides for unpaid leave for eight weeks. I dare say I have had no calls about this bill in Whitby-Ajax. I expect that's so because most employers or small business folks in Ontario already do what this bill provides. That's where most of the jobs are. That's where they are created in the province of Ontario. They're good to their employees and work closely with their employees, and most of the members in this House know that. People are compassionate and recognize that burdens are placed on individuals because of illness of family members, particularly catastrophic illnesses, illnesses leading to early death.

Quite frankly, I'm proud of the people of Ontario in the way they have been able to deal with this. I know the Ministry of Labour feels it's necessary to legislate this kind of good behaviour. I suppose there may have been abuses here and there, no doubt. Given human nature, there are some folks who are abusive, so I suppose that may be remedied by this legislation. It may not be, of course, since there are ways people can find to get around legislation, as we all know, particularly in employment areas.

1710

In any event, it's a minor bill brought forward by the Minister of Labour copying the federal provisions, but it does give us an opportunity to have a look at what in fact this government has been up to in labour legislation and in other bills. I'm not surprised it's a minor bill. We have been here, and these folks across the way have been the government for six months and we have seen virtually no significant legislation in this place. Indeed, even before the House today, we have very little in the way of legislation.

This was going to be the party of economic growth. This was going to be the education government. Is there an education bill before the House? No. Is there a major

economic bill before the House? No. Is there any forward-looking legislation of any consequence before this place? The answer is no. Six months, 231-plus promises to the people of Ontario. Time for a change: There's going to be major change, they said. So where is it? It's this bill copying a federal bill making a minor labour law amendment. This is the big change the Liberals promised to the people of Ontario. There it is, folks all around the province.

You can look at the legislative calendar and at the bills that have been brought forward. They brought forward one bill that was of some consequence, Bill 8, which has gone back to committee again and which is an attack on volunteers on hospital boards around Ontario. I never heard about that during the election campaign. They never promised to attack volunteers who serve on our hospital boards all around the province, but that's what Bill 8 does. It attacks people on our hospital boards.

Then we have the member for Sarnia-Lambton, who spoke on the bill. She said things about this government having a heart and compassion, and that when she sat in opposition on this side, it was survival of the fittest, and so on. I think the member was here when we did the budget increasing dramatically the funding for children's treatment centres. I think she was here when we did the funding providing places for people in our social service system, adults with severe disabilities whose parents are getting elderly and need that kind of help and are worried about what will happen to their children thereafter. I think the member for Sarnia-Lambton was here for those kinds of initiatives.

This tendency toward self-righteousness on the Liberal benches is also emulated by the Premier, this condescending attitude about government knows best for you and government will decide. The state knows best for you, for your family. In education, for example, the state knows that your children should go to state schools and should not go to other schools unless, of course, for a religious education, you're Roman Catholic, but if you're not, if you're Muslim, Jewish or Christian, then you don't count or get to participate. You will be discriminated against. You are, by this government in Ontario.

The whole thing we hear from this government is that we're going to teach character education, they say, in the schools; there's an Orwellian notion of character. Then they bring in a tax on salads. What do they call it? They call it a fat tax. They make fun of people in Ontario who might be overweight. This is the kind of self-righteous, holier-than-thou attitude that is reflected by this government, including the member who's barracking opposite there, the kind of self-righteous attitude that is being exhibited. But what we actually see is minor legislation with none of the big promises that they made being fulfilled. We do see a lot of promises made, of course, that are being broken.

Think about the labour reforms we did before. Think about the growth in the province of Ontario. Think about the project agreements we did in Sarnia-Lambton. Look at that single labour reform that went through this

Legislature and that has resulted in hundreds of jobs and major projects in Sarnia-Lambton in the petrochemical industry. That would not have happened were it not for that legislation in this place. That's the kind of labour reform we need in Ontario. It makes us more competitive, so that Sarnia-Lambton can compete with Galveston and can compete with Alberta. That's the kind of step forward we need. That's what I hope we see from the Liberal government at some point.

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): Compete with Alabama; compete with Louisiana.

Mr Flaherty: No, Galveston is in Texas. We have the member from one of the Ottawa ridings who thinks Galveston is in Louisiana. You can check your map book there; you'll see where it is.

But if you knew something, which I guess you don't, about the petrochemical industry, if you know something about good jobs in that industry, if you knew about competition in that industry, if you knew the labour problems they had that we were able to solve—with cooperation, I might add, from the unions and from the employers—it required legislation, which we did. Now these project agreements have happened in that part of Ontario. It's not just important for that part of Ontario; it's a major industry for our province in generating very good jobs.

Labour reforms, the Ontario-Quebec situation, the labour mobility situation—

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): It's not done yet.

Mr Flaherty: The member opposite says it's not done yet, and you're right, but it's better. It's better than it was, because we got their attention. We had to do it through legislation, mind you, and some arduous discussions with our colleagues in Quebec, but the point was raised and we moved forward and we made progress. I'm sure as Canadians we all want to make sure that we have interprovincial opportunities to work that are equal; that's a fundamental. That is something I hope the government and the Minister of Labour pursue. It is an ongoing challenge, given perhaps the different labour structures in the two provinces along the Ottawa River. So there's more to be done there, but we went a long way down that road. That's the kind of labour reform that generates jobs for the people in the province of Ontario.

We brought in another important labour reform about secret ballots.

Interjection.

Mr Flaherty: This bill is OK. The member asked if I liked the bill. There's not much to it, but it's OK. It's not really something to get worked up about. That's why I'm talking about the bigger picture. I know the Liberal members opposite want to hear about the bigger picture, in labour in particular, and what we can do in labour so they have more jobs here.

That secret ballot vote was very important. That kept business in the province of Ontario. I'm sure most people in the province thought that when people were voting at their workplaces about union issues, certification and so on, it was a secret ballot. After all, when we vote in

general elections, and by-elections even, we assume a secret ballot as our democratic right. So that also happened as one of the fundamental labour reforms that we did in Ontario during our time.

The people of Ontario have high expectations of the Liberal government, and I think that's justified. It's justified because the Liberals and Mr McGuinty went to the people of Ontario last year and made several hundred promises to them about the Valhalla that Ontario would be under the government of Mr McGuinty. Many of those promises have been broken. Some of them are fundamental.

The promise to the people of Ontario to hold the line on taxes, which has been broken: That is a breach of trust with the people of Ontario by Mr McGuinty and his party. It is being remembered already, and we are only at the six-month mark for this government.

Another fundamental promise was about a balanced budget. It looks unlikely that on May 18, the people of Ontario are going to hear a balanced budget from the current Minister of Finance. It's virtually impossible for him to deliver a balanced budget, because they've gone on a spending orgy in the province of Ontario, an incredible spending spree in excess of \$3 billion. They say they care about a deficit, and they go spend another \$3 billion.

1720

What's that all about? Money going out to hospitals—I get phone calls from hospital boards saying, “We didn't even ask for this money now, and it's arriving.” Commissions receiving money; the Minister of Natural Resources running around the province handing out money. All of a sudden there are chunks of money here, chunks of money there. Why? So that the Liberal government can come up with this big number and say this deficit was the fault, of course, of the Conservatives. People are tiring of that. They know what you're doing in the spending area, in excess of \$3 billion. You're not finished yet; it may be more than \$3 billion by the time you're finished.

It's interesting, because if you look at what the Minister of Finance said before the parliamentary committee on finance and economics affairs—this is last December—it looked like the Minister of Finance was planning to balance the budget. This is December 9. He says, “Overall, in one fiscal year, all of these measures together should represent about \$2.9 billion in revenues to the province.” These are the new taxes, the fee increases and all that the Liberal government is doing. So Mr Sorbara says on December 9 in Hansard at committee, “about \$2.9 billion in revenues to the province. If you just apply that to this year, it's about half the \$5.6-billion deficit, so clearly there's a lot more work to do in terms of recasting and reorganizing our expenditures.”

At that point in December, the Minister of Finance was saying, “OK, I'm working this down. I'm going to work down toward a balanced budget.” But then, \$3 billion-plus in new spending, including \$500 million just last week to help out automobile companies in the province of Ontario.

I think what the people expect is candour from the government. In other words, don't tell me one thing and do another thing. Be frank with me. If you're going to go spend the money, say that you're spending in excess of \$3 billion. Admit it to the people of Ontario. Admit that you're going to run a huge deficit. Don't try to be all things to all people now, as you did last year.

They're not fooling the people anyway. The people see this spending, and they know who's going to pay for it. They know that there's only one taxpayer, and they know that their pockets are going to be picked on May 18 by this Liberal government—the government that promised them to hold the line on taxes and deliver a balanced budget. That's what the promises were—those fundamental promises—then. Promises made, promises broken.

Compare that with the legacy that we had of promises made and promises kept. Not everyone in the province of Ontario agreed. I know this is hard to believe, but not everyone agreed with everything Premier Harris or our government did. Not everyone agreed with that. But at least there was respect by the people for the decision-making process of government. Why? Because when we sought their consent at the polls, when they voted for Premier Harris, they knew that the promises that had been made would be kept. What a refreshing difference from what we see today by this government in this place.

There's something else: government living within its means. The people in Whitby and Ajax tell me that they want government to live within its means. They don't have the luxury of borrowing and building up debt. They like the fact that in 2001, when I was the Minister of Finance, we made the largest payment in the history of the province against public debt—\$3 billion—the same amount of money this government has squandered already, despite the fact that they're talking about deficits.

Listen, the people in the province of Ontario—

Interjection.

Mr Flaherty: I know the member for Aldershot and other places doesn't like to hear this, but the people of the province of Ontario want to see the debt reduced, the same way they pay off mortgages on their homes. You know that's a priority with most of the people in the province. Don't you think they expect the same thing from government? Don't you think, when they look at us in this place and look at this government, they say, “Would you please live within your means?”

Now, that requires decision-making. Ah, here's the problem. You have to make decisions when you're the government. What do we hear day after day from the other side of the House? We hear, “Oh, the Conservatives did this, the Conservatives did that.” When are you going to be the government? When are you going to start making the tough choices that have to be made? That's what governing is all about, and no, it's not easy. You have to make tough decisions. You do. It will be good for them, Mr Speaker.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Heckling should be done from your—

Mr Flaherty: I know I've touched a nerve, and the member's not in his seat, in any event. It's an important nerve.

It's not easy being government. It's work. You actually have to look at issues, and you can't just deliver platitudes, a lot of which I heard in the Liberal speeches here today. You actually have to make decisions, and that's why you're elected. You asked to be elected, you asked the people of the province of Ontario to give you a mandate, you got the mandate, and now you've to make some decisions. People expect you to do that, and they expect accurate information.

You look at something like that automobile insurance promise that was made, how the people of the province of Ontario have been misled by a promise that said the premiums would be 10% lower this year than last year.

The Deputy Speaker: Will the member please take his seat for a moment. The member from Sarnia-Lambton.

Ms Di Cocco: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe that we're dealing with An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000, in respect to family needs, and I believe that the member really should stay on topic.

The Deputy Speaker: That is a point, and I would ask the member to bring his comments back in that direction, please.

Mr Flaherty: Thank you, Speaker. I acknowledge the point being made. Of course, I'm speaking about the relatively minor legislation that has been brought into this House, compared to the major issues that we're facing, and looking for that major reform from the Ministry of Labour. Goodness knows, we need continued labour reforms. We need jobs. We lost 25,000 jobs last month. My goodness, it's shocking.

They've got me surrounded. We're surrounded by Liberals in here. They're over here; there are some over there; there are almost as many Liberal as there were promises. That'll change. They also will be broken by the electorate.

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): Repeat that line. That's a good line.

Mr Flaherty: No, I don't like that line.

That important thing is to be accurate to the people of Ontario, and that, of course, is the point, whether it's in this labour bill or any other bill that comes before this House. The auto insurance thing is particularly repugnant on that issue of candour with the people of Ontario. To go to the people of Ontario, as an example, and say, "Your automobile insurance premiums, on average, will be 10% lower this year, 2004, than they were last year, 2003," is inaccurate and leads people to a conclusion that is wrong. It's more than that, because people have to plan—

The Deputy Speaker: I do remind the member to talk a bit about the labour bill.

Mr Flaherty: We're concerned about families with this bill. I am concerned about families being able to pay their automobile insurance premiums when they've planned to pay 10% less, because that's what you told them was going to happen. You're saying in here they can take eight weeks off work. They're going to have to work the eight weeks to pay their automobile insurance premiums.

It's not right to let people think that they're going to have a savings and then for it not to happen. They should write their MPPs. They should send their MPPs renewal notices with their automobile stickers. They could send them to Queen's Park, send them to the Liberals, send them to me, send them to us. All you need is "Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario." The postal code is M7A 1A8. That's a good one to send in, because that's when we'll just test this 10% reduction. I think the test clearly will not be met.

Taxing and spending: very substantial tax increases coming for the people of the province of Ontario. Why? To build up a deficit. Why they want to build up a deficit I don't know, except it's what they did between 1985—

The Deputy Speaker: Member, take your seat. A point of order, the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Ms Di Cocco: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe that there is a convention in this place that when a bill comes before us, we speak to the bill. I'm sure the member wants to raise the level of debate in here so at least we are talking about the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you to the member. The member for Whitby-Ajax, please.

Mr Flaherty: The member for Sarnia-Lambton got up in debate and said she had a monopoly on compassion. What's that got to do with this bill? She was saying that the people on this side of the House, the Conservatives, were all these hard-hearted people. What's that got to do with it? What is she talking about in this place? That's ridiculous. She thinks she has a monopoly on compassion. Ridiculous.

1730

Taxing: We need our jobs in Ontario. What the Minister of Labour should be concerned about is getting jobs for the people of Ontario, making sure that our legal structure is such that people get to work and that we have economic growth. You don't do that by cash-grabbing \$200 million from people who want to buy soup and a salad at Tim Hortons, but that's what they proposed, a tax grab of \$200 million. You'd think the Minister of Labour—

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I know there are some members of that caucus who are running for leadership who can't tell the difference between Bill 31 and Bill 8—

The Deputy Speaker: Get to the point of order, please.

Mr Wilkinson: —or perhaps the member who is speaking can't tell the difference between auto insurance and compassionate leave.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, please.

Mr Wilkinson: I hope we could speak to the bill, Mr Speaker. You're the Chair.

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the member for Whitby-Ajax—I don't want to be interrupting all the time, but it would be best if we stuck as closely as we could to the bill at hand.

Mr Flaherty: I can speak to the compassion issue that was raised by the members on the other side as part of the debate. The holier-than-thou member for Sarnia-Lambton feels she has a monopoly on compassion in Ontario and that other people in this province aren't so inclined.

Do you know what's important when you look at a labour bill like this and when you look at the job losses in Ontario? This is the Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review for our province. The Ministry of Labour is an important player in this Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review. We have in Ontario a government that is going to have revenues this year of something like \$70 billion. This government, including the Ministry of Labour, anticipates that they will spend more than that. They also anticipate that they will have additional revenues in each of the subsequent years in excess of \$4 billion, based on the government's own assumptions as set out in these estimates.

We have a government that is going to tell the people of Ontario that their insatiable appetite for taxing the people and the small businesses of Ontario is bigger than \$4 billion a year over the course of the next several years. This should be of grave concern to the experts on jobs at the Ministry of Labour, because it is a danger. If you can't run a government with an additional \$4 billion a year over the course of the next four years, and balance the budget, without taxing more from the maxed-out people of Ontario, then we have a serious balanced-budget challenge in this province.

I encourage those at the Ministry of Labour who bring this bill forward, and the minister, to look at the strong fundamentals we have in this province and try to follow their own advice about restraint, which is on page 8 of the economic review. What's it about? Well, if you look at the budget of Ontario, about \$10 billion is used for interest on the public debt; about 80% of the rest of the money, the operating money, leaving aside capital for a moment, is transferred to transfer partners—school boards, hospitals and so on—and about 70% of that is spent on salaries and benefits.

If the members opposite—if the Minister of Finance and the Premier—are serious about restraint, then they should be talking about it, and they should be preparing the people of Ontario for restraint in their demands and for restraint in spending, including by the Ministry of Labour, which brings forward this bill. It's very important that we develop a culture in Ontario that says that governments will live within their means. The people of Ontario expect that, particularly when they see the large amounts of revenue that are coming into this province over the course of the next several years.

If you look again at the Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, under the name of the Minister of Finance,

which includes references to the Ministry of Labour and spending and so on, we see that with tax increases, the anticipated increase is about \$4.1 billion annually going forward—staggering amounts of money. One would think that would be sufficient to satisfy the demands of the spenders across the aisle.

After the revenue projections are looked at and after the spending addiction is looked at, we have to look at the decision gridlock. The Ministry of Labour—I give them credit for bringing forward a bill. At least they made a decision. It's a minor bill, but it's a good bill on what it deals with. It's good to see it come forward. But what we know is happening with this government—that's why we don't have more substantive legislation in front of this House—is decision gridlock. They can't decide what to do. Ministry after ministry: important issues. They were going to cap class size in education, they promised the people of Ontario. Where's the bill? They're not doing it. Instead, we get minor bills about this and that and the other thing. That's because they can't make decisions. They're refusing to govern.

Come forward with the important substantive legislation so we can have substantive debate on those important issues you promised the people of Ontario you would deal with. These are important. After six months, we haven't seen any of that substantive legislation promised to the people of Ontario by the Liberals when they were seeking public office. Now they have public office, and they're frozen. They don't know what to do—decision gridlock. That's why we see minor legislation coming forward and being debated in this House.

There are important issues in labour. Job creation is an important issue. It's important to be accurate to the people of Ontario, not only with respect to automobile insurance but also with respect to the cost of the equity in education tax credit. We had inaccurate information given to the people of the province by the ministry.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair is trying to listen for the words “employment standards” and/or “medical,” those sorts of things. Really, please speak to the bill.

Mr Flaherty: I am speaking to the bill, Speaker. This member from Sarnia-Lambton comes in here and talks about compassion. You didn't rule her out of order. You didn't tell her to speak to the bill. Now you're telling me I have to speak to the bill. I am—

The Deputy Speaker: Will the member please take his seat. Everybody, just take your seat. I'm merely asking the member for Whitby-Ajax to speak to the bill.

Mr Flaherty: My concern with the bills, of course, Speaker, is that we have job creation in Ontario, and one of the important things about job creation is being frank with the people of the province, so that when you bring in legislation to this place, when you bring in bills, you give them accurate information. Tell them you're out there spending more than \$3 billion of their money to build up a deficit artificially. Tell them that. Tell them that when you brought in the repeal of the equity in education tax credit, you misled them about the amount. Tell

them it was nowhere near \$500 million. Tell them on automobile insurance that you misled them—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. We can keep this going, but let's just have a little bit of order. I want to hear the member to see when the debate is on the bill.

Mr Flaherty: It is important that the promises made to the people of Ontario be kept. It's important that there be integrity in government. The Minister of Finance should have resigned. He is going to present a budget that is going to include the Ministry of Labour and whatever is planned for economic growth and jobs in Ontario going forward. He's planning to do that on May 18. According to the Chair of Management Board, he is going to set the interest rate for Ontario savings bonds despite the fact that his responsibilities for the Ontario Securities Commission and the Toronto Stock Exchange have been taken away. All of this that affects job creation should be of great concern to the Ministry of Labour, although it's clearly not a concern to the member for Sarnia-Lambton, who is compassionately on her feet again.

Ms Di Cocco: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: This Legislature has a bill before it that is being developed, that is being debated, and I would expect that the member debate the bill before us.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, the member for Sarnia-Lambton. I think that's fairly well understood. What we're trying to do is to get through this debate. The member for Whitby-Ajax.

1740

Mr Flaherty: The concern, of course, is the insubstantial legislation being brought before this House by the members opposite, including the member for Sarnia-Lambton and including the bill we're debating now. This is insubstantial legislation, not that it's not a good piece of legislation—it's good—but it's just not major legislation. We need major legislation in this House because the Liberal government told us we would have major legislation so that they could keep their promises. Promises made, promises broken is the reality we're facing here, but we hope that legislation will be coming forward.

What we're seeing is responsibility avoidance by this government. We're also seeing a tendency toward bringing in retroactive legislation, with the equity in education tax credit, with trailers, people who use trailers as cottages and recreational properties, and with Bill 49, the Adams mine bill, another bill before this House.

This is a concern. It's against parliamentary tradition to bring in retroactive legislation, particularly when it affects people's pocketbooks. The whole idea is that people are supposed to be able to plan their affairs based on the law as it is now, and that if the law is changed, the law affects their lives going forward proactively and not going backwards. That's been changed by this government in three important areas: the EETC, the trailers and this bill that's before the House, Bill 49.

I encourage the Ministry of Labour to do everything they can to create jobs in Ontario. I encourage the minister to do what he can with the Minister of Finance and the Premier to impress on them that this bill is OK but that there are important steps that need to be taken in this province to ensure we have the kind of job creation we had between 1995 and 2000, and then following 2000 when we got over the one million job mark.

That changed Ontario. It made Ontario a wealthier place to be. It helped families in the province. That job creation and that growth made it possible to increase health care spending by in excess of \$10 billion. I know the Minister of Labour is fully aware that the absolute foundation of the quality of life in this province going forward, whether it's in the labour area, health care, education, social services or protecting the environment, is strong economic growth in Ontario. To do that, we need to encourage the creation of jobs. The Ministry of Labour has an important responsibility there, which I'm sure they are conscious of.

I look forward to the kind of economic initiatives coming forward from the government that will make a bill like this seem not as important, because we'll be looking at the bigger issues: We'll be looking at innovation in the province. We'll be looking at skills training. We'll be looking at balancing budgets. We'll be looking at paying off public debt. We'll be looking at those fundamentals that the Liberal candidates and the now Liberal Premier talked about during the course of the general election only six or seven months ago, but about which we have not seen legislation in this place.

I'd like to hear that they're working on it and that we're going to see this kind of important step forward, but I haven't even heard that. Certainly that's not what we hear when we're allowed to ask questions during question period. What we hear is finger-pointing about what happened with the government before.

I hope the members opposite in the government will rise above that, that they will see to those promises, even the ones they've broken, because it's never too late to repent. What was it that Sean Conway, the member from the Ottawa Valley, used to say? "All saints have a past, all sinners have a future." That's what Sean Conway used to say. That's good counsel to the Liberal government of Ontario that I'm sure your former, long-serving member from the Ottawa Valley would give you. You have an opportunity to make up for those broken promises. You have an opportunity to bring in legislation in this place that will keep your promises to the people of Ontario. That would be a great start as we go forward.

I encourage the minister not only to bring in this bill, which we are supporting as the member for Kitchener-Waterloo indicated, but also to bring in whatever legislation the government decides will help create jobs in the province of Ontario, so we'll have the kind of economic growth that will give us the quality of life, the social services and the brilliant future for the people of Ontario that we all seek.

Thank you, Speaker. I was pleased to speak to the particulars of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, we've at least reached the point of questions and comments.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): These were important comments. They were wide-ranging but within the context, I put to you, of the interests of the Minister of Labour. It was frustrating, as someone attempting to pay close attention to it, to see the speech interrupted and frustrated by fraudulent points of order, none of which had any merit and none of which ended up being positively ruled on.

Mr David Oraziotti (Sault Ste Marie): You would never do that, Peter.

Mr Kormos: I find it disappointing that a government member would want to utilize the ruse of a point of order to try to occupy the time of a speaker.

Having said that, I take some heart in the concern about the loss of jobs. It was only yesterday that I asked this government about the Bauer Nike jobs in Cambridge and in Mississauga: 300 jobs gone in the Bauer Nike hockey stick factory in Cambridge and Nike, a multinational corporation, not even wanting to contemplate or consider an offer by Canadian investors to purchase that factory, putting those 300 workers back to work, because they don't want the competition from a made-in-Canada hockey manufacturer.

Nike bought out Bauer some years ago—Bauer Nike in Mississauga. Again, Bauer Nike telling its workers—25 of them at that plant, skilled, long-time workers who manufacture the made-to-measure protective equipment for NHL goalies, professional hockey equipment—their jobs are finished. Where's the work going? It's going to China, and it's being contracted out to sweatshop conditions with the likelihood of all of it going offshore.

Now, here's an endemic Canadian industry. These are unique jobs that, quite frankly, will never be restored once they're gone. I sense and appreciate the frustration of the member who spoke. I called upon the government yesterday to intervene. The government shrugs and says, "Oh, well, what can we do?" Well, that's the problem with the Liberals. It's been a matter of, "What can we do?" They've done nothing. They've broken every promise they've made. We've seen what they can do. Now we're seeing what they can't do.

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): I'm delighted to be able to respond to both the member from Whitby-Ajax and the member from Kitchener-Waterloo.

I actually sat here rather incredulously listening to these comments that a bill that permits a caregiver to be with someone at the end of their life is of no significance, insubstantial or minor, the comments that this was a self-righteous and condescending attitude. Can someone please tell me where the good debate is in those words?

We're talking about people—and I speak from personal experience as a palliative care worker for many years—who at the end of their life need to have the person they care for the most with them. They need the support and help of a lot of other people along the way, but in addition, at that critical time in their lives, they

need these people with them, and that is not self-righteous and condescending.

Let me tell you what is self-righteous and condescending. It was the previous government who, if you were dying, ended up in a hospital and didn't die in time, charged you extra for your bed. That's condescending, that's shameful and that's self-righteous.

The fact of the matter is that this bill permits people to be with those they care for the most at the end of their life, be they two months old or 100 years old. It's something that should have been done a long time ago. Thank heaven for the folks who put this together to the minister. It is a good beginning to what we need to do on behalf of many people in this province as we deal with the issue of palliative care. Forty per cent of all seniors in Canada live in this province, and that number will double. I wholeheartedly support this bill.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm pleased to join in the debate this afternoon and add some comments to do with the comments made by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo and the member from Whitby-Ajax on Bill 56, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family medical leave and other matters.

As was pointed out by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, it is complementary to federal legislation, and we do support this bill. It provides eight weeks' leave from work without pay. The member from Kitchener-Waterloo did point out that it does have some shortcomings. In her opinion, it doesn't go far enough and really only deals with those who are critically ill, someone who's expected to pass away within 26 weeks. This is a shortcoming, because there are many other caregivers dealing with illnesses that do not necessarily result in a significant risk of death, but there's still a great need for caregiving. So there are some shortcomings.

1750

One of the worries about a bill like this, if you end up having too many conditions and too much red tape involved with the bill—I know in my riding in the north, we hear a lot about the northern health travel grant and on numerous occasions from individuals, constituents, who are having problems with all the paperwork involved with the northern health travel grant. It really becomes a terrible battle trying to get some compensation from that health travel grant.

I hope this legislation doesn't get bogged down in red tape and goes toward being very supportive of those caregivers who need the support. We do support this legislation.

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I'm happy that the official opposition is supporting Bill 56. I want to address a couple of the comments made by the member for Kitchener-Waterloo and the member for Whitby-Ajax, that this is merely companion legislation in respect of what the federal level is doing. To imply that this is somehow trivial or unimportant is totally inappropriate. I think it is our job as the government of Ontario to work with all other levels of government. We make no apology

for working with the federal government for the betterment of Ontario residents and to improve on the quality of life in this instance.

Let me give you an example as to what would happen if that does not happen. As a former regional councillor in York region, I have seen federal funding in respect of affordable housing coming out on the community rental housing initiative being sat on for more than two years. It's not until we have taken over as the government of Ontario that we have started to make things happen and to build 2,300 units.

I also want address the comment with respect to the certificate requirement when the sick person is overseas. I think it's very clear in the proposed legislation that a qualified health practitioner means a person who is qualified to practise medicine under the laws of the jurisdiction in which care or treatment is provided to the individual described in subsection (1), and so on.

Finally, I want to just quickly talk about the comment of the member for Whitby-Ajax that nobody called him. I think that member is missing the point. We should not have to rely on the good heart of the people of Ontario. It's almost like saying that Canadians are law-abiding and, therefore, we don't need the Criminal Code. I think we need legislation to make sure that people have no fear in their hearts and will be able to get medical leave.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Whitby-Ajax has two minutes to reply.

Mr Flaherty: Thank you, Speaker. I know you want to hear the two minutes on this bill and what the Ministry of Labour can do to encourage job creation in Ontario,

and what the Ministry of Labour could do to enhance the lack of credibility of the Liberal government by encouraging them to start keeping some promises, particularly the fundamental promises about balancing the budget and not increasing taxes. Holding the line on taxes was the magic phrase that was used by Mr McGuinty, now the Premier, when he sought votes from the people of Ontario.

This bill deals with people taking time off work, as much as eight weeks, to take care of a loved one, which is important. There are other ways of addressing the issue. There's the hospice movement in the province of Ontario. In my own area of Durham region that movement has been quite successful, thanks to an incredible group of volunteers. A lot of these folks are seniors—not all, but some—who give of their own selves, give time to operate the hospice in Durham and, of course, to visit people in their homes. My own family has been touched by that, and it is a remarkably sensitive and serving movement in Ontario. I commend that movement and those alternatives to the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Health, whatever, when they're looking at law changes and at funding in Ontario.

At the end of the day, we all want the same thing, and that is that loved ones are best cared for in the final days of their lives. I'm sure that intention is shared by all members of this place and partly addressed by this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1755.

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Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon / L'hon Steve (L) Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation	Mississauga East / -Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga South / -Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga West / -Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Etobicoke Centre / -Centre	Cansfield, Donna H. (L)	Nepean-Carleton	Baird, John R. (PC)
Etobicoke North / -Nord	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Niagara Centre / -Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Brotten, Laurel C. (L)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)	Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)	Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)
		Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)
		Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)
		Ottawa Centre / -Centre	Patten, Richard (L)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Ottawa South / -Sud	McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Watson, Hon / L'hon Jim (L) Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Ottawa-Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Meilleur, Hon / L'hon Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / -Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Hon / L'hon Gerard (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon / L'hon George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Toronto-Danforth	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Sorbara, Hon / L'hon Greg (L) Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Jim (PC)
Sault Ste Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Scarborough Centre / -Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	Windsor West / -Ouest	Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Scarborough East / -Est	Chambers, Hon / L'hon Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités	Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight (L) Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Scarborough Southwest / -Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	York Centre / -Centre	Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Scarborough-Agincourt	Phillips, Hon / L'hon Gerry (L) Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement	York North / -Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L) Speaker / Président	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Simcoe North / -Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	York West / -Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St Catharines	Bradley, Hon / L'hon James J. (L) Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs		
St Paul's	Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mercredi 21 avril 2004

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

Loi de 2004 modifiant la Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario, projet de loi 60, <i>M^{me} Meilleur</i>	
Adoptée	1633
M ^{me} Meilleur	1633

DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario	
M ^{me} Meilleur	1634
M. Prue	1636

QUESTIONS ORALES

Certificats de naissance	
M. McNeely	1646
M. Watson	1646

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

Loi de 2004 modifiant la Loi sur les normes d'emploi (congé familial pour raison médicale), projet de loi 56, <i>M. Bentley</i>	
Débat présumé ajourné	1668

CONTENTS

Wednesday 21 April 2004

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Children's mental health services	
Mr Yakabuski	1631
Calabresi Canadians	
Mr Colle	1631
BSE	
Mr Murdoch	1631
Hospital workers	
Mr Parsons	1632
Beaches Easter parade	
Mr Prue	1632
Brush-a-Mania	
Mr Duguid	1632
Small business	
Ms Scott	1632
Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood	
Social Services	
Mr Delaney	1633
Highway tolls	
Mr Klees	1633

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

Standing committee on government agencies	
The Speaker	1633
Report deemed adopted	1633

FIRST READINGS

Ontario Heritage Amendment Act, 2004, Bill 60, <i>Mrs Meilleur</i>	
Agreed to	1633
Mrs Meilleur	1634
Ontario Recreation Facilities Association Act, 2004, Bill Pr4, <i>Mr Brownell</i>	
Agreed to	1634

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Ontario heritage legislation	
Mrs Meilleur	1634
Mr O'Toole	1636
Mr Prue	1636
Rouge Park	
Mr Ramsay	1635
Mr Ouellette	1635
Ms Churley	1636

ORAL QUESTIONS

Transportation infrastructure	
Mr Klees	1637, 1640
Mr Takhar	1637, 1640

Transit services

Mr Arnott	1638
Mr Caplan	1638, 1639
Mr Klees	1638
Mr Sterling	1638

Public health

Mr Hampton	1639
Mr McGuinty	1639

Automobile insurance

Mr Hampton	1639
Mr Sorbara	1639

Services for disabled children

Mr Milloy	1640
Mrs Bountrogianni	1640

Mid-peninsula highway

Mr Hudak	1641
Mr Takhar	1641

Fabry disease

Mrs Sandals	1641
Mr Smitherman	1641

Energy contracts

Mr Hampton	1642
Mr Duncan	1642

Photo radar

Mr Dunlop	1642
Mr Takhar	1642

Rent regulation

Mr Qaadri	1642
Mr Gerretsen	1643

Highway improvement

Mr Yakabuski	1643
Mr Takhar	1643, 1644
Mr Arnott	1644

Ontario youth apprenticeship program

Mr Kular	1643
Mrs Chambers	1643

Immigrants' skills

Mr Craiton	1643
Mrs Chambers	1644

Water quality

Ms Martel	1644
Mrs Dombrowsky	1644

Affordable housing

Mrs Van Bommel	1645
Mr Caplan	1645

Level crossings

Mr Hardeman	1645
Mr Takhar	1645

PETITIONS

Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital	
Mr Hardeman	1646

Ontario budget

Ms Wynne	1646
Mr Berardinetti	1647
Mr Wilkinson	1648
Mr Qaadri	1649

Hospital funding

Ms Martel	1646
-----------------	------

Highway 518

Mr Miller	1647
-----------------	------

Taxation

Mr Hudak	1647
Mr Arnott	1648
Mr Hardeman	1648

University and college funding

Mr Patten	1647
-----------------	------

Landfill

Mr Dunlop	1648, 1649
-----------------	------------

Senior citizens

Mr McMeekin	1648
-------------------	------

GO Transit service

Mr Delaney	1649
------------------	------

Water services

Ms Scott	1649
----------------	------

SECOND READINGS

Employment Standards Amendment Act (Family Medical Leave), 2004, Bill 56, <i>Mr Bentley</i>	
Mr Bentley	1650, 1658
Mr Milloy	1652
Ms Di Cocco	1653
Mr Flynn	1654
Mr Prue	1657
Mrs Sandals	1657
Mr Ramal	1658
Mr Hoy	1658
Mrs Witmer	1658
Mr Flaherty	1661, 1668
Mr Kormos	1667
Mrs Cansfield	1667
Mr Miller	1667
Mr Wong	1667
Debate deemed adjourned	1668

OTHER BUSINESS

Visitor	
The Speaker	1633
Toronto Maple Leafs jersey	
Mr Eves	1637
Ms Churley	1637
Mr McGuinty	1637
Legislative pages	
The Speaker	1637

Continued overleaf