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Jeudi 6 mai 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 6 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 6 mai 2004

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS'
PUBLIC BUSINESS

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT
SUBVENTIONS ACCORDÉES AUX
RÉSIDENTS DU NORD DE L'ONTARIO

Mr David Orazietti (Sault Ste Marie): I move that in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should examine the northern health travel grant (NHTG) with a focus on reviewing the criteria and improving the services associated with receiving support from the NHTG, as well as enhancing the administration of the NHTG by simplifying its processing formula.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Orazietti has moved private member's notice of motion number 15. Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr Orazietti, you have 10 minutes to lead off.

Mr Orazietti: It's certainly my privilege to rise in the House today to speak to a resolution which is very important to the residents of Sault Ste Marie and also to residents across northern Ontario. This resolution concerns the northern health travel grant.

Mr Speaker, several of my northern colleagues will also be speaking to this resolution: the member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan, Mr Mauro; the member for Thunder Bay-Superior North, Mr Gravelle; and the member for Algoma-Manitoulin, Mr Brown. I want to thank my northern colleagues for their support of this resolution and for speaking to it this morning.

We have some veteran MPPs who know very well the issues related to the northern health travel grant and who have done an excellent job in past years advocating for this program, and this resolution continues to reinforce those efforts.

Before I begin discussing some of the more specific issues relating to the northern health travel grant, I want to thank Minister Smitherman for his support of this resolution and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care staff for meeting with me to discuss this issue.

I sent all members a letter briefly outlining this resolution on April 26, and I hope that members from all parties support this resolution, because it is truly a non-partisan issue. It's about access to health care.

What is the northern health travel grant? It's a program that was created under the Peterson government to help reduce transportation costs to individuals who reside in northern Ontario and must travel long distances within Ontario or to Manitoba to receive medically necessary, insured specialty services that are not available in their local communities. This program is absolutely essential to northerners. It exists because of the incredible shortage of specialists in northern Ontario, and we have a shortage of family physicians as well. Certainly in parts of southern Ontario and rural Ontario those difficulties are present as well, but when you look at the GTA and the shortages there, the shortages in northern Ontario are much, much worse. It also exists because we must have equal access to health care for northern Ontario residents.

I don't think we need to spend much time arguing the merits of this program, because they are self-evident to anyone who has any understanding of issues facing northern Ontario residents when it comes to health care.

The northern health travel grant requires residents in the north to be referred by their doctor, dentist, optometrist, nurse practitioner, chiropractor or medical specialist to a health care facility that is at least 100 kilometres away from their residence. The referral must be for services provided for under the Health Insurance Act, and the referral must be to a specialist certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

In northwestern Ontario this is a concern because many residents face the difficulty of traveling to a specialist in Manitoba, and the certification of foreign-trained physicians is such that they may be able to practise their medical specialty in Manitoba but may not be registered by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, so it compounds the problem. This is one of the issues we would like reviewed if this resolution carries, and perhaps some of the members from northwestern Ontario would care to speak to that this morning.

The northern health travel grant budget is approximately \$25 million, and through this program each year approximately 161,000 applications are processed for medical services where individuals have had to travel over 100 kilometres for necessary medical treatment. To put that in perspective, you're looking at a population in northern Ontario of 750,000 to 800,000 people. If this were on a per capita basis, on a per visit basis—now, we know that's not quite the case, because some of the 161,000 applications may have been by the same person multiple times. But if it were on a per person basis, this would equate to about 20% of people in northern Ontario

having to travel over 100 kilometres for necessary medical treatment. It's a significant number.

Of these 161,000 applications, about 100,000 trips are by northerners living in more isolated rural communities who have had to travel to larger northern Ontario communities for medical treatment. Almost 24,000 of these trips are by northerners to southern Ontario destinations for specialty medical services. About 15,000 of these trips are by residents living in northwestern Ontario to Manitoba. They can't even get the medical service they need in this province.

What are northerners accessing the northern health travel grant for? The top five areas of referral for the northern health travel grant patients were ophthalmology, facility-based programs such as MRIs, internal medicine, orthopaedic surgery, and therapeutic radiology or cancer treatment. So 161,000 visits, and these are people who are facing extreme health care challenges travelling over 100 kilometres.

The number of people applying for this grant is rising as the demographics in northern Ontario are changing rapidly, and a significant number of physicians in northern Ontario are attempting to retire from their practices, so we have an aging physician population in northern Ontario.

There are some key issues we need to address. The northern health travel grant requires an individual to access a specialist who is the closest to their residence. If we're talking about wait times—and our government is very committed to reducing wait times for essential care and treatment—it's very important that northern residents, and all residents of Ontario, see a specialist as soon as they are able to. If the wait time to see the closest specialist is six months, and there is a specialist slightly farther away but the wait time may be a month or two, it simply makes sense to have that individual travel a little farther to see someone a little sooner. It's in their best interest; it's in the interest of their health. This is an issue that needs to be reviewed in terms of the travel grant.

1010

There are program eligibility requirements as currently set out—without getting into specifics about eligibility; I don't want to prejudge the review process and unfairly set expectations about the process—that need to be reviewed.

The northern health travel grant also requires individuals to meet the 100-kilometre limit or threshold. There are some anomalies in this situation, where an individual might be slightly under the 100 kilometres but needs to travel, for example, three times a week for kidney dialysis and do this all year. The number of kilometres they're traveling for essential health care is extremely high. I think we need to take a look at those anomalies and address some of those issues.

The other issue, obviously, is the issue with the Manitoba specialists. There are specialists in the province of Manitoba who are foreign-trained who may not be recognized by the Royal College but can deliver those specialty services. Residents in northwestern Ontario

need to be able to access those people and get the best health care they can.

One of the other complaints about the northern health travel grant is the processing time. We have a very antiquated system in place that requires extensive manual processing of forms. If you call to find out what the status of your application is, oftentimes it's difficult to track because it's not in an electronic form. This also needs to be addressed.

The northern health travel grant cannot be viewed in isolation. There are a number of things we need to do in northern Ontario to assist in improving health care. Northerners would certainly prefer not to have to travel for these services. Under ideal circumstances, we would have specialists in all communities, but we know that's not possible. And certainly many people in Ontario would not want to have to travel these distances if we could avoid it. But since they do, we need to make this program as best suited to their needs as possible, to ensure that we are breaking down the barriers and allowing affordable access to health care for northerners.

We need to work with northern Ontario municipalities to improve their physician recruitment strategies. I spent six years on the city council of Sault Ste Marie. We put in place a physician recruitment program where we provide \$40,000 for a four-year commitment to physicians in Sault Ste Marie. We're pleased to be able to do that. The Northern Ontario Medical School going forward in the communities of Sudbury and Thunder Bay is a tremendous asset to our government. We're investing substantial dollars.

The position of the NDP is coming home to roost here in Ontario. The cutting of seats in medical schools has caught up with us. Northerners and people in this province are paying an incredible price because of that shortage.

We need to review the underserved area program, and we need to have traveling specialist clinics. I met a couple of individuals in the airport last week who were traveling to Sudbury and then to Sault Ste Marie to provide specialty services to northerners. I certainly thank these physicians and encourage them to continue to come back to northern Ontario.

These are some of the things that in the short term we're going to need to do to improve our health care.

I want to close by thanking you for listening to my comments this morning. I look forward to hearing what other members have to say on this issue and look forward to your support on this resolution.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I'm very pleased to join the debate on this resolution put forward, that suggests that in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should examine the northern health travel grant, with a focus on reviewing the criteria and improving the services associated with receiving support from the northern health travel grant, as well as enhancing the administration within NHTG by simplifying its processing formula. I am in certainly in support of this motion.

When in government, I supported simplifying and improving the process, and I very much support that now. In fact, I remember a day at the Red Tape Commission when I brought in 30 rejection letters from the northern health travel grant as an example of red tape in government and did work toward trying to improve the system.

Certainly we have lots of experience in our constituency with the frustration people have faced in trying to access the program. I'll read an e-mail I received recently to do with this issue. It says:

"Dear Norm Miller, MPP, and Kay Vollett: This afternoon, Thursday, April 22, 2004, we received two cheques from the Ministry of Health, each for \$205.50 for northern health travel, for 18/06/2002 trips and 10/03/2002 trips.

"This is totally the efforts and work you have given on our behalf, and we are very appreciative. We couldn't have done this on our own. As you know, we tried so hard to be understood.

"We have learned a few lessons. No matter how difficult the situation, don't take instructions from the kiosk in a busy cancer clinic, as this could be served by an uninformed volunteer or staff. Never expect the bureaucracy to understand or help. Hopefully, sometime the Ministry of Health will produce an application form or procedure that is easier for people to process who are under great stress and strain.

"Thank you again for all the help and assistance, and we know the work you have done on our behalf."

It was addressed to me, but I want to point out that it was my staff who did all the work on behalf of that constituent, not me. Kay Vollett, Inge Juneau, Jessie Crisp and Marcia Morrison, my staff, have worked very hard. We get an inquiry to do with the northern health travel grant almost every week. Really, that isn't the way it should be. The system should work for those who are having health problems. It shouldn't be so bureaucratic.

Here are some of the problems with the system. Say you're a cancer patient. For each trip you make for treatment, you have to get a separate signature, an individual signature, from the doctor. That's about the last thing you're going to be thinking about when you're undergoing treatment for cancer. There are some real problems with the process of trying to access the program. You only have six months to do it. Once again, with cancer you may be receiving treatment for more than six months. You're thinking about getting well, not about trying to access the northern health travel grant. We have to make this program work better for those who need it.

I would like to point out that in 2002, I believe it was, the program was doubled under the past government. It used to cover going just one way; now it covers both directions. I believe it's approximately 34 cents a kilometre for both directions over 100 kilometres.

But there could be improvements. There's no regard for the continuity of care. The patient is forced to go to the closest specialist even where there's a lengthy history of care with a specialist at a centre farther away. We have to look at each individual situation.

I have another letter to the Ministry of Health. I'll read a little bit of it that deals with that issue:

"...I am an incomplete paraplegic and have a great deal of pain after driving two hours. I have family and friends in Toronto, which allows me to drive down, rest overnight, and drive back. (This has been working well for me.)" This particular individual was told he would have to go to Barrie. "If I were to go to Barrie, I would have to take a hotel and rest overnight, since I do not have anyone in Barrie that I could stay with. The expense would be too great for me and I would just have to stop."

The program has to look at individual cases.

The paperwork is much too onerous: one application per trip, as I mentioned. Chemo patients can have dozens of trips. Applications must be submitted within six months, even when the course of treatment is ongoing. This puts tremendous pressure on the patient, who should be focusing on getting well, not on trying to fill out paperwork. As I mentioned, I've seen cases where we've tried to help individuals who have had 30 trips for chemo treatment and they've come in with 30 rejection letters. Surely when there's a program of treatment, there must be a simpler way of doing it, that one cheque is issued, or one rejection letter, if that be the case. Or you should be able to set out a schedule of treatment where maybe for each trip the doctor initials a form. There's got to be a simpler way that's going to benefit patients more.

Similarly, as I mentioned, if a patient successfully applies, in the case of chemo treatment they get 25 cheques.

Doctors are still unaware of the program. As I mentioned, you have to get a doctor's signature, so if they're unaware of the program, they may not inform the patient. Doctors need to be more aware of the program so they can help the patients. I think the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines could be of assistance in this situation as well.

1020

Those are just a few of the suggestions. I know we have other people who would like to speak to this matter. I think it is a worthwhile idea. We need to improve this program. It seems pretty straightforward and simple, but sometimes in government it's difficult to make these improvements no matter how logical they appear. I would love to see improvement in the program. It is a worthwhile program. Northern Ontario covers pretty much 90% of the land mass of Ontario, and obviously there are some huge distances involved in trying to get to treatment. This is a worthwhile program, and I support this resolution to improve it.

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): First of all, I want to congratulate my colleague from Sault Ste Marie, Mr Oraziotti, for bringing this resolution forward today. All of us representing a northern Ontario constituency recognize that while our goal should always be to provide all needed medical services to each and every community in the north, the reality is and shall probably remain that we will always have to travel to major urban centres such as Toronto, Hamilton

or Winnipeg to receive certain vital specialized services. That being the case, it is only fair that a program such as the northern health travel grant be in place to at least partially compensate our constituents for their travel expenses. Certainly I am grateful on behalf of my constituents, as I know we all are in the north, that the Liberal government in 1987 brought this program to life and at least went part of the way toward alleviating the sometimes astronomical costs associated with travel and accommodation when your constituents are far from home.

Having said that, there have always been flaws in the program, in my opinion, that I felt needed to be fixed. Under the previous government, those of us representing the north focused our attention on the level of compensation that the travel grant program provided. Through an absolutely extraordinary campaign, supported by thousands upon thousands of northerners, we managed to get the compensation level doubled. While it still left many of our constituents out of pocket, it at least provided some needed financial relief.

The problem with our success in that regard was that the government of the day felt they had closed the file on the northern health travel grant program, that all the problems were in essence solved based on that compensation change. But the truth is, there are still adjustments that need to be made to bring true fairness to the program, in my opinion, and these are adjustments related to flexibility and to whom the program should apply.

Today, through my colleague Mr Oraziotti, we're being given a perfect opportunity to bring forward some advice as to what changes are needed to improve the northern health travel program. There are few that I want to mention in my remarks today.

I'm going to focus more on the criteria in terms of some of the guideline changes. One of the frustrations that my constituents in Thunder Bay-Superior North have—and it's one that I think needs to be dealt with—is if you live in Marathon or Geraldton and need to get services in Toronto, London, Hamilton or Ottawa, the travel grant program works based on mileage. So they would say Marathon to Toronto is so many kilometres, and they would give you 34 cents a kilometre based on that. The reality in northern Ontario, particularly if you live in Marathon, is that there is a very good chance that you will drive from Marathon to Thunder Bay and then you'll fly from Thunder Bay to Toronto. This makes a lot more sense for a lot of constituents; it actually saves time. This is one of the realities of our situation in Thunder Bay-Superior North; the same with Geraldton, Longlac, Nakina—you're going to drive to Thunder Bay. So there you are, going to Thunder Bay, traveling back, yet the compensation level is only factored in as if you left Marathon and drove immediately east. It's something I've talked about before and something that I hope will be considered.

Another issue I think we need to talk about is those people who are accessing midwives in the north, which is far more common, midwifery being under the Regulated

Health Professions Act, funded by the province of Ontario. If a doctor in a community refers a pregnant woman to a midwife in Thunder Bay—again, that is the example I'll use—because midwives are not deemed to be medical specialists, they are not able to access the northern health travel grant, which seems distinctly unfair in that there are fewer and fewer obstetricians and family doctors who are delivering babies. The fact is that a doctor will refer them to these wonderful people who are working in the midwifery profession in Thunder Bay, frequently for prenatal care and low-risk pregnancies, but they are certainly providing some relief to the medical profession itself, to the doctors who are doing it.

I've written a number of letters on this. We'll continue to make the case that I think the midwifery profession is one that we do support in this province, and that indeed we should be allowing those people who are going to a midwife to access the program. It seems unfair. I've had many constituents write me about that.

Another issue that I think the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka was talking about to some degree too is the issue of your specialist if you've got a condition. I've got many examples. One constituent had a condition that required her to see a neurologist. For many, many years, she was going to Ottawa to receive this treatment. There then became a neurologist available in Thunder Bay. This constituent's point was, "I've been going for some time to this doctor who knows my case and my file." I think there needs to be some flexibility in that regard.

What happens, as a result of the fact that there is now a neurologist—and the member from Sault Ste Marie made this point very well; it's an extraordinarily long wait to access that particular neurologist—is they are being told they can't access the northern health travel grant.

The other one is—quickly; I'm running out of time—we have an eating disorder clinic in Thunder Bay that's looked after by the St Joseph's Care Group. The chair of the St Joseph's Care Group, Mr Dick O'Donnell, wrote me about the fact that for people who need to access help under the eating disorders clinic, there are in-patient treatment centres in Toronto and Ottawa. The only way you can access that is to get assessed in your regional centre, which in this case is Thunder Bay. Again, because there aren't medical specialists involved, people who have to travel thousands of kilometres, or hundreds of kilometres certainly, to access the services in Thunder Bay are not eligible for the northern health travel grant. I think they should be.

I could go on and on. I appreciate the opportunity that the member from Sault Ste Marie has given us to debate this today. I hope this will all be part of the review. I'm in great support of this resolution.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's a pleasure to rise this morning to support this resolution. I'd like to welcome, first of all, these young people who have joined us this morning. It's great to see your class here. I'm not sure what school you're from, but it's great to see you

here. We should give them a round of applause for watching.

As I said, we'll be supporting this resolution, which says that in the opinion of this House, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should examine the northern health travel grant with a focus on reviewing the criteria and improving the services associated with receiving support from the grant, as well as enhancing the administration of the grant by simplifying its processing formula.

I have to say, it's always nice if you think you can work with one of the government ministries and streamline the application procedure or the administration of programs. Good luck. OK? That's the first thing. You're a couple of people here, and you will quickly find out, because certainly it makes so much sense.

We, of course, as Mr Miller and Mr Gravelle have both said, doubled the grant, as far as traveling over 100 kilometres both ways, and we're very proud of that. I thank the former minister, Tony Clement, for his stand on that and for trying to listen to the people of the north.

I think one of the biggest problems we have in this House is that there are only 11 northern ridings, and they take in about 90% of the province. We tend to think there's not a lot happening north of Highway 7 or Highway 9, and it gets kind of silent and quiet up there, but the fact of the matter is, northern Ontario is one of the most beautiful parts of the world. If people here have never had the opportunity to fly over the north or travel in the north, they're really missing something.

We're fortunate. We have Norm Miller here in our caucus, who is attending all types of functions in the north and trying to get a grip on his position as critic. Of course, he's doing a great job there.

It's also funny today that both these resolutions come up at the same time, one on the northern health travel grant and the other on foreign-trained professionals, because of course the issue, not only with the grant, is that we also need professionals of any type, whether they're foreign-trained or our own students, in the north.

I have a couple of suggestions to the government. First of all, obviously anywhere we can streamline the administration of the grant is necessary, and we applaud the efforts in trying to do that; but second, with medical students. We are opening the Northern Ontario Medical School—again, it was our government's commitment to do so—with campuses in Sudbury and Thunder Bay.

1030

There is one key area we have to zero in on—and I hope the people from the ministry are listening carefully to this—and that's residency positions right across our province. It's going to be a big issue. The other night I happened to speak to a number of students from the University of Ottawa who were at the OMA reception. They specifically brought the medical students out. It's a very important issue. I've had some of the young medical students in my riding come to me as well. There just may not be enough positions, and that includes family physicians as well as specialty areas. The citizens of Ontario help to train and put these medical students through

university, and it's simply unacceptable to think we might lose them because they can't find a residency position. We really have to zero in on the administration of that part of the program and make sure that all of those who take their training in Canada, as well as the foreign-trained professionals, get an opportunity to have a residency position when they want to before they receive their final diploma.

Second, when we talk about administration—and this is something that has bothered me for some time. The 20,000 new long-term-care beds that we announced in the province are being built and most of them are open now. I have never agreed with the formula for how they were allocated. In my riding, we need about another 100 long-term-care beds. I've actually sent Ms Smith a letter on this.

Other areas of the province were allocated beds and they're not full. There's something wrong with that scenario. We absolutely have to find a way to reallocate some of the beds that have not yet been built to areas that need these beds. I need 100 beds in my area. It's not northern Ontario, but it's getting up there. There must be other communities in the same position, where the formula has not worked. Again, it's an administrative issue with the Ministry of Health.

I've gone on long enough. I'm going to leave some time for my colleague Mr Tascona. We will be supporting Mr Oraziotti's resolution here this morning. We have to do anything that can streamline the process for helping our citizens, whether they're in northern Ontario, southern Ontario or anywhere in the province. We have to make it work as well as it possibly can. I thank you for the time, and I'll be turning it over to Mr Tascona for his turn.

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I'm pleased to stand today to add my comments to the resolution regarding the review of the northern health travel grant, dealing especially with eligibility criteria, improved services and improved administration of the program. I'd like to thank the member from Sault Ste Marie for bringing it forward.

As many of you will know, this is a very serious health care issue in northwestern Ontario, in fact in all of northern Ontario, which at some point has been a very contentious issue for many of us who represent ridings in that area. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to it.

By way of example, I'd like to relay a situation that I dealt with very recently. This past weekend, I had the opportunity to spend about half an hour, of the two days I spent in Atikokan, dealing with a constituent from that town who recently had a very serious issue regarding the northern health travel grant. Atikokan is a small community that's part of the riding I represent. It is about two hours west of Thunder Bay. This lady ended up with a very serious issue when her husband became gravely ill and the hospital in Atikokan was unable to provide the level of service required for her husband. The doctor referred her husband to the Thunder Bay Regional Health

Sciences Centre and, as is apt to be the case from time to time, Thunder Bay Regional was unable to accommodate her needs. The next-closest hospital was in Winnipeg in Manitoba and they were also unable to accommodate her needs.

As a result of that process, this lady and her husband ended up spending 42 days in Duluth, Minnesota. For those of you who do not know, Duluth is an American city. For 42 days, her husband was there. The result of that process was a \$162,000 bill to the taxpayers of the province of Ontario. That part of it of course was covered. However, for this lady who spent 42 days in Duluth with her husband, who was gravely ill and on life support for much of that time and who thankfully has survived, her bill came in at around \$3,200 for hotel, not including meals and other essentials necessary to accommodate her stay while she was down there.

That speaks for many reasons we need to address this northern health travel grant, but I think the bigger point that needs to be made as we deal with the northern health travel grant is that we need to be pursuing a health care system in the longer term that has as its goal the ability to provide as many health-care-related services in as many locations as possible. We need to pursue a system of health care provision in this province that hopefully, somewhere down the line, will see the need for less northern health travel grants, not more. We're not at that point yet, but we need to get there as soon as we can.

For the constituent I referred to, it was \$162,000—one patient, one bill. I'm told there are anywhere from 9,000 to 12,000 applications on a monthly basis to the northern health travel grant program. The numbers must be staggering. In a business case side of it, I think we can support the long-term goal of trying to provide more health care services in more locations across this province. That should be where we go.

Additionally, I could make the argument—and I think many of us could make the same argument—that when we are referring patients to places like Manitoba, places like Duluth, Minnesota, we as a province are actually subsidizing their health care systems. That work could be performed in this province. We need to find the resources to make it happen. It's a great example of breaking down silos. Instead of sending \$162,000 to Duluth, we need to try and keep that work; let it be performed in our province. Get patients the care they need closer to home, because that's what this is all about. There's a great business case for trying to make that happen.

That being said, we cannot forget—my time is winding down. I would love to give a minute to a member from southern Ontario, Speaker, if you don't mind. I will share my time with the member from Brantford.

That being said, we cannot forget that the most compelling reason for this is the provision of services. We need to get to a point where we can try and ensure that people, as often as they can, are able to acquire health care services as close as they can to their home communities. The last thing people need to be dealing with at a time like this are concerns around financial implications. The approval of these grants, even when

they're approved, sometimes takes five weeks at the best and as long as three months. That has a very strong impact on people on low incomes.

We have lots we can do. I'm proud to stand and support the member in terms of this review of the northern health travel grant. And I'm happy to give one of my minutes to the member from Brantford.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I want to rise today and say that New Democrats will support this motion. We've long felt, as I think most people do, that the northern health travel grant needs to be modernized and changed to reflect some of the realities we find in northeastern and northwestern Ontario. Let me give you but a few.

For example, when we first drew up the northern travel grant system back in the late 1980s, it was based on the health care model at that time: the types of hospitals we had, the specialists we had in northern Ontario, the kinds of treatment people were able to get, either at home or away. Over the last 15 years or so, a lot of changes have happened in northern Ontario. Some have been good when it comes to providing better health care services in the north. For example, if we look at today compared to 15 or 20 years ago, there are far more services offered in northeastern and northwestern Ontario than there were. We need to reflect some of those changes in the northern travel grant.

But also, on the flip side of this argument, we have become much better at diagnosing diseases and prescribing treatment for those diseases. Unfortunately, some of those issues are not dealt with in the current structure of the northern travel grant, and I want to talk about a couple.

1040

Le premier dont j'aimerais parler, c'est toute la question du système de dialyse. Par exemple, dans la communauté de Hearst on a présentement, je pense, six ou sept personnes qui ont besoin du service de dialyse. On sait que dans le nord de l'Ontario, comme dans d'autres endroits dans cette belle province, quand on a besoin de prendre la route en hiver pour aller prendre nos services de dialyse, cela peut être dangereux. Justement, on prend la vie entre les mains, comme on dit en bon français, quand on prend la route pour aller à la prochaine communauté pour avoir ce service de dialyse.

Ce qu'on a vu à Hearst, par exemple, c'est qu'eux autres ont été poignés avec une affaire particulière un peu frustrante. Je reprends « un peu »; c'est très frustrant pour la communauté. Le règlement du « northern travel grant » dit qu'on a besoin d'être à 100 kilomètres ou plus de l'endroit de son traitement. Si on regarde la distance entre l'Hôpital Notre-Dame et l'Hôpital Sensenbrenner à Kapuskasing, le kilométrage est de 98,5. Pour cette raison-là, on n'est pas capable de dire que les personnes qui ont besoin des services de dialyse peuvent avoir le travel grant.

Donc mon approche, mon choix numéro un est qu'on doit trouver une manière pour mettre un système de

dialyse dans l'Hôpital Notre-Dame à Hearst pour que le monde n'ait pas besoin de voyager. Je pense que c'est la première approche.

Mais en attendant qu'on passe à travers ce processus—et je vous signale que le gouvernement précédent et le ministre, M. Clement, ont fait des approches à travers le gouvernement et à travers la régie de santé pour faire les études nécessaires pour démontrer si on avait besoin d'un service de dialyse à Hearst. Justement, on a conclu qu'on avait besoin de ce service à Hearst et que cela devrait être financé par la province.

La prochaine étape sera le ministère avec la régie de santé, une autre étape avant d'être capable d'approuver un centre de dialyse à l'Hôpital Notre-Dame à Hearst. Même si on dit oui aujourd'hui, quand le financement sera mis en place, on parle d'un changement d'environ une couple d'années. Pour cette raison j'avais demandé au premier ministre précédent, M. Harris, et à M. Eves, et là j'ai demandé à M. McGuinty en tant que premier ministre, qu'on fasse un changement au travel grant : si quelqu'un a besoin de prendre la route pour un service nécessaire pour soutenir sa vie, on peut donner le travel grant directement à la personne.

C'est un peu différent si je demeure à Timmins et j'ai besoin d'aller à Smooth Rock Falls. C'est à plus de 100 kilomètres. Supposons que je demeure à Mattice et que j'ai besoin d'aller à Kapuskasing pour un appointment avec un spécialiste. C'est un peu différent si ma vie n'est pas affectée par les traitements. Je peux y aller, je peux m'organiser, et si je manque mon appointment parce qu'il neige ou les routes sont méchantes, je peux toujours m'organiser pour y aller un autre jour. Mais quand on a besoin du service de dialyse, on a besoin de ce service, simplement dit. On ne peut pas être mis dans une position de dire, « Écoute, je vais attendre deux jours parce qu'il ne fait pas beau dehors. Je vais vous téléphoner pour vous dire quand je vais arriver. » Ça ne marche pas. Ils ont besoin du service tout de suite.

C'est pour ça que nous autres, on a dit que, comme approche temporaire, on fera un changement au programme travel grant pour l'allouer dans les situations qui sont autour de 100 kilomètres si c'est un service qui est nécessaire pour soutenir la vie. Je pense que c'est quelque chose qui est approprié, et ça ne coûtera pas beaucoup d'argent au gouvernement.

The other thing is the whole issue of managing pain. You will know that in northern Ontario, as there are across this province, there are a number of citizens who deal with very serious chronic pain. In some cases, those people have not been able to get pain management clinics inside their home communities.

For example, I've had a number of constituents in my riding who have been dealing for a number of years with a specialist in Toronto, let's say, who understands their case, has been dealing with their pain issues, understands the patient and has had an approach to treatment that has been successful for the patient. In those particular cases, because we know that when it comes to managing pain it's not only the physical but also the psychological

aspect that you have to approach, it may not necessarily be the right thing to transfer a patient to somebody else, who may or may not be closer when it comes to providing treatment.

I think of Mr Carrière and others I've dealt with over the years, where we're constantly having to make appeals to the northern travel grant system, saying, "This particular man has to see a specialist in Toronto. Here are the reasons why." This is supported by his family doctor and it's obviously supported by the specialist. At the end of the day we end up winning, but we have to go through an appeal each and every time the patient has to travel for an update visit to determine if there needs to be a change or modification to his treatment. The northern travel grant says, "Oh, but somebody in North Bay could probably do this." The specialist in North Bay says, "No, I don't want to deal with this case. It's a case that's above and beyond my scope of practice." So you've got the specialist in North Bay who's saying, "I don't want to deal with the patient because it's outside of my scope of practice." You've got the specialist in Toronto saying, "I'm prepared to deal with him. Not only am I prepared to deal with him, I understand the case. I've been managing this man's condition for a number of years," and a family doctor who is supporting, "Let's send the person off to the specialist in Toronto," but the northern travel grant says, "Oh no. Too bad. You've got somebody in North Bay, so therefore we'll only pay as far as North Bay."

Those kinds of things have to be fixed. They're not a huge-ticket item for the province of Ontario, in my view, when it comes to managing the cost of health care. With those particular cases, it's not as if we'd be opening the floodgates of allowing all kinds of expenditures. But those are a couple of examples, as I explained, with dialysis in Hearst and pain management for patients around the province, where we could have some flexibility that would make some sense and certainly make the lives of patients in this province a lot easier.

I want to commend the member for bringing forward this particular resolution. It's a step in the right direction. It has yet to be seen if the government is prepared to make those changes. I want to put my best foot forward and say that if we pass this motion today, which I think we will, I have a number of suggestions I'd like to make to the government about how we manage the issue of the northern health travel grant in a way that reflects the reality we find in many of our communities.

The other thing I want to say is that it's not just a northern issue. Unfortunately, in our province we have a lot of patients in southwest, southeast and southern Ontario who are in exactly the same position as we are in northern Ontario. They may be living in a community that doesn't have a particular specialty or, in some cases, doesn't have a family doctor and are in the position of having to travel, not just tens of miles, but hundreds of kilometres to get services. We need to look at how we approach services for those people in southern Ontario who need to travel as well. Certainly we don't want to go

back to what the Tories did, where they had the Cadillac service for people in the south who were able to fly up for cancer treatment in Sudbury and Thunder Bay and have their hotels and everything paid at 100%, but cancer patients in northern Ontario going to the same facilities basically got a lesser model. I don't advocate that.

I say we need some system that's fair for all patients in this province who need to travel for services. Maybe we need to look at going beyond just a northern travel grant to looking at what we can do to help patients across this province access services when needed.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I am pleased to join the debate with respect to the private member's resolution of the member for Sault Ste Marie. There are problems with the northern travel grant application, which the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka pointed out very clearly, and I'll deal with those fairly shortly.

But I want to point out that in the Liberals' election campaign, in their northern Ontario platform, True North, they talked about northern health care. With respect to the travel grant, they promised, "We will cut the waiting time for northern health travel grant payments in half," and "We will make the travel grant more responsive to the health care needs of northerners." The Liberal action to date has been nothing. They have not even announced a study on when they are going to do something—nothing. It's a backbench member from the Liberal government who has brought this forward, and I certainly support that. But it takes a backbencher to bring this to the forefront of the Legislature when the government should be taking action. The government should be doing something about this, because obviously, as we've heard from the members, there is a problem. So what we have here is a Liberal campaign commitment, with nothing done to date, and we have a backbencher saying, "I want to protect my constituents," and it's the backbencher who's doing that.

The Conservative record on this, as was pointed out by the member from Simcoe North—I was involved in Ombudsman hearings with respect to the northern travel grant when I was on the Legislative Assembly committee. The travel grant was drastically increased, enhanced, in 2001. There have been a number of health care initiatives in northern Ontario—the northern medical school, to name just one, which is significant with respect to enhancing and providing more accessible health care in northern Ontario.

The problems with the program are pronounced. From what I understand from the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka, there have been disputes over provider referral patterns, and the closest availability of service results in a grant denial. There have been problems with the availability of application forms. Instructions on the application form are erroneous and confusing. Separate application forms are required for each trip. Section 3 is to be signed in advance of travel, otherwise you are disqualified for a legitimate claim. A single form needs to be signed by five separate parties. There's a lack of

assistance for patients with respect to dealing with this. The signing authority is too restrictive. There's also confusion about the 100-kilometre and 200-kilometre stipulation, and the grant is not payable for the first 100 kilometres traveled. Those are a number of comments that have been made by the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka with respect to this matter.

1050

I would also point out that he was referring to a constituent in terms of staying in Barrie. A lot of the problems for areas from Parry Sound-Muskoka, perhaps even up to Sudbury and the surrounding area, would be resolved if the cancer care centre approved by the Ministry of Health would be expedited and put in Barrie at Royal Victoria Hospital, and getting that moving along. It's moving along, and I'll credit Minister Smitherman for taking an interest in this, but the bottom line is that it needs to be approved and set forth to the next stages of the project to provide radiation therapy for people who are in need.

As a member of the Barrie Rotary Club, I'm very proud to say that one of the projects we've undertaken for this particular cancer care centre is to build a stand-alone facility where the patients and their families can stay while they have treatment at this cancer care centre. That's something that is a private initiative of the community and I think it will help address individuals who maybe can't afford to stay at a motel or whatever. We're taking action within our community to make sure that their families can stay with them when they are being treated at RVH, and that's to be commended.

In closing, certainly I will be supporting this resolution. It's an issue that has previously been dealt with monetarily, but there are obviously administrative problems that have to be dealt with. The Liberals made a campaign commitment, and I recognize the member for Sault Ste Marie for having the disposition to bring it forward to the House to make the government act.

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I wish I had 15 minutes to talk on this, now that the member who just spoke has had an opportunity to unfortunately put partisan politics in front of this and not recognize this for what it is, and that is to take care of the north and the people who need those services.

I'm from the south—south-central, southwestern, however you want to say it. I have relatives in the north; I came from the north in terms of my family lineage. I'm very proud of the north. I want to stand and say to the member for Sault Ste Marie, you keep working. This is private members' business; this is private members' hour. I can only tell you how much I personally support it. I know that all the members in this place have said that they support you 100%. It's the right thing to do.

I want to say to the member for Timmins-James Bay, who rightfully said this is a universal problem that we have in our province, I hope we do get a chance to take a look at it. In my own riding there are transportation issues for dialysis treatment that need to be dealt with.

Having said that, let's not play partisan here in this House during this time. It's the right thing to do, and I

think we all need to support this to make sure that our members take care of their constituents. I thank the member, and the northern members, for bringing this forward.

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I'm delighted and excited to be here speaking to this resolution this morning brought by my colleague from Sault Ste Marie, the chair of the northern caucus and a good friend of all northern people.

This is about access and making sure that all people in Ontario have access to the health services they require. I represent one of the large northern ridings. It's a constituency of about 86,000 square kilometres. Most European countries would fit into it; all of southern Ontario easily fits into it. It reaches from Killarney and Manitoulin through to Manitowadge, bordering on Thunder Bay-Superior North, Mr Gravelle's constituency, at Marathon.

Some of the issues my colleagues have brought forward are very clear in my constituency. Manitowadge would be 400 kilometres, more or less, from either Sault Ste Marie or Thunder Bay. It is an incredible journey just to get to one of those places by car. There is no longer commercial air transport from those places, so they have no choice, really, but to take an automobile, or in some cases a bus if you can get to one, just to get to one of the major centres of northern health care, which would be Thunder Bay or Sault Ste Marie in their case. Hornepayne would be in the same situation.

It is very difficult for these folks to access care, particularly if they have to go on a regular basis. Maybe people can do it once or twice a year, but when you're having to do this on a routine basis, which many of my constituents have to, even the shorter distances of 90 kilometres or less one way cause great difficulty if you're going for dialysis or chemotherapy or you're doing any of those things that require going to a major centre on a regular basis.

In doing this review, we should think about the context we're in. Many members have mentioned it would be nice to do away with the northern health travel grant, because we could provide the services in the community. We know that's not perfectly true, but we have made some advancements. The Northern Ontario Remote Telecommunication Health Network, for example, provides many of the smaller hospitals and even health clinics across northern Ontario with access to specialists. I believe there are now 80 sites across the north that provide this communication with specialists, with tests. It's quite amazing. I've visited quite a number of them. It's a fabulous service, meaning the patient doesn't have to leave. They deal with the specialist by teleconference, and there are over 50 specialists involved in that. That is a huge help to our constituents and to our hospitals.

The medical school, when internships and residencies occur in northern Ontario, will be a help. We have a strong northern rural residency program, which needs to be strengthened and enhanced, and which brings young

doctors into the smaller communities of northern Ontario. We have a number of things going.

Just recently, the Manitoulin Health Centre, at their site in Mindemoya, opened a chemotherapy clinic, funded internally, by the way, from the hospital's own funds, which now provides an opportunity for many chemotherapy patients in the district of Manitoulin not to have to travel. So we are making steps, and we have to see the travel grant within the context of making sure we have the services as close to home as possible, as all Ontarians would want.

I share the view of my friend from Timmins-James Bay that this is not totally a northern issue. There are places in Bruce county, there are places in Huron county, there are places in eastern Ontario and in the southwest. Many people in Windsor have to travel to other sites for specialist care.

We also have the problem of the family practitioner, and this has been raised too. We have a shortage of family doctors. In many of my communities, if you lose one family practitioner, you've lost all your family practitioners. These days in Elliot Lake and Espanola, we're having some difficulty having enough family practitioners. That means you can't get a referral to a specialist. It's very difficult to get the referral. If you can't get the referral, you can't go to the specialist. If you can't get the form, you can't get the service. That is a major difficulty we're having these days.

I urge members to support Mr Oraziatti's thoughtful, reasonable, non-partisan intervention here this morning. I know the House wants this to happen and that we can have full access for the people of northern Ontario to be treated like all other Ontarians.

1100

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Oraziatti has two minutes to reply.

Mr Oraziatti: I appreciate the overwhelming support this morning from Mr Gravelle of Thunder Bay-Superior North, Mr Mauro of Thunder Bay-Atikokan, Mr Brown of Algoma Manitoulin, Mr Levac of Brant, Mr Miller of Perry Sound-Muskoka, Mr Dunlop of Simcoe North, Mr Bisson of Timmins-James Bay and Mr Tascona of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford. I appreciate very much the support shown here today for this resolution. It is something that is extremely important to northern Ontario residents. It's an issue, as Mr Brown has quite aptly said, about affordable access for northern Ontario residents.

Just to pick up on the point of the member from Timmins-James Bay, this issue is about serving all Ontarians better. If there are anomalies or situations in other parts of the province that we need to take a look at, we should be doing that. I would be happy to reciprocate support for members in other parts of the province who have medical situations where residents have to travel to get vital specialty health care. I think it's extremely important.

I want to thank members this morning for highlighting some of the specific cases they have experienced in their constituency offices and some of the problems that have

come to light with respect to processing these forms and with respect to applications being declined for a whole host of reasons. We need to take a look at these situations.

These are people. We are talking about improving the lives and health of people in this province, and we need to take that extremely seriously. It's not simply about a bureaucratic paper-pushing exercise. It's about making sure people have the health care they need. We need to ensure that this review takes that seriously and moves in a direction that gives people better, affordable access to health care in this province.

Again I want to thank members for their support and look forward to this resolution moving forward.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I move that, in the opinion of this House, foreign-trained professionals and tradespeople possess a significant potential contribution to the economic and cultural benefit of Ontario and that the government work in partnership with Ontario's occupational regulatory bodies to remove barriers that prevent internationally trained individuals from contributing fully to the labour market.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Qaadri has moved private member's notice of motion number 14. Pursuant to standing order number 96, Mr Qaadri, you have 10 minutes to lead off.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and through you to the people of Ontario, before I begin my substantive remarks, I would like to thank and welcome my honourable colleagues in the government caucus who have shown overwhelming support and eagerness to speak to this resolution. I would like to thank, in advance, the members from Davenport, London-Fanshawe, Brampton West-Mississauga, Markham and Ottawa-Orléans. They are Messrs Ruprecht, Ramal, Dhillon, Wong and McNeely.

I'm discussing today what I consider, and I believe this House should consider, the greatest riches and the greatest asset our province and, frankly, our country has. It's not our highways, our lands, our waters, our capacity for power generation, great though those are. It's not our manufacturing capacity, our schools, our colleges, our universities, not even our hospitals or our health care delivery systems, great though those are. I'm referring to the very people of Ontario, our greatest asset, our greatest riches, our human resources.

I speak, as well, as a multicultural Canadian, as an individual who has seen from a personal capacity friends, family, my own social circle, individuals come with the best of intentions with qualifications from abroad but meet the barriers, the hurdles and, I would say, the unnecessary challenges and delays to fully integrate into this society. I speak to you in an urgent and personal capacity.

I'd like to start with a quotation from the father of western medicine, Hippocrates, who wrote in Greece in

the fourth century BC: Life is short, the art long, experience deceptive, judgment difficult and opportunity fugitive. While this of course refers specifically to physicians and health care practitioners, I think it refers more broadly to the many skilled tradespeople and professionals who come to Canada and to Ontario. With this quotation, I highlight the fact.

Many of these individuals have undergone difficulty and strains in their own countries to accredit themselves, to rise in their own society, to avail themselves of all the educational opportunities, which are not often easily acquired in other countries, be it the expense or problems with admission, or simply the class stratification that goes on in many other parts of the world.

For example, we have individuals from 92 countries in the province right now who have applied to the licensing regulatory body of doctors, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, to eventually practise medicine. But it's not only physicians; I have here a list provided to me by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration in the federal government of the skilled immigrants coming from all over the world who could actually address the existing and pending skills shortages. I'd like to share with this House, and with you, Speaker, and with the people of Ontario, these lists.

First of all, the professional list, in the order of precedence: engineers; engineering technicians and technologists; accountants; teachers; medical laboratory technologists; pharmacists; nurses and practical nurses; architects; geoscientists; and physicians and surgeons. Of course, as you will appreciate, this is merely the top-10 list. We can always use even more lawyers, if necessary, but this is just the top 10.

The immigrant tradespeople who land in this country, and particularly in this province, are: cooks and bakers; industrial millwrights; technicians and auto body repairers, individuals in the automotive service; hairstylists and barbers—of which the third party might avail themselves from time to time; tool and die makers; machinists; electricians; plumbers and steamfitters; refrigeration and air conditioner mechanics; and early childhood educators.

But this is not merely a list for an intellectual exercise. This is not a list simply provided to us on PowerPoint or some e-mail attachment meant to disappear into the mass of papers that we have. These are real individuals with real families, who are often coming to visit other members of their family and stay with them, and are willing to expand the Canadian mosaic. For example, of the approximately 225,000 people who immigrate to this country Canada-wide, something in the order of about 60% of them, or probably about 120,000 or 125,000 of those individuals, actually come and settle in Ontario.

We often say, almost to the level of truism or platitude or cliché, that diversity is our strength. But this is very much true. There was a television commercial and print ad that used to run about 20 years ago on behalf of the United Negro College Fund in the United States, and their byline or their catch phrase was, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." This is very true. I have, for

example, personal knowledge of individuals like Dr Hector Fernandes, who came originally from the Philippines and was a full professor of endocrinology—the study of hormones and the science of hormones—in his own native land, and yet is unable to cross the barriers, the hurdles, the challenges, to actually practise medicine. He spent so much time waiting and preparing for exams and improving his own knowledge base that he actually has achieved a master of science from the University of Toronto in this field and is on his way to doing a PhD, to the point where he will have a double doctorate. And yet he is denied the opportunity to practise medicine.

1110

The other thing to say is that this is not mere paternalism. This is not an effort of bleeding-heart liberalism. This is not simply trying to cater to a particular bloc, voting group or base. This is a felt and clear and present need in Ontario. For example, along with all the skill sets and other professions I've mentioned, including engineering, architecture, geoscience and so on, there is, as of this moment, something on the order of one million Ontarians who do not have access—free and easy access—be they northern or southern Ontarians, to family doctors. And yet, at the same time, we have something on the order of about 1,500, and probably even 2,000, foreign-trained international medical graduates, foreign-trained physicians, in this province, looking for the opportunity to serve Ontario.

The strange thing is that these individuals, when they're applying for immigration in their own lands, are often granted points or credit or value because they have these various professional degrees. Yet when they reach Ontario, they seem to be in this Catch-22 situation, in that they have neither the Canadian experience nor retraining and recertification and, of course, without that, they can't practise, but without getting that opportunity to practise, they can't achieve that as well. So it's kind of a vicious cycle.

That's why I feel very strongly, as the MPP for Etobicoke North, as a physician, as a multicultural Canadian and as a representative voice for the broader community in Ontario, that the time has come when we in this government, in this House, in this Legislature, must streamline, expedite and make more efficient the licensing, the verification of credentials, the testing for competency and the language proficiency for all the various professions, be they engineers, accountants, even lawyers, teachers, nurses, architects or physicians and surgeons. Because it is a felt need and also, beyond that, beyond the service of Ontario and our community, it is, I would say, in this day and age, an extreme tragedy that individuals with the best of intentions, with their own heritages, come to this country but are unable to reach and exploit the equality of opportunity, which is essentially the byword of a liberal philosophy, the democratic process in Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock):

Thank you, Mr Speaker; well done.

I'm pleased to rise today in support of the resolution presented by the member from Etobicoke North. Indeed, I don't think you'll find many people in this Legislature who would be opposed to this resolution. It does contain many fine words, but it doesn't do much except to provide the current government an opportunity to look like it's acting on one of its campaign promises. In fact, it would not surprise me if this resolution is trumpeted as an example of the government moving forward on one of its promises.

Let's take a closer look at what the promises were. Today's resolution and, indeed, the January 20 announcement by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities fall far short of the promises made by the party opposite. In their campaign pamphlets, the Liberals promised:

"We will remove barriers preventing well-qualified foreign-trained physicians from practising in Ontario.

"We will lower barriers that prevent foreign-trained professionals and skilled workers from reaching their potential. We will work with professional and trade associations to accelerate the entry of skilled new Ontarians into the workforce. Our goal is to eliminate major barriers within one year.

"We will ensure timely access to trades and professions for qualified professionals trained outside Canada. Newcomers face too many barriers that prevent them from practising their trade or profession. We will require that all Ontario trades and professions accelerate the entry of qualified new Canadians. If after one year any profession or trade has not eliminated barriers to entry, we will act."

Well, the clock is certainly ticking on the one year mentioned in the Liberal campaign documents, and yet nothing is mentioned today about requiring all Ontario trades and professions to accelerate the entry of qualified new Canadians. Instead, the resolution we're debating today calls for the government to work in partnership with Ontario's occupational regulatory bodies.

In the throne speech debate, the Premier stood behind at least part of his commitment. He told the Legislature, "We will break down every single barrier which stands in the way of getting foreign-trained professionals and tradespeople into the Ontario workforce." Granted, they no longer attach the one-year timeline—again the one-year timeline—to this goal, but it was a statement of definitive action.

Today's resolution, as I support it, does not address the promises made by this government and it does hide the fact that this government has been slow to act on this important matter that affects all communities across Ontario. To quote the Premier when he spoke as a member of the opposition on the issue of expanding access for foreign-trained professionals, "What we really need in Ontario, what would truly and deeply make a difference, would be a Premier who is willing to make this a priority issue." Well, this is a priority issue, and it should be a priority issue for the Premier and his government.

About 60% of total immigrants to Canada come to Ontario. We expect about 235,000 to arrive this year. Statistics Canada reports that 70% of the newcomers who looked for work reported at least one problem in the process. The most commonly cited problem was a lack of Canadian job experience—26%—followed by the transferability of foreign qualifications or experience.

It was certainly a priority for the previous government. Bridging programs were introduced that improved access for internationally trained engineers and other professionals and skilled tradespeople. They earmarked millions of dollars—

Interjections.

Ms Scott: Now everybody's awake.

They earmarked millions of dollars to provide bridge training opportunities. They more than doubled the number of foreign-trained physician spots and introduced Ontario's access to professions and trades initiative.

When and if this government moves forward with concrete changes and investments to increase access, it would do well to remember that they need to do more than just announce more spaces in medical schools or engineering schools or more apprenticeship training. They need to make sure that the infrastructure is in place in the colleges and universities so they can offer these courses. Professors need to be hired, classrooms need to be available, and hospitals need to have the staff available to supervise more interns. More residency positions need to be available. Right now, you hear from all different doctors and doctors in training that they have to go to the United States to complete their residencies, and then they write the American exams and are more prone to stay in the United States as opposed to coming back to Canada. We cannot let this continue.

When the previous government did take action to increase access, Minister Papatello berated them. In the quotes from Hansard on November 26, "You are just stringing these people along, making them believe that you're actually helping them." I'm afraid that all this government is doing here today is just that.

I want to tell you a good story. In my community of Kinmount, we're going to be lucky enough to have a foreign-trained doctor come to our community this summer. I want to commend the doctor recruitment committee in Kinmount, headed by Ted Wilkes, because for years they've been trying to recruit new doctors to the area.

The shortages faced by my community are mirrored across this province. A decade ago, there were approximately 43 practising family physicians working in the city of Kawartha Lakes. Today, there are 34. Of those 34 who remain, approximately 7 will likely retire within the next five to 10 years. In addition, a decade ago, 36 of those family physicians cared for their patients when they were admitted to hospital. Only 17 currently provide this service. This has occurred while the population has continued to grow and age. The result has been an explosion of unattached patients—orphaned patients who live without any regular care and seek episodic care

from the hospital emergency department or after-hours clinics.

The need to integrate foreign-trained professionals in our communities is clear—not just for physicians but for a host of other professions and trades, as mentioned by the member for Etobicoke North.

I'm pleased to support this resolution. I sincerely hope this is just the first step taken by this government, not the last.

1120

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I'm delighted to join this debate. I applaud the member for Etobicoke North for reminding us that we must move very speedily on this issue of opening the doors to foreign-trained professionals. It is simply not acceptable to have doctors, accountants, engineers and technicians drive taxis, clean restaurants, or deliver pizzas, and that is what's happening today.

As you know, I've introduced two private member's resolutions in the House, one in 1999 and one in 2002, with very specific recommendations at that time to the Conservative government. In fact, there are six specific recommendations. I'll just read two of them because they make sense and form the basis of the specific bill at that time.

"That individuals have the opportunity to seek licensure or certification of professions and trades for which they have been trained, in the context of provincial human resource planning, and without additional barriers not faced by Ontario-trained individuals."

The last one is simply "That all self-governing occupational licensing bodies provide internal appeal processes which are sensitive to such matters as timeliness and access to information, whereby decisions of licensing bodies can be objectively reviewed by staff other than those conducting initial assessment."

I remember that the PC minister at the time quickly left the chamber, snuck out so as not to be seen to be voting for this opposition resolution. But one thing happened which is very important to relate, and that is that the backbench PC members of the Legislature stood up and unanimously supported this resolution. In 1999 and in 2002, both times, this resolution was passed unanimously by the House. Has there been action taken? Yes. There have been some actions.

First, let me congratulate the Professional Engineers of Ontario, who have introduced a pilot program to help foreign-trained professionals. Let me congratulate the Certified General Accountants of Ontario, who have introduced special courses for the purpose of upgrading foreign-trained professionals. There are others, of course. I hope that as we put pressure on professional organizations in Ontario, they too are in the process of taking steps so that discrimination against foreign-trained professionals is not a fact.

What is our government doing about this right now? The McGuinty government is taking steps to address this issue. As was mentioned previously, on January 20 of this year, our government announced an investment of

more than \$4 million over three years to strengthen bridge training programs to assist internationally trained individuals to continue their careers in Ontario. Even more, as we speak, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is developing what's called a report card that will require regulators to report on key indicators relating to the removal of barriers for internationally trained individuals. Those are important steps this government is taking to stop discrimination against foreign-trained professionals. Let's lower the barriers and open the doors so that those who have internationally trained professional degrees can access them and make a good living in Ontario.

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm honoured to rise today to speak in support of the resolution. This specific resolution is very important to me and dear to my heart. It was part of my commitment before the election, and now, as the government, it's time to work on it and try to implement it in a professional fashion to help the foreign-trained professionals who live across the province of Ontario.

I listened with great interest to the member for Sault Ste Marie when he was talking about the travel grant, how communities in northern Ontario suffer from a lack of physicians, doctors and professionals and how difficult it is to get service in that part of the country, which I have visited many times and love. The people who live in that area deserve all our support and efforts to eliminate that problem. I would imagine that if we were to eliminate the barriers for foreign-trained doctors and professionals, they might go to northern Ontario and help the northern communities deal with daily life and help the situation there.

I listened with great interest to my colleague from Etobicoke North when he was introducing the resolution to eliminate barriers for foreign-trained professionals. He detailed it in a very professional manner. He was eloquent in describing the problems as a result of the barriers, which prevent the professionally trained from entering the market in this province, which prevent using the professionals to strengthen our community and our economy.

I also want to tell the member from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock that our commitment to this issue is great. I had the honour to go to Fanshawe College around Christmastime to witness a graduation for about 17 or 19 people from about five different countries who got some training qualifying them to work in the London community. All this effort was made because of the government of Dalton McGuinty. Another commitment was about \$4 million invested in this field to train foreign-trained professionals. About \$4 million went to the areas of engineers, teachers, pharmacists and nurses. It's a very good step, as the member from Davenport mentioned, to start to eliminate the barriers.

Also, I'm working with Middlesex county, with London, to try to gather some money in order to help foreign-trained doctors to practise in the rural area around London-Middlesex. I think all this trial is the first

step. We're getting a lot of support from the ministry, from the government. I believe we're going in the right direction.

As we mentioned, this is the first step, and hopefully we can continue with more help for other people who have decided to be part of this nation to be able to use their talent as professionals to enhance our economy, so we move them from burdening our economy to benefiting our community, our government. At this time we need a lot of people, especially in the medical area. About one million people in this province don't have a family doctor to go to.

I think this is a great resolution. I'm in great support, and hopefully every member of this House will support the resolution because it's important to all of us.

Mr Vic Dhillon (Brampton West-Mississauga): It's my pleasure and an honour to speak in the House in support of the resolution brought forward by the member from Etobicoke North. This resolution allows foreign-trained professionals access to become employable in their professions.

I represent a riding where a vast number of new immigrants choose to make their home and a lot of these immigrants are highly trained professionals. They're qualified in professions that are in great demand in Ontario, and in Canada, for that matter. Unfortunately, a lot of these individuals are working in positions that have no relevance to their field of expertise.

Just last week I received a letter from a constituent, Mr August Apon, who lives in my riding. He expressed frustration in assisting a friend who is a new immigrant. She is a teacher. She was a teacher in one of the best schools in the country of origin. It was quite frustrating to read the difficulties she was having in getting accredited. In the letter it was explained that it was a very lengthy and costly procedure for her to be able to teach. I find that totally unacceptable.

There's a huge opportunity cost as well for these people who come here. They're working in positions that don't pay nearly as much as the positions they should be employed in. Moreover, there's a big cost to our province, as we're wasting this huge wealth of unexplored potential. So I ask all members of this House to support this resolution.

1130

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? I remind the members that this is normally a rotation, so I'm looking for—thank you, Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): Mr Speaker, I'm up right now. I'm not as fast as some of my younger colleagues. I'm doing the best I can.

I want to thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me to join the debate on the resolution from the member for Etobicoke North with respect to removing barriers. It's certainly an opportune time to deal with this. I'd like to point out once again that there was a Liberal election promise in their platform, "We will remove barriers preventing well-qualified foreign-trained physicians from practising in Ontario." That's under the section "The

Health Care We Need.” It goes on to say, “We will lower barriers that prevent foreign-trained professionals and skilled workers from reaching their potential. We will work with professional and trade associations to accelerate the entry of skilled new Ontarians in the workforce. Our goal is to eliminate major barriers within one year.”

Right now I think we’re in about the eighth month of that particular year, and as to Liberal action to date, nothing has been done. We’re eight months into that year and here we have a Liberal backbencher, to his credit, bringing forward this motion urging the government to do something.

I think it’s important, because I’ve got a situation right now in my riding that I think is outrageous. This involves a school teacher, an exceptional teacher, who is appreciated and respected by her colleagues, the administration, parents, the community and students. There’s a paperwork problem with respect to the Ontario College of Teachers. What has happened is that the Ontario College of Teachers is not allowing her to complete the academic year as a grade 1 teacher to the end of June 2004.

The individual in question emigrated from Hungary looking for a better life for herself and her family. She has taken the upgrading courses in an effort to obtain her certificate of qualification from the Ontario College of Teachers, and obtained further documentation from Hungary, which was the last step in the process. I think it’s important, and I put forward a petition in recognition of this, to allow her to continue teaching for an additional three months to finish out the school year. That will not jeopardize the high standards to which our teachers are held, but will give her the extra time she needs to work with officials in Hungary in order to comply with the Ontario College of Teachers.

I put this forward to Debbie Booth, the vice-chair of the parent council, on behalf of all concerned parents at Pope John Paul II. I have committed and brought forward to the Clerk a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario specifically to deal with this issue.

Ms Bator has been removed from her grade 1 teaching position at Pope John Paul II elementary school in Barrie, Ontario, by the Ontario College of Teachers due to insufficient time to get additional documentation from Hungary required to renew her teaching certificate in Ontario.

I’m urging the Minister of Education—I’ll put it forward to the Legislature today in the spirit and principle of what’s being put forward by this resolution—to reverse the decision of the Ontario College of Teachers, to allow her to complete her academic year as a grade 1 teacher to the end of June 2004. That’s a live situation; it’s a real situation right now. I want the member for Etobicoke North, if he really believes in what he’s saying here, and I believe he does, to do something with respect to the Ministry of Education. I put it to the rest of the members of the government to look at a situation such as this; it shouldn’t be allowed but it is.

I’d also like to comment on the fact that the backbencher has put forward this resolution trying to urge this government to live up to the promises it made through the campaign. As a doctor, he’s a professional. The government has done nothing to keep its election promise to remove barriers to foreign-trained doctors.

I know when I was serving on a cabinet committee in our government, we were focusing on this and we put forth a program, which I believe was workable. I’m very surprised the government hasn’t acted to bring that forth because physician supply is at a shortage. If you listen to the Ontario Medical Association, they believe there’s about a 2,000-doctor shortage. We have to address this thing urgently. It not only needs to be dealt with regarding doctors but, as I said, it should be dealt with respecting the qualifications of other professionals and teachers, which I’ve indicated.

I wanted to be on the record with my support—and I’ve put it on the record—to make sure the teacher in question, Gabriella Bator, is allowed to teach the rest of the year. This is the classic situation to which this resolution applies, and the government should do something about it. I urge the Minister of Education to act.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is again a privilege to rise on this particular issue. I’ve spoken to it before in this House, and I continue to speak to it.

It is trite to say that we are a nation of immigrants. That is said all the time and, in fact, it is true. Ever since Canada’s first immigration law was passed in 1871, immigrants have come to this country literally from all over the world. People think a lot of immigrants come to this country today, but that is not really the case. The big heyday of immigration to Canada was in the 1800s and early 1900s in the time of Clifford Sifton. Immigrants were chosen in those days for far different reasons than they are chosen today. They were chosen in those days to populate the west, to start up farms, to grow wheat. Today they are chosen quite differently.

In fact, even in the last number of years, the immigration patterns to Canada have changed remarkably. I know this from having worked in that department for some 20 years before becoming a politician. When I first worked there, the majority of immigrants would come from the family class. They would be sponsored by their close relatives, and 60% to 70% of the people would come here literally because they had someone here who could provide for them, who could help them find a job, who would make sure they did not become a burden to the public.

Today, that is not the case. Today, 70% or more of all of the immigrants coming to this country are chosen from what is called the independent or entrepreneur class. These are people who have skills and abilities that are in demand, or supposedly in demand, in our country. They are chosen on the basis of a merit system, a point structure and a grid pattern; in nine of the 10 provinces, they are chosen federally and in one province, Quebec, they are chosen independently. I have some more to say about that in a minute. But they are chosen as

independents. They bring with them certain skills and abilities, which Canada says they need, and then quite often, unfortunately, they find those skills and abilities are not recognized once they come.

To work in immigration is to see an amazing movement of people. If you ever have the opportunity to go to a place like Pearson International Airport and watch the new immigrants come off planes, literally from the four corners of the earth, you will see them come with a passion in their eyes. They are coming here to a dream country, to fulfill something for which they have often worked their entire lives. You see them often coming with nothing more than that passion in their eyes, often with very little other resources. But they come here and almost immediately, sadly, run into the wall that we call, "You must have Canadian experience," and that is a wall which is sometimes impossible for them to break through.

I think of some of those who have come into my office recently who have run into that wall. I think of Dr Lang, who is a Canadian-born individual who went through public school in East York, who went to high school in East York, who went to the University of Toronto for his bachelor of science degree and for pre-med and then who made the horrible choice—at least he now thinks so—of finishing his doctorate and being called to the medical profession in Germany. He cannot come back. He does come back, of course, every three months to visit his wife and children, and he comes back to see his parents, including his own father, who is also Dr Lang, who was originally from Germany. He convinced his son it was a good idea to take those last years at a school in Germany. He comes back to all of that, but he cannot come back and practise. He cannot practise for what he has been trained and for what he literally worked his whole life in Canada. He's stuck now in Germany, with three-month visits to his family.

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I think about the five Albanian women who have been in my office many times, trying to get accreditation to be teachers. They have gone through the entire course to be accredited as teachers, only to find that in the last few months of their accreditation process, the rules were changed. Now, even though they spent two years trying to be accredited, the rules have changed and they can no longer qualify without taking additional courses. I have written to the minister about this, but we've not yet had a response. I hope to have a good one soon, because we need those women to teach in our schools.

I am standing today to support the motion, but I think, with all respect, that the motion could and should be stronger. If it's a first step, then it's a fine first step. But if this is the entire policy, we need, quite frankly, to do much more. It's not enough to work with occupational bodies. It's not enough to work with them to change things. We need to force that change, because some of those bodies have been more than reluctant to do what is necessary. We need to make the bodies open up to the challenge and to the opportunity that this presents to us.

We need a credential assessment system and agency in Ontario that can very rapidly accredit and say when the accreditation is acceptable. We need an appeal mechanism, so that people who are turned down, such as the five Albanian women who want to be teachers, can appeal and not simply be told that the regulations have changed.

In this province, we need to do something that Quebec did in the 1970s. Quebec determined that they wanted to get into the immigration game. They determined that it was in the best interests of that province to get into immigration and to help choose their own immigrants, those that they needed. I would remind this Legislature that we have that authority, and we have never exercised it. The law in Canada is still extant. The British North America Act, section 95, reads as follows:

"In each province the Legislature may make laws in relation to agriculture in the province, and to immigration into the province; and it is hereby declared that the Parliament of Canada may from time to time make laws in relation to agriculture in all or any of the provinces, and to immigration into all or any of the provinces; and any law of the Legislature of a province relative to agriculture or to immigration shall have effect in and for the province as long and as far only as it is not repugnant to any act of the Parliament of Canada."

Quebec has used that quite brilliantly to bring in the class of immigrants they need. They choose their own doctors; they choose their own nurses; they choose their own engineers; they even choose their own lawyers.

I will tell you, we would have a great opportunity, not only to choose those people, but we would have an opportunity, if we were willing to expend the money and if we were serious about helping foreign-trained individuals, to be there in all of those countries from whence immigrants come, to assess their qualifications. What would be better, what could possibly be better, than to sit down and say, "We choose you to be a doctor, or a nurse," or "We choose you to be a teacher," or "We choose you to be an engineer"?

This is what we are telling you right now: "You are accredited." We have done all of this work and we'll tell you, when you arrive in Canada, when your passport is stamped, "You will be accredited, and you are accredited by virtue of our choosing you here in the field," or, in the alternative, "You will not be accredited in Canada. However, you might have to take a one-year course, you might have to go back to school, you might have to go to internship." At least those people would know. Humanely and civilly, we could tell them, "You will not be accredited in Canada. We will not accept you in Canada or in Ontario." Then those people can remain where they are. To my mind, and I think to the minds of many, it is far better to leave a doctor in a Third World country, helping the citizens of that country, than to bring them here and, as one of the members here said, have them deliver pizzas or work in a kitchen or drive a cab. It is far better in the entire world to do exactly that. That's what we could do if we were in the immigration game.

It's not enough just to pass this motion—and I will be voting for it—but we must seize the opportunity for all of our people, and in so doing, we will seize the opportunity for Ontario.

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I'm happy to speak in support of this resolution, and I will start by saying that, as the member from Beaches-East York said, it is now trite for us to say that we are a country of immigrants. We also say that Ontario is the land of opportunities and that we welcome new immigrants from every corner of the world with open arms. But do we? It is one thing for us to admit new immigrants who have excellent credentials and experience in their country of origin, and yet another for them to arrive and find almost insurmountable barriers to working in their own profession or trade here.

As a former solicitor dealing with immigration files, it has always baffled me that our immigration admission system used a point grid system to rank applicants with respect to their education, their experience and also with respect to the occupational demand in Canada, but as soon as they arrived, they quickly found out that they actually could not work in their own field or their own profession. This totally defeated the purpose of that system. I understand that the admission system has been reformed, and it's improved somewhat, but the fact remains that these administrative and regulatory barriers continue to exist today.

I also want to talk about the other angle, about the benefits that we, Ontario, get when these qualified professionals and tradespeople come into our province. It has been widely reported that there is a serious shortage of skilled labour, and I think it is important for us to recognize that it's not just for the benefit of these immigrants or these people who are trained overseas to be able to work in their own profession or trade, but it will also significantly contribute to us as we proceed to build a strong and vibrant economy.

I've been meeting with stakeholders in the small business initiative to try to identify areas where we can help meet the needs of small and medium-sized businesses, and we've heard time and time again that the lack of skilled labour is one of the major issues preventing these small businesses from growing to the next stage. We are not talking about lowering the standard; we are talking about lowering the barrier so that these new immigrants or these people who are trained overseas can more readily qualify under our existing standards.

I understand that a number of initiatives have been undertaken, including the recent announcement by our Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, putting in place programs such as internships, but that has to be really improved and expanded quickly.

I want to conclude by saying that when Premier Dalton McGuinty talked about building a better Ontario for everyone during the election last year, I think that must include the removal of barriers for people with these overseas qualifications and training to allow them to realize their potential in our province.

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): It's a privilege to rise and speak on ballot item 18, as it's a large concern to a lot of individuals. I know that within my own riding, we have Rider Tool, for example, which is currently having a major problem. I know they were having a major problem getting qualified individuals to work on the machinery they had. They were advertising in every jurisdiction in North America, and they weren't having anybody come in. So they had to go to Europe to advertise to bring qualified individuals in.

But the main reason I wanted to speak in the Legislature today was because of the foreign physicians issue. Personally, I had a family approach me that was having difficulty bringing in a brother from another country. He wasn't being allowed out of the country because he was a doctor in that country. They didn't really want to let him out, because this isn't an issue that's just taking place here in Ontario or in Canada but throughout the world, the shortage of doctors. So there were some difficulties there, and I went through the Canadian consulate in that country to help that individual come to Canada.

1150

Since he has been in Canada—he wants to stay here, of course. Part of the problem is now—and I don't think anybody has any difficulty with the standards; that's first and foremost. Everybody wants to ensure that the standards found in Ontario are maintained. But where the problem comes in is that one department of the federal government gave this individual a work permit so that he could work in a car wash. So we have a foreign doctor now working in a car wash. It's not just car washes; I met doctors who are working as receptionists, in laundry facilities, at hospitals—all trying to go through the process.

The difficulty in this particular case was that the federal government would give the individual a work permit to work in Ontario but would not give the individual landed immigrant status. It compounds from there. The College of Physicians and Surgeons would not begin processing this individual until they received landed immigrant status. So the federal government was now telling this individual that they had go back to their country of origin to make application to come to Canada. Well, you can just imagine what's going to happen if this individual goes back to his country of origin. I don't think he'll be back in Canada.

So we have been able to try to work with this issue, but this is just one example. I know a number of others within our community. We really need to focus on that to make sure that those individuals who want to come to the great country of Canada have that ability, whether it's streamlining the process so that we can effectively identify certain professions that have met the qualifications so that we can move that up, or whether it's combining and making sure that process is actually working together with the federal government so they can begin the process right away and cut about a year's worth of steps off that landed immigrant status.

I know all are working for it, and I commend the member for bringing this forward, because I believe it is

something that we all need to work for for the betterment of our community. I thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I'm pleased to support the important resolution before us today so eloquently put by the member from Etobicoke North.

The picture we're seeing in this province and in this country is that our workforce is aging. By 2011, we'll have 13% fewer younger people, who are the ones who contribute most to the workforce, and 13% more of the type like myself.

The situation for the province is unsustainable. These economic and demographic trends are indicating that we must rely on the skills of foreign-trained tradespeople and professionals to be able to compete in the global market. But ensuring that people can work in their fields just makes good sense. The investment they have made in themselves is, simply put, a gift to us and to our province. Ontario typically receives 100,000 immigrants a year from over 180 countries, and their profile has changed significantly. Now, over 40% of newcomers arrive with bachelor's degrees or higher.

I'd just like to tell you a story about my own engineering firm. We had a young fellow apply to us, a young Lebanese engineer. He wanted to work. We didn't have the place for him, but we kept him in mind. Then one of our engineers lost his driver's licence. Ziad's name was there, and we called him in and asked, "Would you drive for this engineer?" Ziad said yes. He wanted to get into the engineering profession. Within a year or two, he was doing engineering work. After a few years, he was one of our top engineers. He's now with the city of Ottawa.

So I think what's often lacking is that opportunity, and it's extremely important that we do provide the opportunity.

To suggest, as the members from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock and Durham have, that our government is acting slowly is not correct. This is one of our priorities. You can see from the people who have spoken this morning from our side of the House that we're going to make up for that eight years of inaction.

We must trade to compete. To compete, we must assist those professionals and specialists among our new Canadians in maximizing their contribution. What better people can we get to facilitate economic activity between Canada and their countries of birth?

So I want to thank my honourable colleague for bringing us the opportunity to debate this issue today. It's the first step. I think we all acknowledge that this is just the start; our program is much larger. We have to provide opportunities. It's not enough just to say, "Well, we'll change those qualifications." We must reach out to our new Canadians. We must bring them into the workforce, and that's for our own good. That's for the good of our province. We have to take advantage of the opportunity we have to make sure that every doctor, every engineer, every scientist and all the good tradespeople have opportunity. The opportunities aren't going to come simply; it has to be a concerted effort by our government. We will

do that, that concerted effort, that will identify the people who need the opportunity to serve our province and our country better.

So I thank the member for bringing this forth. I think it's excellent. It's our first step toward getting this done.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): I'll address this resolution on immigration from the perspective of business and industry in my area. I thank the member for Oshawa for sharing his time and experience in working with a foreign doctor who's working in a car wash.

I had a chance to attend a symposium put on by our local Grand Erie Training and Adjustment Board. They had presentations from Kim Richardson of KRTS Transportation, a presentation from Stelco and presentations by a number of foreign-trained professionals—Andrei Novokchanov, Viorel Grosu and Maria Teresa Fernandes de Castro.

Stelco Lake Erie Works has looked at this issue from an employer's perspective. In the early 1980s they brought a number of trained mechanical and electrical workers from Britain just to fill a need that could not be provided locally. I will point out, and I know the union would back me on this, that Stelco Lake Erie is one of the most efficient steelmakers in North America with respect to person-hours and tonnage produced.

We were also given an overview by Kim Richardson. He runs a truck training operation in Caledonia—Kim Richardson Transportation Specialists. They're very successful in training many internationally educated employees and individuals, but also support them in finding employment. This kind of support is particularly important for internationally educated people, as we know, in attempting to obtain meaningful employment in Ontario.

Because immigration is so important in Ontario—it's vital to our future—Ontario really deserves a hand in shaping the policies that bring newcomers here. Quebec and the federal government, for example, have already negotiated a special agreement governing immigration to that province. We need our own immigration agreement with the federal government, using a made-in-Ontario approach to achieve certain goals—testing potential immigrants, evaluating them before they come to Ontario, to help us better coordinate and collaborate in some of the issues we're discussing today.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Qadri has two minutes to reply.

Mr Qadri: I'd like to thank, honour, welcome and salute my colleagues in the Liberal caucus: the members from Davenport, London-Fanshawe, Brampton West, Mississauga, Markham and Ottawa-Orléans. They have spoken very clearly about the value that we in this Legislature, as the people representing Ontario, must hold dear—our greatest riches, our greatest assets, and that is, of course, the very people of Ontario, in particular the individuals, the internationally trained professionals and skilled tradespeople who come from more than 100 countries.

I'd also like to salute the independent member for Beaches-East York for his always considered remarks and, as well, the Tory MPP for Oshawa for his contribution. I'd also like to acknowledge, merely, the faint praise or the reluctant acquiescence, detectable but not substantial, from the MPP for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock and the MPP for Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, and their newly found and newly manufactured concerns about new Canadians, new Ontarians. As I recall, as they refer to our own platform, I would remind them with respect that their program for immigrants, new Canadians, was actually found in their Criminal Code section. So I'll let others conclude.

It's on an urgent and personal basis that I speak to you on behalf of the many, many professionals and skilled tradespeople, be they engineers, teachers, architects, physicians, even lawyers, cooks, automotive workers, machinists, electricians, plumbers and so on.

Equality of opportunity, the opportunity to labour in freedom, to prosper unencumbered, and to eventually achieve a measure of self-respect, self-reliance and a measure of success, however an individual may define it: That is what this resolution is about, and that is what I ask this House to support.

NORTHERN HEALTH TRAVEL GRANT

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We'll deal first with ballot item number 17. Mr Oraziatti has moved private member's notice of motion number 15.

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

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): We will now deal with ballot number 18, standing in the name of Mr Qaadri. He has moved private member's notice of motion number 14.

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

All matters relating to private members' public business having now been completed, I will leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1201 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVAL ASSOCIATION

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): It is with great pleasure that I rise today to congratulate the Royal Canadian Naval Association on 50 years of service. The Oshawa Naval Veterans Club in my riding is hosting the association's 50th annual reunion this weekend. There will be delegates from all over Canada and from as far

away as Australia. It is expected that over 700 veterans and cadets from the army, navy and air force will descend on Oshawa for this event.

The association was granted its royal charter in 1954. It was established to further the efficiency and well-being of service, preserve its traditions and encourage recruiting, as well as foster comradeship among those who have served, or are serving, in our naval forces.

We should take the time to reflect on those services that provide us with the freedom and prosperity we enjoy in our country today. The dedication and hard work of our navy and armed forces grant us a lifestyle that is second to none in the world.

As a life member of the Oshawa Naval Veterans Association, I invite all members to join me in congratulating the event organizer, Des Stelle, and the Royal Canadian Naval Association for 50 years of dedication and commitment. Like the bumper sticker says, "If you like your freedom, thank a vet."

SUDANESE HOMEWORK CLUB

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I'm proud to rise in the House during Education Week to congratulate a group of dedicated literacy and ESL teachers in the Waterloo region who are helping newly arrived Sudanese families adjust to Ontario's education system through the establishment of the Sudanese Homework Club.

The club began in 2002 at St John school in Kitchener after consistent gaps began appearing in the results of newly arrived Sudanese children's work in the classroom, especially in the area of literacy. Concerned parents, with the support of Sudanese community leaders, developed the idea of a comprehensive after-school program to help teach students and parents the necessary skills required to succeed in our school system.

The homework club meets twice a week, where it provides a place for students to receive help with homework assignments; information to parents about school expectations in Ontario; ongoing support to parents about school related matters; a means of communication between the school and the parents; and a link for parents to be able to communicate with the school.

I would like to commend the Waterloo Catholic District School Board's Cathy Moloney, Diane Workman, Mary Coyne, and Maureen Innes, Sudanese community members Anthony Gubek and Cecilia Imunu, and all the dedicated volunteers who work in this program. This is only one example of the proactive approach my community has taken to improving student literacy. I would like to take this opportunity to invite the Minister of Education to my area to visit the Sudanese Homework Club and to learn more about some of the other programs operating in the Kitchener area.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): On February 25 of this year, I submitted, under subsection 62(1) of the

Environmental Bill of Rights, an application for review of the certificate of approval for the county of Simcoe landfill site 41. I received a letter from the Ministry of the Environment on March 1 stating, "You will be sent a notice of decision as to whether a review will be conducted, along with the rationale for this decision, by April 27, 2004." Ten days have now passed without a phone call or a letter.

In light of the recommendations in Justice Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry; in light of Minister Dombrowsky's release of the white paper on watershed-based source protection planning; in light of Minister Dombrowsky's very own legislation, Bill 49, the Adams Mine Lake Act; in light of Minister Dombrowsky's December 18, 2003, announcement of a water-taking moratorium that "takes action to stop the giveaway of Ontario's precious water sources"; and in light of Minister Dombrowsky's statement on Earth Day, on April 22, when she was quoted as follows, "The McGuinty government is moving rapidly to protect the air we breathe and the water we drink, and to ensure our waste is handled properly," surely with the facts I just provided, the minister would not delay the application for a review decision, or for political purposes actually deny my request for the review.

I thought the Walkerton tragedy was supposed to have taught us all a lesson about how we treat our precious groundwater resources. Site 41 has the potential for severe groundwater contamination equal to or greater than the Adams mine. The citizens of Simcoe North expect a timely and favourable decision on my application for a review under the Environmental Bill of Rights. They deserve the same respect from the minister as the citizens of Timiskaming-Cochrane.

GUELPH STORM

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): The hockey season has come to a disappointing end here in Toronto, but it is alive and well in Guelph. The Guelph Storm outplayed, outmanoeuvred and outlasted the Mississauga Ice Dogs with a 5-1 victory last night in Mississauga, to win the OHL championship. The Guelph Storm won four straight games against Mississauga, the first time since 1988 that a team has swept the finals.

Star forward Matt Ryan led the Storm with a two-goal performance, while Cam Janssen, Ryan Callahan and Brett Trudell each added a goal. Guelph goalie Adam Dennis barely broke a sweat, with only 20 saves. The Storm outshot the Ice Dogs 41 to 21.

Captain Martin St Pierre, Guelph's veteran sniper, won the Wayne Gretzky 99 award as the league's top performer in the playoffs. The top gun led the Storm in the playoffs with eight goals and 26 assists.

The Guelph Storm will represent the Ontario Hockey League at the 2004 Memorial Cup in Kelowna, BC, beginning May 15. The Storm has had a solid history of victories. This is the fourth time in 13 years they have participated at the national championship. Back just two

years ago, Guelph had the honour of hosting the Memorial Cup.

I hope all members of the Legislature will join me in cheering on Ontario's representatives at the Memorial Cup. Go Storm!

ANTHONY HSU

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Dr Anthony Hsu's birthday is May 12. He, of course, isn't here to celebrate it because his life was stolen from him as a result of the attack on him by the MRC audit system. But Tony Hsu led, and his spirit continues to lead, the struggle to end MRC audits, to create a humane and fair audit process and to put a suspension, a moratorium or freeze on those audits until such time as a fair process is developed.

Irene Hsu, Dr Hsu's widow, wrote to me, "Do you know if there is any remote chance that I can write a birthday card telling" Tony "that I love him and I miss him very much and that the moratorium legislation is being passed at Queen's Park, and throw the card in the lake?"—the same lake on the shores of which Tony Hsu's body washed up.

I say to the Minister of Health, Liberals during the election campaign promised to freeze, to put a moratorium on, the MRC audits. They promised that to get elected. Two weeks ago, I promised that the New Democrats would do everything we had to do to accelerate legislation to freeze these MRC audits. Minister of Health, New Democrats are going to keep our promise. Will you keep yours?

HEPATITIS C

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I rise in this House to recognize Hepatitis C Awareness Month. Hepatitis C is a viral blood infection that can lead to liver failure. This disease is a significant public health concern, and I join with Ontario's health care providers and organizations like HepACT, the Hepatitis Activist Group, in urging Ontarians to learn more about hepatitis C so they can combat its effects and prevent its transmission.

Hepatitis C, if left untreated, can cause serious liver damage and even cancer. It is estimated that up to 2% of Canada's population carries the hepatitis C virus. In Ontario, we have identified about 60,000 people who are infected with hep C, but there are many more people who still do not know that they have it. Unlike other forms of hepatitis, there is no vaccine against hepatitis C, but anti-viral drugs are an increasingly effective form of treatment.

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There is a way to manage and live with hep C, but what role should the government play in making this disease manageable? Funds need to be set aside for early detection and treatment. But in all other aspects of health policy in this province, the most basic of those is primary care, the very basics of a having a family doctor attend to you and your ongoing care. If you're put on a treatment

program with a specialist, even if that specialist is in another city, you have to have that continuing care in your community.

We would like to thank organizations like HepACT and HepCURE for their tireless work to raise awareness of hep C in Canada.

OMEMEE AND DISTRICT LIONESSE CLUB

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I'm pleased to rise today to draw the attention of the Legislature to a ceremony that took place in my riding on May 1, marking the 25th anniversary of the Omeme and District Lioness Club.

The Omeme and District Lioness Club was chartered on May 12, 1979, with 15 members. Four charter members—Ruth Bailey, Edna Carew, Diana Clifford and Noreen Parks—are still active in the club.

The main focus of the club is to serve in the community with ongoing projects such as the food bank, Women's Resources, Omeme Children's Centre, Five Counties Children's Centre, chapel restoration at Emily Cemetery, vision screening, local families in need and cries for help that they can afford to support.

The Lioness Club is also a strong supporter of both Peterborough and Lindsay hospitals. In 1995, they raised over \$6,000 for CAT scan equipment in Peterborough. More recently, they have been supporters of the heart catheter and the defibrillator equipment in their local fire department.

Beyond our community, they've also helped to support District A-16 projects and worthwhile organizations far afield, such as Lions Club Camp Kirk. In 1985 to 1986, they furnished the double room at Canine Vision Canada. They continue to support the foundation, and all club members have life memberships.

Over the years, they've raised money in many different ways. In November 1988, the Lioness Club tried a new fundraiser: apple pies. Fifteen years and approximately 50,000 pies later, this project is still one of their main sources of income.

I would like to add my congratulations and thanks to President Sue Collins and all the members of the Omeme and District Lioness Club. Without their efforts over the past quarter century, the community would have been a much poorer place. You have much to be proud of. Congratulations.

HEALTHYONTARIO.COM

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): Mr Speaker, you, in particular, will be happy to know that HealthyOntario.com, an Ontario government Web portal that provides easy access to consumer health information, is in the running for a top international Internet award, the Webby Award.

HealthyOntario.com is being recognized for its excellence in providing Ontarians with information they

need to learn about themselves and find answers to their health questions. Ontarians can use HealthyOntario.com to find a doctor near them and look up information on specific health conditions and medications. The Web site's success is also reflected in the enormous response from the public, as it averages more than 4.5 million hits each month.

Since being launched in October 2002, HealthyOntario.com has won nine major information awards for delivering high-quality service to the public. Some of these awards include the 2003 National Award of Excellence for best Web site, the 2003 prize for best writing and outstanding electronic and interactive communication, and the 2003 Ontario Showcase Award.

HealthyOntario.com is one of five nominees for the eighth annual Webby Awards for government and law Web sites. The Webby Awards are chosen by members of the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. HealthyOntario.com is also eligible for the Webby's People's Voice Award, where members of the public vote on-line. Winners of the Webby Awards will be announced May 12.

I would ask that all Ontarians cast their vote for HealthyOntario.com by visiting www.webbyawards.com. Visit HealthyOntario.com. Let's hear it for HealthyOntario.com. Make sure you cast your vote, Mr Speaker.

AGRICULTURAL AWARDS OF EXCELLENCE

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My riding of Oxford is well known for its contribution to agriculture. It's been called the dairy capital of Canada, but actually all but a few of the commodities in the agriculture portfolio are grown there. Many Oxford farms are on the cutting edge of technology and set the pace for agriculture in the province.

That's why it gives me pleasure to speak today about the Agricultural Awards of Excellence hosted by the Oxford County Federation of Agriculture. Through these awards, the best and the brightest in Oxford are recognized either because of the excellence they have shown in their field or because of their dedication to their rural community. I have been fortunate to be able to attend the awards every year since their inception and I'm always amazed at the diversity and ingenuity of the farming operations highlighted. This year, after enjoying a wonderful meal prepared using Oxford county produce and listening to the presentation by Dr Craig Pearson, dean of the Ontario Agricultural College, I was once again delighted to help the community recognize this new crop of winners.

At this time, I'd like to congratulate the Oxford County Federation of Agriculture 2004 Awards of Excellence winners: winner of the community service award, Kit Caffyn; co-winners of the youth in agriculture award, Dan Alyea and Chad Arthur; winner of the conservation award, the Janssen family; outstanding family farm, Smithden Holsteins; Kuipers Mushrooms, farm

innovation; winner of the food processing award, Cee Bees' Hive Products; small agribusiness award, Aaross Farm; Sylvite Agri-Services Ltd, large agribusiness; and last but not least, the president's award went to Olspank Dairy, owned by the Kappers family.

I'm proud to say that I represent such a fine rural community with such excellent stewards of the land as these award recipients. I wish them continued success.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. I ask the House's indulgence.

On Wednesday, May 5, 2004, the member for Durham, John O'Toole, introduced Bill 75, An Act to amend the Retail Sales Tax Act, which seeks to increase exemptions from a tax. After first reading of the bill, the government House leader, Mr Duncan, asked that the bill be reviewed as to its orderliness.

I have had an opportunity to review standing order 56, the provision in our standing orders that deals with money bills, together with the relevant parliamentary authorities and precedents.

Marleau and Montpetit's House of Commons Procedure and Practice states at page 898 that "private members' bills which reduce taxes, reduce the incidence of a tax, or impose or increase an exemption from taxation are acceptable."

I also note that, in our own House, on December 12, 2002, the Speaker ruled that a bill that would increase exemptions from assessment for senior citizens and disabled persons did not offend standing order 56.

In light of these authorities and precedents, I find that Bill 75, which seeks to increase exemptions from a tax, is in order.

I thank the government House leader for raising his concern.

WEARING OF BUTTONS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Yesterday I was advised that Toronto Sun workers here at Queen's Park were admonished not to wear pins which advocated their position in the effort on their part and that of their co-workers, members of CEP Local 87, not only to organize a union, which they've done, but to negotiate a first contract. I put to you that Sister Christina Blizzard, Sister Antonella Artuso and Brother Alan Findlay work here at Queen's Park. This is their workplace, and no employer would be permitted, during the course of contract negotiations, first contract or otherwise, to forbid a worker from wearing a symbol of their support and solidarity with their sisters and brothers in the course of that effort.

I put that to you as a point of order. However, we can resolve it without your having to make a ruling by permitting, by way of unanimous consent, people to wear these buttons, reading "Underpaid, Understaffed, Underappreciated," in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in

CEP Local 87, those workers at the Toronto Sun who are courageously attempting to negotiate a first contract to obtain justice and fairness for themselves—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I wouldn't regard this as a point of order, but if you're asking for unanimous consent to wear that button, I could ask the members. Is there unanimous consent? Agreed. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

CONRAD GREBEL UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ACT, 2004

Mr Arnott moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr5, An Act respecting Conrad Grebel University College.

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

RETAIL SALES TAX AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA TAXE DE VENTE AU DÉTAIL

Mr Arnott moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 77, An Act to amend the Retail Sales Tax Act /
Projet de loi 77, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la taxe de vente au détail.

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

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): This bill was motivated in response to the Minister of Transportation's announcement earlier this week. If passed, this bill would ensure that there would be a sales tax exemption for all children's car and booster seats. If the government is going to compel parents to buy booster seats for children, the least they can do is make sure that all car seats for kids are exempted from provincial sales tax. I would ask all members to support this legislation.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

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

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Is there consent? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that notwithstanding standing order 96(g), notice for ballot item 22 be waived.

The Speaker: Do we have consent? Carried.

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that the standing committee on finance and economic affairs be authorized to meet in the morning and afternoon of Wednesday, May 12, 2004, for the purpose of considering Bill 40, An Act to amend the Insurance Act to protect emergency service providers from rate increases to their personal contracts of automobile insurance.

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

MINISTER'S BIRTHDAY

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On a point of order: It is certainly my privilege to indicate to the House that it is the birthday of the Minister of Transportation, Harinder Takhar, and to extend to him our very best wishes.

MEMBER'S WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Marking important days, this is also the day the member for Chatham-Kent, Pat Hoy, and his wonderful wife are celebrating 32 years of marriage.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): There are a lot of important days here.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSESCANADA-ONTARIO MUNICIPAL RURAL
INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): My purpose today is to inform the House, and through you the people of Ontario, of our government's progress in establishing the Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund. In co-operation with our federal and municipal partners, this historic program will provide almost \$900 million over the course of the next five years for the renewal of public infrastructure in small towns and rural communities.

Hundreds of communities in all parts of the province will benefit from this program. It will help smaller municipalities provide clean drinking water and better waste water treatment facilities. It will help them fix their roads. It will help them repair their bridges. It will strengthen communities right across this great province of ours. It will help overcome the neglect of past governments that have allowed rural infrastructure to fall into

disrepair. It will help deliver the real, positive change that is our government's most important commitment.

Earlier today my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and I, along with representatives of the federal government, were in Owen Sound attending the Organization of Small Urban Municipalities conference. At this conference, the government of Canada and the government of Ontario signed a letter of intent paving the way for implementing the new Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund, or COMRIF. Joining us for the signing of this historic agreement was Ann Mulvale, president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

We know that the strength of Ontario depends on the strength of our rural communities and smaller urban centres. Helping these communities restore their municipal infrastructure will contribute to continued prosperity for small-town Ontario and improve the quality of life for our people.

It is an important part of our government's commitment to build strong and safe communities, so in this regard we are going to give these communities the financial programs they need to plan and manage their own future, based on their own needs and based on their own identified priorities. We will give them the tools to build their own successes.

This program is different from those that have been put forward by previous governments in many important respects, and I want to highlight them for you.

One of the most significant improvements is the degree of co-operation we have achieved with our counterparts in the federal government and with our partners at the municipal level.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario has participated in all aspects of our discussions with the federal government that are taking place in establishing this fund. As a result, the program reflects the real needs of smaller municipalities. It supports projects that have real benefits for the people of those smaller communities because they will have grown from the ground up instead of being dictated, as they have in the past, from the top down.

The previous government engaged in a war of attrition with other levels of government. Political posturing and endless bickering crippled the policies and programs that survived those quarrels. They were designed to make the government look good, but they neglected to do good for the people who ultimately paid for them. So we are entering a new era of co-operation among governments and we are delivering results.

COMRIF, the Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund, will restore public infrastructure in smaller communities across this great province. These investments will result in improvements to our public health and to our economic prosperity, improvements that will last for generations.

The Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund is just one more example of the ways in which this government is delivering real, positive change that will

make Ontario strong, healthy and prosperous. It's a proud day for Ontario citizens.

1400

INVASIVE FISH SPECIES

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources):

It's my pleasure to stand in the House to advise the members of actions this government is taking to make sure the province's lakes are cleaner and healthier.

Earlier today, at a consultation meeting on the proposed national alien invasive species strategy, I announced that the government is banning the live sale of several invasive fish species. The new regulation prohibits the buying and selling of live bighead, black, silver and grass carp, along with all species of snakehead and two species of goby that are used for bait.

In addition, the regulation bans the sale of these fish for use in aquariums, as well as the use of grass carp in backyard ponds. While these carp species currently sold live in food markets will still be available for sale, they must be killed before the customer can remove them from the store.

I would like to provide a bit of context for the members on why these measures are being taken.

Invasive alien species have long been a difficult problem for jurisdictions across this country. The 100 worst invasive alien species listed by the World Conservation Union include many that are now established in our province, such as purple loosestrife, Dutch elm disease, zebra mussel and spiny water flea.

In addition to the obvious environmental threat they pose, they can also jeopardize the economy, social and human health, as well as international trade. Ontario has been front and centre in efforts to halt the spread of these species.

One of our key goals as a government is to keep Ontario's natural environment healthy, with cleaner air and water. Of course that includes keeping our fish and wildlife populations healthy, thriving and sustainable.

Maintaining a healthy natural environment must include controlling the introduction and spread of invasive species. In recent years this has become an increasingly urgent issue, particularly in the Great Lakes basin. I think a lot of Ontarians would be surprised to learn that more than 160 invasive species have become established in our Great Lakes. Many of them have had a negative economic and ecological impact, with the sea lamprey and the zebra mussel perhaps being the best known of these.

Right now, the introduction of invasive carp into the Great Lakes presents a very serious and imminent threat to our environment, and that is why we have acted.

When we proposed a ban in February, we outlined our intentions in an Environmental Bill of Rights registry posting that closed at the end of March. There was very clear support for the proposal, with over 70% of responses urging us to proceed.

It is apparent that we need to prevent these species from being introduced to our waters either on purpose or by accident. That makes more sense than trying to control their spread once they're here. If invasive carp were to take hold in the Great Lakes, there is concern over the negative impact on recreational and commercial fisheries and on fish and wildlife habitat in shallow and near-shore areas.

I've been told by our experts that these species have not yet become established in the Great Lakes, despite the few reported incidents of carp being captured in Lakes Huron, Erie and Ontario. As some members may know, the impetus for this action was finding grass carp last month at the mouth of the Don River.

Not only have we put in place a new regulation, but we've also asked the federal government to help us. While there is no doubt that this new regulation will be helpful, it may not be enough. So yesterday I forwarded to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans a formal request to amend the Ontario fishery regulations to prohibit the possession of live fish of the same invasive species. I've also asked the federal government to expedite this approval.

The members may also be interested to know that we have been asked to help in the development of an invasive carp management plan for the United States. Ontario was one of two provinces invited to take part by a task force co-chaired by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Our government is committed to taking real, positive and decisive action to control invasive species. We call on everyone to participate in this effort to ensure its success: anglers, private landowners, non-government organizations, all levels of government and more. We must act now to protect our natural environment and preserve our biodiversity.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): It's good to rise on behalf of the MNR critic position to comment on the movement forward by the ministry. It's good to see these sorts of programs coming forward, as long as all the partners are dealt with on this. What's the implication going to be to the commercial fishermen that deal with live fish, who catch these fish, or the groups that bring them in to be sold in restaurants such as that?

What takes place sometimes is that in parts of Toronto you'll find these carp for sale in a restaurant, which will put them on display. What's the impact going to be, in that particular case, where a restaurant would go in to purchase these live fish to put them on display in the restaurant, where they're selected out by individuals who want to consume them? Are they going to have to be killed at that point, or is it at the final point of sale? I think that's something the minister needs to address, and hopefully he'll look into that. Also, it's been brought to my attention regarding the commercial fishery and the impact on them regarding bringing in and exporting fish as well. Live fish, for commercial fishermen who use

hoop nets—the way they do business is importing and exporting.

I think one of the key areas in this that wasn't brought forward was the number one way in which invading species come into the province of Ontario, and that's through ballast water discharge. I know I brought a bill forward on ballast water discharge and, actually, as a result of that bill, I was asked to present to a US committee that was willing to move forward on a joint commission to bring in legislation that would affect all Great Lakes and all the jurisdictions around the lakes. We had one binding law and worked with the federal government on that. The industry's concern at that point was that there may be different laws in different jurisdictions that they would have to comply with. They were very willing to sit down with us to look at possible ways of dealing with ballast water discharge—the number one way that the round goby or the spiny water flea, to name but a couple, have come into the province of Ontario to deal with.

I know this is good. I would hope the minister does deal with commercial fishermen to ensure that their concerns are brought forward or at least minimized so they know that it's not impacting them. As well, I would hope the minister also knows that the number one food source for the black carp, which is one of the ones listed, is the zebra mussel. I know we don't want to introduce species to try and take care of other things, but those are the sorts of things that the minister has to consider. I think we don't have any problems supporting this, as long as all the stakeholders are being dealt with.

CANADA-ONTARIO MUNICIPAL RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I want to commend the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal for the announcement today.

The Legislature will be aware that the previous government put in a \$600-million small town and rural infrastructure assistance program a number of years ago, which, incidentally, was a five-year program. People applied for it, then the election came along and the new government decided to make the program vanish. Today it has come back, and we're happy to see that.

We all know that the first phase of the program was designed to help municipalities, smaller municipalities in particular, deal with meeting the drinking water objectives of the province, because they were unable to do that without assistance. He mentions in his announcement, in fact, that he brought the federal government on side in order to make this work, and I want to commend him for that, because the one problem we had with the small town and rural infrastructure program was that the federal government refused to fund their share of the programs as they were announced. So I'm happy to see that he has done that. We've heard a lot of complaints about this present government not keeping their promises. I want to commend the minister for standing up.

I just want to read from a document that relates to that:

“Many people choose to live in rural Ontario for the quality of life it offers them and their families, and for a wide range of lifestyles possible in smaller communities with closer links to the natural environment.”

They will help “rural municipalities by taking over responsibility for the maintenance and reconstruction of municipal bridges across Ontario.... These bridges represent a significant cost to rural municipalities but a significant benefit to most of Ontario. It only makes sense to have the provincial government take responsibility for this important infrastructure.”

It's too bad they didn't keep their own promises, but I'm happy to hear that they took a promise out of The Road Ahead and are keeping that promise.

INVASIVE FISH SPECIES

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): There are two bills here. I just want to comment very, very briefly on the bill regarding the fish. It's a good bill; do it. That's all I need to say.

CANADA-ONTARIO MUNICIPAL RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): The second one is not quite the same kind of bill. With all due respect to the minister and to the critic from the Conservative Party, this is a bill that appears to us to be nothing more than old money rehashed to appear like new money. This is very much like the Conservative policy with the extra money coming from the federal government.

If you look at it, it's \$900 million spread over three governments over five years, which is about \$60 million a year. Now, \$60 million is not an amount that needs to be sneezed at, nor am I sneezing at it. But it is, in fact, only a fraction of what our small towns and small urban centres in Ontario need. They have estimated that they need at least \$200 million a year for five years in order to get the sewer and water infrastructure up to where it is. This is approximately one third of the money that they actually need in order to make water safe. It's about one third of the money they need in order not to bankrupt them. We know that many of these small municipalities are facing bankruptcy, or if not bankruptcy at least major tax increases, in order to comply with the water regulations as they are now required to do.

You have promised a new deal for our cities and towns. You have promised that our cities and towns are going to be much better places. The central thing you promised in all of that was to give them new sources of revenue: not sources of handouts, not sources of loans, not sources like you have said here today, but actual, real revenues, and chief among those you promised was the two cents on the gas tax. I was in some of those meetings during the election, Mr Minister, and heard you promise that.

That's the kind of thing we want to see, so they have a permanent, long-term solution to their problems of water and sewage infrastructure. As much as we welcome the announcement today, we're not convinced it is new money at all but simply a reannouncement of something the Tories did before.

Show some leadership. Go where you're supposed to be going, and that is to make them independent of this province and independent of the federal government, and to have sufficient monies on their own to make the infrastructure changes they need.

With that, I'll turn it over to my colleague.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): This is just a drop in the bucket, so to speak, compared to what we know is needed to fix our aging infrastructure around this province, but not only that, to comply with all the new legislation that's been brought forward, some under the previous government and now of course we're continuing with the Nutrient Management Act, source water protection and the Safe Drinking Water Act.

I raised the question in this Legislature a while ago about Walkerton in particular, and I raised Walkerton because of course we know what happened there. That was the impetus that brought us to all these new pieces of legislation, which we generally support. But their water bills have gone up and up over the years, and they cannot afford them.

I have had a number of representatives from smaller municipalities across the province call me and meet with me to talk about the fact that they're having trouble meeting with representatives from the ministries, coming to talk to me to see what I can do to help them deal with these high bills they've been getting from the Ontario Clean Water Agency, which they can't afford to pay.

Next week, you will see on the order paper a resolution I'm putting forward; I'll tell you about it in advance. I've been trying to think of ways, working with these communities, which can help the government because of the deficit, which of course we know they knew was coming. Leaving that aside, they're going to be telling everybody they can't afford to reinvest the way they had promised. So here's an idea.

The government has recently brought in, with my support and my party's support, new regulations that eventually will start charging water takers—the people who are now taking our water for free. Bottled water companies were singled out, but there are others.

My resolution—and I had to be careful how I worded it because of the rulings on what kinds of money bills we, as private members, can bring in—will ask the government to give a significant portion of the fees that are collected from these water takers and put them toward a Safe Drinking Water Act, the proceeds from that to go to our municipalities to help them pay these high costs.

DEFERRED VOTES

ADAMS MINE LAKE ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004

SUR LE LAC DE LA MINE ADAMS

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of Bill 49, An Act to prevent the disposal of waste at the Adams Mine site and to amend the Environmental Protection Act in respect of the disposal of waste in lakes / Projet de loi 49, Loi visant à empêcher l'élimination de déchets à la mine Adams et à modifier la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement en ce qui concerne l'élimination de déchets dans des lacs.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Call in the members. There will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1414 to 1419.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise to be counted by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Prue, Michael
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kennedy, Gerard	Qadri, Shafiq
Bountroggianni, Marie	Kular, Kuldip	Racco, Mario G.
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Cansfield, Donna H.	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Caplan, David	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marchese, Rosario	Smith, Monique
Churley, Marilyn	Marsales, Judy	Smitherman, George
Colle, Mike	Martel, Shelley	Sorbara, Greg
Cordiano, Joseph	Matthews, Deborah	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	McGuinty, Dalton	Wilkinson, John
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wong, Tony C.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Milloy, John	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Mitchell, Carol	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Oraziotti, David	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	

The Speaker: All those against, please rise and be recognized.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Eves, Ernie	Ouellette, Jerry J.
Baird, John R.	Flaherty, Jim	Runciman, Robert W.
Barrett, Toby	Hardeman, Ernie	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	Tascona, Joseph N.
Dunlop, Garfield	Klees, Frank	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 58; the nays are 14.

The Speaker: The ayes are 58; the nays are 14. Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I move that the bill be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, please.

The Speaker: The bill will accordingly be referred.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I have a question for the Premier. Mr Premier, we've been reading some of your press clippings over the last few years about your stand on taxpayer protection legislation. It's an interesting journey, to say the least.

September 4, 1990: "McGuinty defends past Liberal tax hikes and says they have been necessary to counter declining federal transfer payments for social assistance, health care and education to help balance the budget."

In 1995, you claimed that you signed the taxpayer protection legislation, but your little red book of 1995 promised a balanced budget bill that would only commit to government balancing budgets over a specific financial cycle. Although you claimed to have signed that pledge, you did not. There were only four Liberal members who signed it, one of whom is still in the House, Mr Ruprecht, your member for Parkdale.

In 1997, you said, "I think government should always reserve the right to raise taxes," and yet on September 11, 2003, you signed this pledge not to raise taxes, never to implement a new tax without the consent of Ontario voters, never to run a deficit and to abide by the current taxpayer protection and balanced budget legislation.

How do you explain this great philosophical journey of yours over the last 14 years?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I have a more interesting journey to describe for you, and that would be the one taken by one Ernie Eves shortly prior to the last election. You will remember that the election took place on October 2. You will also want to recall that on September 22, on CHRO, then-Premier Eves said, "No, we will not be running a deficit this year." On Global TV on September 27, a few days before the election, he said, "We will balance this year." CKVR, on September 30, he said, "We will balance this year." Then, during the course of the leaders' debate, right in the thick of the campaign, he told the people of Ontario, "There won't be a deficit this year." If anybody's got some splainin' to do to the people of Ontario, it would seem to me it's Mr Eves.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): To the Premier, here is the splainin' we'd like him to do: why, when he was elected Premier, contrary to the promise he made not to run a deficit, he refused in this House, on some 19 different occasions, to answer the question that was put to him regarding whether he, at any time, instructed his finance minister to come in with a balanced budget, to do the work that our leader would have done to make sure that a balanced budget would have been brought in. Why did he not do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Just so that the leader of the official opposition doesn't feel alone in this matter, he had others accompany him on this wonderful journey.

Jim Flaherty said, "We're back on track now, and the budget is balanced." Bill Murdoch said, "The government balanced its books." Elizabeth Witmer said, "We are going to make sure that we provide another balanced budget." One John Baird said, "We're keeping the budget balanced." And, of course, Tim Hudak himself said, "The books have been balanced."

The question that Ontarians find very pressing and weighing heavily on their minds is, why is it they couldn't rely on the government of the day, the people with access to the books, with access to the information, to give them the straight goods when it came to the state of government finances?

Mr Klees: The fact of the matter is that the people did get the straight goods. Who they didn't get the straight goods from was the Liberal Premier who signed a promise to balance the budget, was not willing to do the work that we on this side would in fact have done, and made the decision to bring in a deficit, contrary to the promise, to the commitment that he made to the people of this province.

Why, Premier? Why would you not do the work that had to be done to balance the budget in accordance with the promise that you made? Your word is worth nothing to the people of Ontario. Explain it.

Hon Mr McGuinty: This is something out of Rod Serling's Night Gallery. There's something surreal to this. The people on that side of the House are trying to blame us for the fact that we relied on them when they told us, and the people of Ontario, that there wasn't a deficit. They're criticizing us for relying on their word when it came to the state of government finances.

There is a lesson to be drawn from this, and that is this: We are going to pass a law in this Legislature that's going to ensure that those kinds of shenanigans can never happen again.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Eves: To the Premier: Speaking of shenanigans, the Kenora Daily Miner and News is quoted as saying, "Cynics say Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty is only backing"—balanced budget—"legislation now because of political expediency—he sees it as a vote getter. They'd be right again."

Dalton McGuinty, you, yourself, on September 3 of last year, said, "I believe that balanced budgets are essential to the economic well-being of this province, and they must never be sacrificed in the name of political expediency." What happened, Mr Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: If we are going to provide an example that would be illustrative of cynicism, then we cannot possibly do so without making reference to this budget, 2003, put out by the previous government, which they were so ashamed of they couldn't introduce it inside this Legislature; they had to do it in an auto parts assembly plant. What they also put in this particular budget was that they said here the budget was balanced. It turns out that that was not true.

It was no wonder they took this document and introduced it outside of this Legislature. It is no wonder

that they wouldn't give us the straight goods during the course of the campaign or even prior to the campaign. It seems to me, if we're going to talk about cynicism, surely that defines it.

1430

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Klees: Contrary to all the rhetoric, does the Premier not remember signing this: "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise, if my party is elected as the next government, that I will not raise taxes, or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters—and not run deficits. I promise to abide by the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act"?

Maybe we should hand that over to the Premier to let him recall that day, September 11, 2003. The Premier seems not to understand, having signed this pledge, that by doing the contrary, by planning a deficit, by planning tax cuts, he and his cabinet and every member of the government are, in fact, breaking the law. Paying \$9,000 won't cover that penalty. Do you really think the taxpayers of Ontario will let you get away with paying—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr McGuinty: When it comes to a matter of the law and a matter of integrity and a matter of honour, I know that the member putting the question to me must be asking this of himself. He was part of a government that was committed, apparently, to the Balanced Budget Act. They proceeded to deliver a budget that was not, in fact, balanced, and we discovered that there is a \$5.6-billion deficit. As a consequence of that, members of that cabinet owe the people 25% of their salaries as cabinet ministers. So the question we have for him is, is he going to pay that money back to the people of Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Final supplementary.

Mr Klees: On September 16, the Premier made the following statement: "We're not practising the politics of division. We're not practising the politics of cynicism. We've got a positive plan that is designed to bring about real improvement in the quality of life for Ontarians." This Premier did not do what our cabinet did. That was—and I recall the meeting very well—in light of SARS, in light of the additional impacts on the economy, our Chair of Management Board and our leader at the time said, "Gentlemen, ladies, we have to get to work, do the program review and ensure, by the end of our fiscal year, that we have a balanced budget." Why did that kind of leadership not come from this Premier? Why did the direction never get to the finance minister to bring in a balanced budget? You could have done it. You chose not to. You chose to break your pledge. You chose to—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr McGuinty: What we choose to do is ensure that those kinds of shenanigans—what was perpetrated on the people of Ontario—will never happen again. We're going to bring into being in the province of Ontario a law that will bring genuine accountability, transparency and openness to the state of the government

books when we go into the next election. This is great news for the people of Ontario. We're going to give them the straight goods with respect to the state of our finances, and they will be able to rely on that information.

TAXATION

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Premier. You really love trial balloons. First you blow them up, and then you shoot them down. First you were talking about toll roads, and then you shot that down; then there was the soup-and-salad tax, and you shot that down; then there was the hope tax on lotteries, and you shot that down. Today we have a new trial balloon, because it's barbecue season and you are now proposing to stick it to those who want a cold beer with their burger. Are you going to shoot this down, too? You said you wouldn't raise taxes. Tell Ontarians you won't ruin their summer by raising taxes on their wine, beer and spirits.

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Now he's treading on some very thin ice. When you start talking about people's beer—I've heard from my brothers on this one. Let me just say that I know the member opposite has a tremendous interest in the budget we will be introducing in this House, for a change, on May 18. We look forward to introducing that budget here, and in the interim we of course are listening to all kinds of advice. He'll just have to be patient when it comes to a final response.

Mr Prue: The people of Ontario didn't have to be patient too long to see you raise hydro rates after promising you wouldn't. The people of Ontario didn't have to wait too long to see the increases in their auto insurance after you promised a decrease. But nowhere is your minister or are you talking about raising taxes for people who can afford it, people who earn above \$100,000, who got a 35% decrease under the Tories. You're not touching that. You know there's \$500 million sitting there that the largest corporations aren't paying on EHT loopholes, and we don't hear any talk about touching that.

This appears to us to be more of the Harris-Eves agenda by a Premier wearing a red tie. You're there to line the pockets of Bay Street and pick the pockets of people who can't afford it. My question again: Will you commit not to raise taxes on beer, wine and spirits?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite sings that sad, sorry, dated refrain about taxing the rich. We intend to bring a slightly more enlightened and progressive approach. Again, I appreciate the advice offered by my friend, and we very much look forward to introducing the budget.

TORONTO POLICE SERVICE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. There is no doubt that there's a growing crisis within the Toronto police force. I've

raised it with you before in this House, yet the province has done very little to ensure effective civilian oversight of the police force. Norm Gardner was appointed to the board by the province, yet he has now been suspended by the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services for the rest of his term. But he is appealing that.

Premier, you know what that means. There's a big hole on the seven-member board. As you know, the board needs all hands on deck right now to deal with the current crisis. I'm asking you, Premier, will you do the right thing and fire Norm Gardner, and appoint a replacement to the board so that the board can do its job?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the minister would like to speak to this.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member should know—and I'm surprised that she doesn't, because there's ample precedent—Norm Gardner has been appointed by an order in council. His order in council goes until the end of December of this year. If the police services board or OCCPS had fired him, there would have been a vacancy. OCCPS has decided that his suspension without pay shall go until the end of his term. As a result, we have no ability from a legal point of view to replace him, and that is why we have that problem.

Ms Churley: That is a cop-out, so to speak. I say to the Premier, you need to show leadership here, not stand on the sidelines. Revoke the appointment. If you have to bring in special legislation, bring in special legislation. We have a big problem here. They're depending on you, Premier, to show some leadership, and I hope you will do that. It can be done.

I want to raise another very serious concern with you. Many are saying that the police services board act gives the chief too much power. Many people believe that the current Toronto chief is preventing the board from doing its job. Your Solicitor General has refused to even look at the act. This is too serious a problem for the people of Toronto and the police force itself to stand around and wash your hands. Premier, will you change the law—open up the act and change it—to increase the police services board's ability to provide effective civilian oversight? We need you to do this. Will you do it?

Hon Mr Kwinter: The police services board act is adequate to do the job that it is required to do. What they're saying is that OCCPS should have greater representation because they have to deal with discipline of police. It's not the police services board. The police services board's responsibility is to enforce the act. You should know that a previous government tried to and actually did remove a member of the police services board before their term expired. They were taken to court and they lost. So we were able to take a look at a precedent and say, "Why would we do something when there's ample precedent that says we don't have the legal right to do that?" That is where we are at the present time.

1440

TAXATION

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): My question is to the Premier. We're on the cusp of the May 24 weekend, and we get news that you're considering hiking the tax on the nectar of the gods for working people: beer. Ontario already has the highest beer taxes in the world. A survey done a few years ago showed that the salary of the average beer drinker is around \$34,000 a year. I have to ask you, why would you consider hiking taxes on the average working man and woman of this province? Why would you even give any consideration to doing this?

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

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I think Ontario breweries are some of the best in the world and we're very proud of the work they do. I'd also say to my friend from Leeds-Grenville, let's not categorize people who drink wine or beer or vodka. You and I might want to go out after the budget and enjoy a beer together. Whether or not there will be an additional tax on that, you'll just have to wait until the budget is presented, and then you'll know.

Mr Runciman: This is a suggestion of an attack on average Joe Canadian. New York State's taxes are 16% on beer; Quebec is 36%, roughly. We know what happened with respect to the discrepancies in pricing of cigarettes in Ontario and New York state: the increase in smuggling, the incentive to organized crime with respect to cigarettes. The other consideration here is the hospitality sector. Thirty per cent of beer sales in the province go through the hospitality sector, which is already reeling from SARS and 9/11. This could be a final blow to many small businesses in the hospitality sector.

So I ask the minister, will you assure average Joe Canadian, the police and the hospitality sector that you will not press ahead with an increase in beer taxes?

Hon Mr Sorbara: I understand my friend from Leeds-Grenville was going to perhaps audition for the next series of "I am Canadian" commercials, but I didn't think he would do it in this House. If he does it, I don't think he's going to get the part. Let me say to my friend that it doesn't further this process at all to get involved in a little bit of scaremongering, even in this jocular way. He knows quite well that neither I, the Premier nor any member on this side is going to add to the marvellous speculation about what might or might not be in the budget.

I'll just take the opportunity to say, however, sir, that our objective is to bring in a budget that will start us down the road to better financial health in this province and the ability to deliver a much higher quality of public services. I know he'll want to be here on May 18.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I've got a question today for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services that may be of interest to a lot of the young people who are here with us today. I know that you and your ministry have done a lot of good work educating seniors, who are often the victims of frauds and scams, to be smart consumers. I have constituents who are telling me that young people are also quite vulnerable to frauds and scams. Can you tell me what your ministry is doing to protect Ontario's youth in the consumer marketplace?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): The member is quite right. We're proud of the work we've done with seniors to help protect members of the community from scam artists. The two groups that are the most vulnerable are our senior citizens and young people. In fact, there was a study that was put out by a group called Youthography, a youth marketing research firm, that showed that teens between the ages of 15 and 19 have combined disposable income of \$95 million to \$103 million monthly. That's \$1.2 billion each year, and that doesn't include the amount of influence teens have at home.

That's why I was so pleased two days ago to go with the honourable member from Don Valley West, Kathleen Wynne, to Marc Garneau Collegiate to introduce a new educational program that has been sent out to 1,700 schools across the province to teach consumerism to young people in this province.

Mr Flynn: Can the minister also tell the House how other parties assisted in the development of this new initiative?

Hon Mr Watson: The McGuinty government is interested in working with various stakeholders, in co-operating with different groups. I'm pleased that we work with the Ministry of Education. We established a committee that was made up of educational professionals, teachers, school administrators and people from my ministry to put together the package of information. We also work with the private sector, the Direct Selling Education Foundation and the Interac Association, two non-profit groups that were there at the table with financial resources so that this package on CD-ROM could go to schools throughout Ontario.

ROYAL BOTANICAL GARDENS

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): In the absence of the Minister of Tourism or the Minister of Culture, I would be pleased if the Premier would respond to my question. You would be aware that in the last week and a half you've been dispatching your ministers down the QEW highway to the Hamilton East by-election at an alarming rate. Earlier this week we learned that the Royal Botanical Gardens may be forced to close its doors, with a projected deficit of \$1.7 million.

We on this side of the House indicated that we needed a billion dollars in SARS relief money to help our

tourism and our health infrastructure in this province. You seem to feel you are satisfied and that only \$300 million would be sufficient. We need someone who will speak up for Ontario in Ottawa to get those funds. We do not get a single penny from the federal government to assist us with this tourism icon. Premier, will you help us in the Hamilton-Halton area to save the RBG and find the necessary funds for this tourism icon?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Let me say that we are very much supportive of finding a way to assist the Royal Botanical Gardens, which is a veritable institution in the Hamilton area. But I want to make it clear that traditionally there have been four partners, to my understanding, when it comes to helping with funding here: the city of Hamilton, the city of Burlington, Halton region and the Ontario government. My friend is suggesting that we invite the federal government to participate in a still broader partnership. I have no objections to doing that. But what I want to make clear to the people of Hamilton is that we are going to work as hard as we can to ensure that the Royal Botanical Gardens is around for a long, long time.

Mr Jackson: Premier, you would be aware, of course, that our government transferred over \$21 million to this important cultural icon over the last eight years. We transferred another \$9 million in SuperBuild funding. Halton region has increased its funding. Hamilton council, of which NDP candidate Andrea Howath is a member, has actually voted to reduce its funding.

Clearly, if the RBG was somewhere in Montreal, it would be receiving all sorts of heritage and tourism funding from the federal government. That is a fact of life. I'm asking you to begin to take a tougher stand with the federal government. As a former tourism minister, I can tell you that there is disproportionate support that we are getting from the federal government. Premier, are you going to make the same sort of commitment to save the RBG that you are currently making to save Dominic Agostino's seat in Hamilton East?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Unlike my friend, I want to treat this matter with the seriousness it actually deserves. First of all, let me say that I just reject that old-style political approach, which is that you exploit regional differences, and you might pit Quebec against Ontario, or you might pit northern Ontario against southern Ontario or Ottawa against Toronto. I think the people have had enough of that, and I think what they are looking for from leadership is ways to bring people together and emphasize what it is that we have in common.

1450

Back to the real issue here, and that is the Royal Botanical Gardens. I understand my friend's concerns. I've indicated in my earlier response that we intend to find a way to be supportive of the gardens, and again, if we can invite the federal government to participate so we have a still larger partnership of partners committed to the RBG, then I'm quite prepared to do that.

VIOLENT CRIME

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, although the crime rate in Toronto has gone down, it is stated that since 1999 the number of violent crimes has risen by some 6%. There has been a drastic increase in the use of guns in these related crimes; indeed, 12 of the 19 reported homicides so far this year have involved the use of firearms. The increase of weapons is an issue that not only significantly undermines the peace and safety of my constituents, but it also affects their very livelihoods. The residents in my community are crying out for the need to get guns off the streets and for better community policing. What is being done to reassure my residents that they can walk the streets at night without their lives being threatened?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for York West for his question. I have a particular interest not only in my capacity as the minister, but his riding abuts mine and we have a similar problem.

I want you to know that the duty of a government really is to make sure that its citizens are safe and secure. I am quite disturbed by the fact that, notwithstanding that the crime rate is going down, the incidence of violence is going up. That is something that is particularly abhorrent because it has to do with guns. More than 50% of the homicides are gun-related. This is something the police forces are looking at.

I'm happy to say—and I'm sure members may know this—that Mayor Miller has set up an advisory panel for community safety. He has asked the Chief Justice of Ontario, the Honourable Roy McMurtry, to chair it. The Attorney General and I attended the first meeting, and in subsequent meetings representatives of our ministries will be there. It's a proactive committee that incorporates not only our two ministries and the Chief Justice but leading citizens who are concerned about this, and we are—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr Sergio: Mr Speaker, with your indulgence, my supplementary question is for the Attorney General. Minister, in my riding of York West Julia Farquharson's son was brutally shot to death on Duncanwoods Drive. In recent years there have been reports of over 12,000 crimes, 3,000 of those very violent; there were five attempted murders and a homicide. Minister, what hope can we give those victims who have suffered such tragic losses to ensure that criminals will be vigorously prosecuted?

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I thank the member for York West for the question. We're doing a couple of things. First, the guns and gangs task force is bringing together specialized crowns to assist in the investigation from day one. So 24 hours a day, seven days a week, this

investigation team has an expert crown counsel there. We feel that's going to make a difference in terms of our ability to get more organized on organized crime. We also feel it's going to make a difference in terms of our capacity to bring forth even stronger prosecution.

Another thing—and I'm going to run out of time here—is with respect to sentencing packages. For the first time, we are bringing forth a sentencing package that shows the harm that's done, generally speaking, across the city of Toronto, and we can use this package in every region in which it's necessary. We feel it's going to put evidence before the court that is going to help us fight for stronger sentences, send deterrence to the street and send a message that there is going to be zero tolerance for gun violence. We think the province has a role here. We're going to play a leadership role and, as a result, make a difference.

OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To the Minister of Labour: Every year in Ontario, 6,000 workers die as a result of occupational disease. In 1998, in an effort to reduce the number of those deaths, the Ontario Federation of Labour began their grassroots campaign to raise awareness about occupational disease and, over a series of novel twists and turns, that campaign led to the release of a WSIB discussion paper that's going to be going out for consultation in June of this year. But your ministry and the WSIB have shut out representatives of both labour and injured workers from the consultation panel.

Minister, please do the right thing. Immediately appoint representatives of labour and injured workers to the occupational diseases consultation panel. Will you do that?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): First, I'd like to say directly to the sufferers of occupational disease, to the families, to the victims, that this is a terrible scourge and our greatest sympathy is to them. I make the commitment to them that I have made to people across the province as I've travelled from Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Windsor, and that is to do what hasn't been done before: to make sure that sufferers of occupational disease and all injured workers are treated with respect; to make sure we have a system that treats everyone with dignity and respect.

With respect to the occupational disease advisory panel, for two years and more it has collected very important information. There was a commitment made to have the report go across the province and gather opinions on it. Unfortunately, there was no—I'll await the supplementary.

Mr Kormos: Minister, up here in the gallery there are two women—stand up, please—Barb Millet and Jean Simpson. Jean's the widow of Bud Simpson, a victim of occupational disease in Sarnia's Chemical Valley. Barb is his daughter. You see, Jean and Barb are both members—victims—of Chemical Valley.

Jean and Barb and tens of thousands of surviving loved ones of workers killed by occupational disease across this province are outraged; they're indignant. They're repulsed that your ministry and the WSIB refuse to let their voices and the voices of a husband and dad now dead be heard by not allowing their representatives to have standing, to sit on this panel.

It's a simple request, sir. We know you feel badly about their loss, but explain to these two women why you're shutting them out of your occupational disease consultation panel.

Hon Mr Bentley: The premise of the question is not correct, as the member should know. The panel is going across the province and will be listening to injured workers, will be listening to their families and will be listening to all. It's very important that we get that information as quickly as possible to make progress on this important issue.

Let me tell you, we will not do with this issue what the NDP did during its five years, which was absolutely nothing. When the NDP had a chance to make a system that was just for injured workers and occupational disease sufferers, what did they do? They stuck their hands in the pockets of injured workers and reduced inflation protection for them.

We will be listening to all workers about this issue. I have made a commitment to make a fair and just system. The sooner we get this information the better, and I look forward to the report. They'll consult in June and submissions are until the end of the summer, and I look forward to it so we can make the fair—

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

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. Prior to October 2, 2003, this government had a policy in place that would prevent a community in Ontario from shipping its garbage to another community without the specific approval of that host community. Minister, do you have the same policy in place for your government?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): The Ministry of the Environment, and this government, are committed to assisting municipalities by providing them with the tools that they need to manage their own municipal solid-waste issues. When municipalities bring the Ministry of the Environment a plan, the ministry reviews it and provides them with a certificate of approval. The certificate of approval will prescribe how that municipality will manage its waste.

1500

Mr Chudleigh: As you're probably aware, there have been significant, successful efforts on behalf of Halton region to reduce, reuse and recycle its garbage and therefore reduce the pressure it has on its landfill sites. We're very proud of the success we've had in Halton. We don't want to see our precious landfill capacity used

up by communities that have failed to take the proper steps to secure landfill capacity for the future. Those communities are well known. We know there's going to be a problem down the road. When will you have a policy that will protect communities that are forward looking, that have taken the steps to ensure that they have landfill capacity both today and in the future? When will you have a policy to protect those people?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: The policy of this government is that we believe the best entity group to manage municipal solid waste is the municipalities. I actually met with Joyce Savoline, who is the mayor of Halton. I had an opportunity to hear from her first-hand about the very good work that they have done in managing their municipal solid-waste issues. I think they're a best-practice community for other communities in Ontario. I'm very encouraged to hear from her that she also intends to work with this government to assist us in meeting our 60% diversion initiative.

That's what we're hearing from municipalities in the province. They want the tools that will enable them to manage their municipal solid waste. There has never been any commitment on the part of this government to take over that responsibility, nor has it ever been a role that your government had either.

CANADA-ONTARIO MUNICIPAL RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Today's announcement concerning new investments in municipal infrastructure was very exciting news, not just for my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan but for all of Ontario's rural and northern communities under 250,000 population. The Canada-Ontario municipal rural investment fund is a very welcome program. I'm very anxious to learn where the dollars from this program will be directed in our communities.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): It is in fact very good news for Ontarians who live in communities of 250,000 or less. I, along with my colleagues in cabinet, have taken the time to meet and to listen to municipal leaders. They told us what their highest priorities were: clean drinking water, waste water systems, municipal roads and municipal bridges.

I'm pleased to report to the member from Thunder Bay-Atikokan, as I am to all members in the House, that Dalton McGuinty and our government, along with our federal partners, have responded. We have designed a program and entered into an agreement with our federal partners to rebuild Ontario to meet the priorities that municipal leaders have identified for us.

Unfortunately, the previous government and the government previous to that left us with an enormous infrastructure deficit. So we have not turned our backs on rural communities. In fact, the program that we've announced today demonstrates our commitment. It's a very exciting day for Ontario.

Mr Mauro: This announcement involves all three levels of government. How is this going to work? Will all three levels of government be working on the same page? How is each involved in the overall program?

Hon Mr Caplan: This is a historic agreement. What normally happens is that the province and the federal government negotiate what the criteria are, what the priorities are. What we did at the very outset was include the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. We had them help to design the program. They were at the table negotiating the terms of the agreement. They will design the application fund. In fact, we are going to provide, through the fund, 1% for project development funding through AMO. Evidence of the co-operation, of a better relationship, is the result: today's announcement.

This is only one sample of some of the great work that we've done. In recent months, we've had several joint announcements with both the federal and municipal governments. I would refer to 2,400 units of affordable housing; \$1.1 billion in funding for the TTC. There is much more to come.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Health. It relates to what appears to be the minister's provincial queue-jumping policy with regards to funding. What I'm referring to, as the minister will be aware, is that the previous government committed some \$600,000, which flowed, by the way, to St Peter's Hospital in Hamilton for a new 90-bed facility for disabled young people, and an additional \$600,000 for the redevelopment of a 50-bed wing. The minister will also know that in total, \$4 million was committed for the planning stage of that facility. So far, the people at St Peter's are waiting for the additional funding. They're not hearing from your bureaucrats. There's no response as to where the balance of the funds are coming from. I'd like to ask why you could find time to make a \$16-million announcement in this swing seat when you're apparently giving instructions that politics is more important than following through on an existing commitment to the people at St Peter's Hospital. Could you comment on that for us?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The member's stunningly ridiculous assertion aside, I'm very pleased to take the issue under advisement and look into it. With respect to the announcement on Hamilton Mountain I made the other day with respect to a \$16-million investment toward a capital project that has been pending since 1999 to improve services for people in our province with very serious mental health challenges, I really think he ought to question the political motive that is involved in his question.

Mr Klees: First, I will gladly accept the minister's undertaking to look into this matter, because all of the paperwork is there. It has been there for months. There has been no response. While this other project may well

be an appropriate project, and appropriate that you would announce it, what is incredibly frustrating for the people at St Peter's is that all the work has been there, the approvals are there and you, sir, have failed to respond. If you didn't give instructions to your bureaucrats that politics is more important than following through on this commitment, I would ask that you stand in your place now and give us the commitment that without further ado this money will flow to St Peter's Hospital. Will you do that?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The member on one hand accuses me of having manipulated a file and caused queue-jumping, and on the other hand, on an issue that I've indicated I'm not fully aware of, asks that I stand in my place and make a funding commitment. That's not the way I operate. Furthermore, on the point, two days ago in Hamilton I had a face-to-face discussion with the CEO of St Peter's. He didn't raise the issue with me. He has my personal e-mail address, which I well know because he sends me e-mails from time to time. So perhaps it's your source at St Peter's who is playing a bit of politics with this issue. It certainly isn't this Minister of Health and this government.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): My question is for the Minister of Education. Earlier this week the Lakehead District School Board received a consultant's report that made specific recommendations related to long-term accommodation needs in our public schools in and around Thunder Bay. The report called for the closure of many schools over the next few years as a result of our declining population in Thunder Bay and the dramatically reduced need for student spaces in our system. Although I believe that most people in our community recognize the need for adjustments based on that reality, the report still came as quite a shock to many of us. Minister, have you had a chance to thoroughly review the report, and if so, can you tell us what your reaction is to the report?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I know that both the member and his accompanying seat-mate for Thunder Bay are, like all of his community, concerned about the report that has come forward. What I can say is that the report is completely based on the old rules. It is based on rules that, for example, don't have a special regard for the academic well-being of students as the first and foremost placement, that are based on the square footage and that won't provide new accommodation wherever it's required in an area unless something is closed down somewhere else. So I would say it's important that people understand that this report does not take into account the directions of this government. It is based on old guidelines. It doesn't take into account the kind of future that we hope to build for children. I would certainly want the people of Thunder Bay to know this is a certain kind of future, but much of this is probably going to be avoided, in the sense that there are new

guidelines and a new outlook coming in terms of how we want to regard schools in the future.

1510

Mr Gravelle: I know that all of us in the community want to understand better how the process will unfold. Certainly there seems to be general agreement that in order for us to provide an improved program delivery to all our students, some schools may have to be closed and some new ones may have to be built. I'd like to get your thoughts on that particular statement.

More specifically, what I would ask you is for your advice. What would be your advice to the Lakehead board and the parents and students who need to know how or how quickly this process will unfold?

Hon Mr Kennedy: I thank again the member for his responsible question, in terms of looking at the future. It is very important that communities, especially those that have suffered some population reduction, have an idea. Will those facilities be there for them in the future and how will they work? Our policy was to seek a one-year moratorium so boards could have the opportunity to look at their needs for the next number of years.

This report may contain information that the board can use, but it is based on a different premise than the one that we're bringing to bear. There will be new guidelines. There will be lower class sizes, for example, which this report takes note of, but does not incorporate into its analysis. There will be an effort to keep 16- and 17-year-olds in school, and to actually create a different kind of role for public education there. All of that will have an impact on facilities.

I would say that the board should look forward to the announcements that come with, and following, the budget, and then use this information not as the absolute destination, but rather to recalibrate it based on how we're going to make sure that those kids get the best education now and into the future.

SAFE DRINKING WATER LEGISLATION

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. You've said that regulation 170 is flawed and under review. So one would have hoped that your ministry staff would have contracted trailer park owners, rural communities, faith communities and homeowners who are implicated by the regulation to advise that the July 1 deadline is off and implementation of the regulation on hold until your government finally decides what it's going to do.

But last week, your communications adviser told the Sudbury Star, "Although it is 'fair to say' recommendations will be made to amend the regulation before the deadline, homeowners should still comply."

How can you possibly expect people to comply with a regulation that's under review? How can you possibly force people to spend tens of thousands of dollars on new systems that may not be required?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): This government places safe water as a priority

for all of the people of Ontario. We are very aware of all the problems that are connected to regulation 170. I expect, within the next week or so, to be able to make an announcement that will address, I believe, the issues that have been raised by the honourable member.

Ms Martel: If I might, you need to make a statement now, because this is a really serious issue in northern and rural Ontario. I have an owner of a small trailer park who has already started eviction processes because she can't afford to pay for the upgrades. I have 14 owners in a co-op in Skead who have come to me to say they can't afford the cost of a new drilled well in order to comply.

You've said the regulation is flawed, that it's under review, and your staff have said that there will probably be changes. It's unfair to tell people to still comply under these circumstances.

Will you stand in your place today and announce that there is a moratorium on the deadline, a moratorium on any further implementation, until you can stand and tell people exactly what the contents of the new regulation are and what the requirements will be?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: This government takes the responsibility of implementing policies to protect source water very seriously. We are moving as quickly as we can, but we need to make sure that when we do go forward, we get it right. I think the problem that we have seen with regulation 170 is that the previous government did not take the time to consider the impacts that the regulation would have across Ontario.

We are moving as expeditiously as we can. I've indicated it will be a matter of days before an announcement will be made, but we want to ensure, on a go-forward basis, that we have a very solid plan that will assist the people of the province of Ontario, and that they can access clean, safe drinking water.

REPORT ON BOXING

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I'm afraid I'm going to have to interrupt the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. Believe it or not, I have a question for you, Minister.

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Is this about beer, Bob?

Mr Runciman: This has nothing to do with beer, but this is an issue I've raised with the minister and with two of his predecessors as well. It has to do with a report that was completed a number of years ago on the status of professional boxing in Ontario. It also dealt with improving the health of amateur boxing in Ontario to ensure we could put very qualified and capable individuals into the Olympics in the future. That report, for reasons unknown to me, has never been released.

A number of the recommendations deal with tax matters. With the budget on the horizon, Minister, could you commit to releasing that report as soon as possible so we could have public input and reaction?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I do appreciate the honourable member's

interest in the issue. I have asked my ministry officials for a copy of the report and expect I'll get it probably Monday or Tuesday, and will be pleased to send it to the member.

Mr Runciman: I've got it in my hand; you don't have to send it.

Mr Eves: Why don't you give it to him, then?

Mr Runciman: I'll send it over to him; that's not a bad idea. No, I'll get a copy for him.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Broken promise. Another broken promise.

Mr Runciman: It's a delayed promise.

There were two outstanding Ontarians involved in this review. Jim Hunt, a very respected sports author, columnist and commentator, and Ralph Lean, whom many of us in this chamber know, spent months on this and interviewed over 45 witnesses who contributed to this.

I'm asking the minister, if he's not prepared to release this publicly, does he have any difficulty with the opposition releasing it so that at least we can have some public input, some public reaction, prior to the Minister of Finance tabling his budget on May 18? Is there anything wrong with that?

Hon Mr Watson: It's a little ironic that the honourable member commissioned the report and asked two previous Conservative ministers to release it and they wouldn't release it. They didn't act on it. I was quite prepared. I don't consider the document a secret document. I think it's quite relevant that anyone who wants to look at it can have access to it. The taxpayers paid for the report. I appreciate the honourable member's interest in the issue, and I'm glad that the McGuinty government and a Liberal Minister of Consumer and Business Services are acting on a request from a Conservative member of Parliament.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a question to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. On April 8, you answered a question in the House about your views on senior executives from the cigarette companies attending the 2004 tobacco control conference. You stated that you sent a letter to the conference organizing committee encouraging them "to deregister tobacco industry representatives and I would ask that you fill the same spot with youth who are committed to the fight against smoking."

The conference took place yesterday, and some tobacco companies are saying that their exclusion was not fair. Minister, how do you respond to the charges that this publicly funded conference was not balanced?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I found it rather interesting, when I was presented with the fact that the previous government had dictated that, in exchange for their funding for the Ontario tobacco control conference, the place where the province-wide strategy to combat tobacco in our society

was to be developed, big tobacco had to have representation there. That struck me as a little bit odd, so I took the action of sending a letter to the conference organizers and suggesting not only that they deregister big tobacco but make the same number of spots available to young people in this province, who I believe need to be at the heart of the strategy and the fight to deal with tobacco cessation in our province. I was there yesterday and very pleased to see there was a stronger representation among young people and one particularly strong group from Cardinal Carter school in Aurora, who impressed me with their intensity for this battle, which is essential to the quality of health in Ontario.

1520

Mr Leal: We've been aware of the problems with tobacco for a long time in this province and in this country. Tobacco packages have the strongest labelling, most tobacco ads are banned, and strict age limits for the purchase of tobacco are in place. Yet, young people are still getting addicted to the substance. Some feel there's no hope but I feel that there is hope. I want to do my share. On behalf of all MPPs in this House, what can we do to help the cause?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The message that I attempted to send on behalf of the government yesterday is that 2004 is the time when the government of Ontario rejoins in a meaningful way the battle to help people get off cigarettes, to prevent people from smoking in the first place. I've had the opportunity to applaud the work of a previous health minister, Ruth Grier. When she was the Minister of Health in this province, there was no question about where the province of Ontario stood.

What can members do? We've got a lot of work to do on this file. The strategy that we'll be employing will require assistance in a variety of ways. I think the single largest thing we can do to win this battle is to reach out and find those opportunities to engage youth, not just to speak to them but to empower them, to give them the tools and resources to make sure that their voice is first and foremost in this struggle. After all, this is a struggle about their lives. Of all persons who smoke in this province, 50% are likely to die from a tobacco-related illness.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. Happy birthday, by the way. This week you introduced the first reading of Bill 73. The act refers to specific weights, heights and ages of children while in transit. Obviously it will take considerable resources from the policing community to enforce your legislation.

Can you inform the House as to what consultation took place between your office and the police services of Ontario. In particular, can you name the police agencies you consulted with to draft this legislation.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First, I need to correct that it's not my birthday today.

I'm really delighted to answer this question. The legislation that I introduced is about saving lives. It's based on solid research that the leading cause of death in children between the ages of one and nine is accidents.

Mr Dunlop: Did you talk to the police?

Hon Mr Takhar: Yes, I'm going to get there. As a result, we have introduced legislation that makes a lot of sense. It will save lives. I have talked to the police forces and they're very supportive of this legislation.

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to know what police forces you actually talked to. Bill 73 calls on the owners of cars to be fined as well as the drivers involved in infractions against school buses while the lights are flashing. I'd like a straight answer on this particular question. Will you be using photo radar to enforce your legislation in school zones?

Hon Mr Takhar: Photo radar is not in my legislation.

PETITIONS

TEACHER'S STATUS

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario College of Teachers issued—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. While members are leaving the assembly, could I ask them to be a bit quieter?

Mr Tascona: "Whereas the Ontario College of Teachers issued an interim certificate of qualification in 1999, valid for six years, to Ms Gabriella Bator, after she supplied all of the required documentation, including a letter of good standing from the Minister of Education in Hungary, her country of origin; and

"Whereas Ms Bator exceeds the requirements outlined by the Simcoe Muskoka District Catholic School Board and the Ontario Ministry of Education; and

"Whereas Ms Bator has proven to be an exceptional teacher, appreciated and respected by her colleagues, administration, parents, community and students; and

"Whereas Ms Bator has been removed from her grade 1 teaching position at Pope John Paul II elementary school in Barrie, Ontario, by the Ontario College of Teachers due to insufficient time to get additional documentation from Hungary required to renew her teaching certificate in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and the Minister of Education to intervene immediately on behalf of Ms Bator, reversing the decision of the Ontario College of Teachers, thereby allowing her to complete the academic year as a grade 1 teacher to the end of June 2004."

I support the petition and affix my signature.

PENSION PLANS

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stelpipe Ltd and Welland Pipe Ltd are currently operating under the protection of the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA), as part of the restructuring process being undertaken by Stelco Inc; and

"Whereas there is a significant unfunded liability in the Stelpipe and Welland Pipe pension plans for hourly employees; and

"Whereas there will be a significant negative impact on the pensions of both active employees and retirees in the event of a windup of these pension plans; and

"Whereas the pension benefits guarantee fund (PBGF) does not protect the entire amount of accrued pension benefits; and

"Whereas the PBGF may not have sufficient assets to provide such protection;

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

"(1) to amend the provisions of the PBGF in order that it provides complete coverage and protection for the accrued pension benefits of all pension plan members;

"(2) to amend the financing provisions for the PBGF in order to ensure that sufficient funds are available to provide for the complete protection of all accrued pension benefits;

"(3) to take interim action as required in order to provide immediate protection of the accrued pension benefits of both active employees and retirees of Stelpipe and Welland Pipe."

It is signed by thousands, and I affix my signature as well. Jen the page will be delivering it to the Clerk.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): In regard to the motion this morning in private members' public business, I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly from some members of the Peel Multicultural Council.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I certainly agree with this petition. I am going to sign it, and Joseph will bring it.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): 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 Speaker of the Legislative Assembly criticized the actions of the Conservative Party and is now running as a candidate for the federal Liberal Party; and

“Whereas the budget should be beyond reproach and should not be presented by a member of executive council who has any perceived or real conflict;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to ensure the budget is not read by a finance minister that is under investigation by Ontario Securities Commission, the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or any other law enforcement agency.”

I have affixed my signature because I’m in complete agreement with this petition.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a very short petition, which is signed by over 1,000 residents of Davenport. It reads as follows:

“Whereas seniors and other qualified patients require the continued provision of physiotherapy services through schedule 5 clinics to promote recovery from medical conditions and continued mobility and good health;

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

“The patients of schedule 5 physiotherapy clinics request the continued support of the Parliament of Ontario for provision of OHIP-covered physiotherapy treatment to qualified seniors and others in need of these vital health care procedures.”

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

1530

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the equity in education tax credit seeks to restore equity and parental choice to Ontario’s education system;

“Whereas the equity in education tax credit allows those from lower-income homes to have the same opportunities as other students;

“Whereas families who choose to send their children to independent schools have to pay twice for their children’s education;

“Whereas the majority of families who benefit from the equity in education tax credit come from lower- or middle-class families;

“Whereas the United Nations has called on the government of Ontario to remedy the inequity in the education system;

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

“To allow the equity in education tax credit to continue to be the law of the land in Ontario, and allow lower- and middle-income parents the privilege to send their children to independent schools if they so choose.”

This is signed by many people in my riding.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): To the Ontario provincial Legislature:

“Because the minimum wage has been frozen at \$6.85 since 1995, despite increases to the cost of living; and

“Because a full-time worker earning the current minimum wage in a large city is almost \$5,904 below the poverty line, and to reach the poverty line would need an hourly wage of at least \$10 an hour; and

“Because the minimum wage should provide people with an adequate standard of living;

“We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the minimum wage to at least the poverty line—that means \$10 an hour—and index it to the cost of living.”

I support this petition.

ONTARIO POWER GENERATION AND HYDRO ONE

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

“Whereas lucrative contracts totalling \$5.6 million were awarded for various jobs at Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation by the previous Conservative government;

“Whereas these contracts were awarded not based on the principles of merit but on the practice of patronage;

"Whereas the amount of money paid out in these contracts to these friends of the Conservative Party was excessive and explains why Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation are in such poor fiscal shape;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly to order a public inquiry into how these contracts were awarded and what measures can be taken to ensure such abuse of the public purse doesn't reoccur."

I agree with the petition and I affix my signature to it.

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario signed by in excess of 2,500 of my constituents:

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

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

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

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

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

I affix my signature to the petition as I agree with it.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario sent to me by Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus. The petition reads:

"Re: the recent announcement by the province of Ontario's Liberal government that it is considering eliminating 'rich seniors' from the Ontario drug benefit plan.

"This possible policy is part of a range of cost reductions the government is contemplating as it tries to erase an estimated \$5.6-billion deficit and balance next year's budget. But, in this case, on the backs of Ontario's seniors.

"These early cost-cutting actions are reminiscent of the previous government's policies which Dalton McGuinty was most vocal in denouncing and which led most citizens of Ontario to vote Liberal and turf out a government so insensitive to individuals. Seniors especially do not deserve to be treated so inhumanely, particularly in areas of health care. In any event, what is the definition of a rich senior?"

"Clearly such action will add to the health care system costs as many seniors cut back on their prescribed

medications because they can't afford to take them. Anyway, seniors already pay the first \$100 prescriptions after the age of 65 plus up to \$6.11 per prescription. Low-income seniors pay \$2 per prescription. Most seniors after retirement are on fixed incomes. Often they are no longer covered by former employer-paid benefits such as health insurance. Unforeseen illness and inherent costs could be disastrous because retired seniors have no income options to cover health care expenses over extended periods of time.

"You'd better think about this, Mr McGuinty. The seniors who supported you so overwhelmingly in the most recent election would turn against you en masse should you implement this most insensitive and inefficient measure and curtail universal prescription payments."

This is signed by hundreds of folks down from the Niagara Centre riding. I'm giving it to Sammy the page to deliver to the Clerk, and I have affixed my signature as well.

OPTOMETRISTS

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

"Whereas the last funding agreement between the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ontario Association of Optometrists expired March 31, 2000; and

"Whereas the optometric fees for OHIP-insured services remain unchanged since 1989; and

"Whereas the lack of any fee increase for 15 years has created a crisis situation for optometrists; and

"Whereas fees for OHIP services do not provide for fair or reasonable compensation for the professional services of optometrists in that they no longer cover the costs of providing eye examinations; and

"Whereas it is in the best interests of patients and the government to have a new funding agreement for insured services that will ensure the most vulnerable members of society are able to receive the eye care they need;

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

"That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care resume negotiations immediately with the OAO and appoint a mediator to help with the negotiation process in order to ensure that the optometrists can continue to provide quality eye care services to patients in Ontario."

I'll be happy to sign the petition as well.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Petitions? The member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I recognize the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: You have to excuse me for bringing this up, but I did get up the second time. You did not go in rotation, so if you could kindly recognize me, it would be great.

The Speaker: I recognized this member first.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

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

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

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

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

I support the petition and affix my signature.

TTC RIGHT-OF-WAY

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): This is a very important petition signed by many residents on St Clair Avenue. It is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and to the Minister of the Environment against a dedicated TTC right-of-way on St Clair Avenue West.

“Whereas an environmental assessment is underway on St Clair Avenue West to study potential transit improvements, including the possibility of installing a dedicated TTC right-of-way;

“Whereas the consultation process so far has been in bad faith, top-down and rushed, which has disappointed and angered the local community almost entirely, and not been up to any acceptable public standards;

“Whereas comments by the chair and the members of the Toronto Transit Commission have made it clear that there is a predetermined outcome to the environmental assessment process, regardless of the objections of the local community;

“Whereas a dedicated right-of-way would restrict left-turn access to neighbourhood streets north and south of St Clair Avenue, and a barrier down the centre of St Clair would force the vast majority of residents to make U-turns and go further out of their way just to get home or go to work;

“Whereas a dedicated right-of-way would force significantly more traffic on to our local streets;

“Whereas safety must be a high priority for any alternative selected and, according to the ambulance and fire department staff, they don’t like to work with right-of-ways;

“Whereas a right-of-way would lead to the reduction or elimination of on-street parking on St Clair Avenue West;

“Whereas traffic bottlenecks at certain intersections and underpasses are already terrible, and certain chronically problematic intersections and underpasses could not stand to lose any one of the existing two lanes;

“Whereas the right-of-way will have substantial negative economic effects on local businesses;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly urge the Minister of the Environment to order a full environmental assessment on St Clair Avenue West, one that genuinely consults and takes into consideration the views and opinions of the local community.”

Since I agree, I put my name to it.

1540

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, May 10, in the afternoon, Bill 18; in the evening, Bill 26.

On Tuesday, May 11, in the afternoon, Bill 25; in the evening, Bill 26.

On Wednesday, May 12, in the afternoon we have an opposition day; in the evening we have Bill 26.

On Thursday, May 13, in the afternoon, Bill 31.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING ACT, 2003

LOI DE 2003 SUR LA PUBLICITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 26, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising / Projet de loi 25, Loi concernant la publicité gouvernementale.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Further debate? The member for Niagara Centre.

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Are you sure, Speaker?

The Speaker: The member for Niagara Centre.

Mr Kormos: OK. The last time I was recognized by the Speaker, I built up a head of steam and got going and then the Speaker changed his mind. The Speaker wanted to recognize somebody else halfway through my comments as I was reading a petition. I just wanted to make sure the Speaker was sure this time. The Speaker has every right to be equivocal from time to time, I suppose—maybe not “equivocal” but simply to change his mind. There’s nothing wrong with changing your mind, is there? Liberals do it every day. I suppose one of the nice things about being a Liberal is that you don’t always have to be a Liberal.

I want you to know that I’m wearing this red badge in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in CEP Local 87, those brave workers over at the Toronto Sun. We have three of them working here with us: Sister Christina

Blizzard, Sister Antonella Artuso and Brother Alan Findlay from the Toronto Sun Queen's Park press gallery—great journalists as well as great trade unionists; people who fight for the working class; people who know that workers' interests are diametrically opposed to the interests of bosses and capital; and workers who know that a means of redressing the inherent imbalance in power between working people, working women and men, the working class and the capitalist class, is to form trade unions and fight the bosses. Our sisters and brothers at the Toronto Sun in CEP Local 87 are doing exactly that. They're fighting for a first contract. As we all know, especially since the Tory attacks on labour relations here in this province, first contracts have become harder and harder to get.

I am loath to even contemplate that the Sun would ever consider a lockout. I say this to the Toronto Sun: Let them try locking out those members of CEP Local 87. There won't be a Toronto Sun coin box anywhere near a unionized workplace that will have a lifespan of more than—

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: Far be it from me to understand what would happen to them, but I would not want to be the insurance carrier for the Toronto Sun in terms of those coin boxes near unionized workplaces, because working women and men are going to stand together in solidarity. Workers are going to stand in solidarity with CEP Local 87 members who work at the Toronto Sun.

Today it was a fight to win the right to wear these badges. Here are these Toronto Sun workers in their workplace—this is their workplace here. Do you understand what I'm saying? Right here at Queen's Park is their workplace. No boss would ever be allowed to tell a worker at any point during a contract negotiation, or once a contract has been negotiated, that they could or couldn't wear a button, a badge, identifying themselves as a union member, identifying solidarity with each other, identifying their goals in terms of what the union contract is all about. Here it is. The button reads very clearly, "Underpaid, Understaffed, Underappreciated."

I say to the workers at the Toronto Sun that we in the New Democratic Party stand with them firmly, shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, in solidarity.

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): You're not the only one, Peter.

Mr Kormos: Mr Ruprecht says I'm not the only one. I want Mr Ruprecht to stand up after I finish my 30 minutes of comments and use part of his 20 minutes to express his unwavering support for the workers at the Toronto Sun, and for all unionized workers.

He perhaps could stand up and tell us how he has been fighting in caucus for the right of all workers to belong to trade unions, including the right of agricultural workers to belong to trade unions. Perhaps Mr Ruprecht would stand up when I'm finished and express his firm, personal commitment to anti-scab legislation here in Ontario. Perhaps Mr Ruprecht would stand up and denounce McGuinty as somebody who campaigns like a New

Democrat but governs like a Tory. Perhaps Mr Ruprecht would stand up for true Liberal principles and condemn a party that has turned its back on working women and men; condemn a party that has turned its back on the lowest paid workers in this province; condemn a party that has turned its back on the issue of workplace health and safety. Perhaps Mr Ruprecht, when I'm finished, will stand up and take his place here in this Legislature, his modest 20 minutes, and condemn his caucus and his party for not having advanced the interests of agricultural workers.

Mr Ruprecht: I will never interrupt you again.

Mr Kormos: Mr Ruprecht says he'll never interrupt me again. I suspect if that's a commitment, it's only good for today. I don't consider him bound to it, because quite frankly when he interrupts me, it's just so delicious. We have so much fun.

Don't think for a minute that Bill 25 is going to put an end to government excess. I was very fortunate, and I'm very grateful to the staff in the minister's office. I personally expressed my gratitude to Minister Phillips for the staff that came in and talked to me.

There were, as I recall it—I think I mentioned this before—seven staff in the room. I should tell you this, because I was a little embarrassed—truly, I was—because the briefing was, I think, for 11:30. I rushed in there but I was late anyway. I ran into a classroom of kids from Jordan and their teachers. I knew some of the kids, parents and teachers, some of the folks. They were standing on the main stairway, and I was later and later for the briefing. I finally got to the briefing and I realized, my goodness, I was the only one getting the briefing on that day, and there was at least half a million dollars in salaries sitting in the room waiting. I was embarrassed. I truly apologize for making at least half a million dollars in staff wait.

Two of them are political staff, though. You see, the reason political staff go to these briefings is they take notes because they monitor the bureaucratic staff. They do. They go to the briefings and sort of keep notes, because there are certain things that the bureaucratic staff are disinclined to want to answer. It's sort of like one of those Johnnie Cochran moments, where you ask a question and all of a sudden one of the political staffers will—Ms Churley knows all about this because she's seen—

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): What's this?

Mr Kormos: In the briefings. I was expressing gratitude for Mr Phillips' staff for the briefing, because it was both bureaucratic staff and political staff. There were two political staffers there. There was at least half a million dollars of staff in the room. It was a very pleasant briefing. They were smart and clever people and I enjoyed the exchange and the dialogue.

Ms Churley: Often more than the ministers.

Mr Kormos: Yes. That's why they do the briefing, not the minister. So why is it that the minister makes more money than any of them? Isn't that strange?

They're the ones who do all the work, right? You guys sitting behind the Speaker, you're the guys who do all the work.

It's sort of like the Toronto Sun. It's the journalists and the press people who do all the work, and yet it's the Godfreys who make all the money, right? They're the ones who go home with all the cheese. It just isn't fair, is it? That's why Toronto Sun workers have formed and organized themselves into a collective bargaining unit, a union. That's why they formed Local 87 of the CEP. That's why they are now on the cusp of winning their first contract, and that's why New Democrats are wearing these buttons, in solidarity with our sisters and brothers at the Toronto Sun, three of whom we work with on a daily basis here at Queen's Park.

I suggest that the Sun would be ill-advised to not negotiate a settlement with these workers. Far be it from me to pass judgment on these things, but it seems to me that the newspaper business is a little precarious in Toronto right now. You've got some stiff competition, and even though the Sun—because the Liberals here at Queen's Park refuse to enact anti-scab legislation, because at the end of the day, of course, the Liberals are in bed with the bosses; there's no question about that. Does Cortellucci ring a bell? It was funny—you know the Cortellucci donations to the Conservatives? On the one hand, they're donations and I suppose in some respects they're tax deductions or, if they're done personally, they're tax creditable, so the taxpayer subsidizes it. Nobody is talking about buying anybody; maybe renting them for a while. So we're not talking about the Cortelluccis buying the government, just renting the government. But the Liberals were up in arms. The Liberals were indignant. The Liberals were outraged at the prospect of the Cortelluccis owning or merely renting the Tories. Yet when the Liberals got into power they had no qualms whatsoever about crawling into the king-sized bed that accommodates that ménage à trois. So there you've got the Cortellucci corporation lying in this mattress of greenbacks and rolling in the dough, so to speak, with a Liberal government on one arm and a Conservative government on the other. They, quite frankly, don't care which government they happen to have at the moment. It turns into a virtual orgy of corrupt—

Ms Churley: Now you're being provocative.

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Mr Kormos: Well, it is. It's an orgy of potential corruption.

I just find it interesting that the same partner that was anathema in the eyes of the Liberals when it was partnered with the Tories, the Cortellucci corporations, now becomes the dance mate, is doing the shimmy like sister Kate with Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals.

Ms Churley: Now you're mixing your metaphors.

Mr Kormos: Yes, but I was reading this wonderful novel about Robert Johnson and Delta blues singers, and it brought to mind the song.

Don't think for a minute Bill 25 isn't going to accommodate the most repugnant and ham-fisted expenditure of

taxpayers' dollars by this government to advance their partisan interests. In speaking, somebody already—and thank goodness they footnoted their comments and gave me credit for the observations about the Mack truck loophole. When I worked in the copper mines up in northern BC many years ago, I worked on Mack trucks and also Electrohauls. Do you know what an Electrohaul is? It's a truck with a diesel engine that generates electricity, and there are electric motors in each wheel. Electric motors, as you well know, generate far more torque than an internal combustion motor does. So these huge Electrohauls—I'll talk to Hansard folks later about the spelling, although I suspect they can do a quick Internet search; it's exactly "haul," as in hauling something. With these huge Electrohauls, when you go underneath, for instance to service the engine and to change the oil, you don't have to put it on a hoist, because you literally walk underneath. You reach up to undo the drain plug on the oil pan on the diesel engine that runs the generator. That's the only internal combustion; it runs the generators that provide electricity to the electric motors in the four wheels. These trucks are huge. I mean, they are huge. An Electrohaul inside this chamber wouldn't occupy the whole chamber, I'm not going to pretend that, but it would dwarf the chamber. There's no two ways about it.

Let me show you the loophole in Bill 25. If you want to come with me to one of the obvious—let's take a look at section 6, standards. Subsection 6(1), standards that an item is required to meet, subparagraph 5: "It must not be a primary objective of the item to foster a positive impression."

I asked the staff who were briefing me—I said, "Well, that's interesting." It seemed you exercised some choices about the language there. Do you understand what I'm saying? You could have said it must not be "an objective" of the published material to foster a positive impression of the governing party, in which case, if any of its objectives included literally painting the lily when it comes to the Liberals—and there's a lot of paint that's going to be required at the end of the day, because that lily is pretty rusty and tarnished. It's going to require Tremclad; it's going to require that aluminium paint that you paint over rusty things.

If it's a secondary objective, quite frankly, it's entirely OK. Do you understand what I'm saying? The government is making this grand announcement: "This will end the abuse of taxpayers' dollars for the purpose of government advertising." Hooey. Bull feathers, as they say down in Niagara Centre. On the contrary, it will accommodate every single objective—you see, one of the interesting things is that the Liberals are not that different from their predecessors, the Tories. We are increasingly hard pressed to make the distinction, except, I suppose, that the Tories in many respects were far more candid about their malice toward so many sectors, so many communities out there in the broader community.

The Tories would mug the people of Ontario, would roll them, would take them down an alley, beat the crap out of them and not pretend that the victim, the people of

Ontario, should enjoy it. The Liberals will mug the people of Ontario, take them down the alley, beat the crap out of them and then sort of expect the people of Ontario to still like them. Do you understand? It's a mugging with a smile. It's a mugging with, "Here's the calling card. Let's do this again soon. Have your people call my people and we could do this again."

That single phrase "the primary objective," as compared to "an objective"—the most protective stance would be to say it must be "the sole objective." Clearly, if the standard were the sole objective, every piece of literature that was ever published, every newspaper ad, every magazine ad, every radio ad, every television ad, every glossy insert in every high-priced magazine—Architectural Digest, Time, Maclean's and Harper's and all that sort of stuff—and in the tabloids—Tab and Midnight and National Inquirer—you know the ads that government is inclined to put in those kinds of publications. If it were "the sole objective," then every ad could be designed to be government propaganda.

But what the government has done, very cleverly: it must not be "the primary objective." So if it's a clearly identifiable objective that the ad is government propaganda, but it's not the primary objective, the government is scot-free. The government has literally walked away from any indictment. The government finds itself with a "get out of jail free" card each and every time—there you go—if it's "the primary objective."

Do you know what's interesting? They also specifically talk about prohibitions against using ministers' or the Premier's visage, his—

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Image.

Mr Kormos: —image. The fact is, right now, the Premier's image is not very marketable. Nobody wants the Premier's image.

Mr Baird: What is it like in Hamilton East?

Mr Kormos: That's why, in Hamilton East, people are saying, "Let's clear the shrubbery here. Let's force our way through this thicket," looking for Dalton. He's not to be found. He's a nowhere man. Dalton is off somewhere else, not by accident, not by virtue of an agenda that was somehow fixed, etched in stone weeks or months ago, but by design, regardless of how feckless it is on the part of the Liberals.

I was down there last Sunday with Andrea Horwath, and I'm going down there Saturday morning. What an incredibly impressive woman. She is one effective advocate.

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Mr Baird: Dalton McGuinty's second-worst nightmare.

Mr Kormos: Andrea Horwath is bright, capable and has a broad range of knowledge. It just blew me away.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: No, she did. Because I go to knock, knock, knock on the door, "Hi, folks, I'm here with"—and people say, "I know Andrea. She's wonderful." I'm saying, "Look, friend, if you've got any more like

Andrea here in Hamilton, please tell me who they are; please, if you've got any more like Andrea."

You see, the incredibly important thing is that—I mean, I feel very blessed. All of our caucus does that Andrea is running as a New Democrat, that she is a New Democrat. But you know, she'd be a credit to this Legislature by virtue of her incredible set of skills, her commitment, her passion, her drive and her talent, regardless. That's why people of all political stripes are voting for her. It's been a long time since I've met anybody as persuasive as Andrea Horwath.

The other interesting thing is all this business about high-priced polling, and I know the government is doing it all the time. The reason I know is because people who get polled, who get telephoned, call me and tell me they got polled and what the spin was. But you don't need any polling to know that the issue is broken promises, because you don't have to ask questions. I don't know why you guys are paying money for pollsters. Just get out of your limos and drop in to the coffee shop—well, not at the coffee shop, because they're probably still mad at you out of fear of having their coffee and doughnut taxed. Right?

Mr Baird: That doesn't affect them because they drink lattes at Starbucks.

Mr Kormos: You've got to get into the roll-your-sleeves-up kinds of coffee shops. You've got to have that Buick Park Avenue, the Lincoln limousine, the Chrysler New Yorker landau double-parked and get into a real coffee shop. But again, don't let them know you're a Liberal; least of all, don't let them know you're a Liberal member of the Legislature, because those people are still reeling from the prospect of you guys taxing their coffee and doughnuts.

There are some seniors, God bless them, who go to these places where you've got the bottomless cup, where you can drink coffee all day. I can't. If I have coffee after 9 in the morning—9 in the morning is my cut-off. As a matter of fact, if I'm in Welland, I'm drinking coffee and then I get in the car at 6:30 or so, you know what the problem is. I get to Doug's Dip, right, and you talk about the prospect of an accident; well, there's almost an accident. I acknowledge that. That's when you've got the traffic jam and it really turns into knuckle-biting, white-knuckle turf after you've had four or five coffees in the morning down in Welland.

This bill isn't going to end government advertising. This bill is not going to end government abuse of taxpayers' dollars. As a matter of fact, you know the stuff that filled our blue boxes over the course of the last two years—you should know; you guys were printing it: the glossy, high-priced stuff.

Do you know what one of my biggest problems is with this? I don't think it works that well. Seriously, it didn't work for the Tories. They spent a fortune on glossy advertising and it didn't work. Why? I suspect that folks did the same thing with it as I did: They fed the blue box. As a matter of fact, I've got one of those old houses with the big window, and then the wood door, and then the

little mail slot, and inside the door is the blue box. So the postperson comes—I saw her this morning. I happened to be leaving the house because I was coming up here. I went down there this morning for a funeral. Mr Silvio Tonigussi died, not that old, either. I actually took the mail and, having the blue box there—so all this Tory stuff is going to the blue box. That's what taxpayers should be most outraged about. It's not only an abusive exploitation of hard-working taxpayers; it's a stupid expenditure of money. But this government is going to do it anyways because it has become habitual. This is like the—

Mr Baird: What about that broadcasting in Buffalo?

Mr Kormos: Yes. Governments are addicted.

Mr Baird: The crack cocaine of—

Mr Kormos: Yes. I'm getting to the crack cocaine but I wanted to build up to it. Please.

Mr Baird: I'm trying to help.

Mr Kormos: You're trying to help.

What is this bill then? If it isn't going to create a perfect—the problem is, it's not enforceable. There's nothing in the bill that says the government can't produce that crap. Nothing. It says that the auditor, or his or her designee, can say, "No, this doesn't pass muster," but it doesn't then say, "and that means the government can't publish it," nor is there any consequence.

Mr Baird: No fine?

Mr Kormos: Nor is there any consequence. It's unenforceable.

Mr Baird: They'll pay fines. We know that. If they break the law—

Mr Kormos: Please, Mr Baird, are you referring to this little bit of spin yesterday? Please don't do that to these people. Be a little more generous of spirit. Are you referring to their acknowledgement that they're going to forfeit a chunk of their cabinet minister's salary for not complying with—

Mr Baird: They all got \$27,000 pay increases anyway.

Mr Kormos: Do you know that phrase "A licence to steal"? Some people have been referring to that as a licence to lay down where nobody has ever laid before. People have been referring to that as a licence to—when you get on the mattress and pull the covers up and you're prone on your back, when you lie down. Do you know what I mean? People are saying the cabinet ministers' acknowledgement that they may have to forfeit salaries is a licence to l-i-e. It has a nice ring to it. When I thought about it—

Interjection: What does l-i-e spell?

Mr Kormos: I'm sorry. There's a heckler who now is going to be in Hansard, because I've responded to him.

Interjection: What does l-i-e spell?

Mr Kormos: By gosh, the heckler just did it again. He interrupted me. Instead of saying, "Interjection," by having responded to him, his actual words will now be in Hansard. I've known the heckler for a number of years. One thing I do know is he's a good speller.

Interjection: Is it "lie"? Is that what you're saying?

Mr Kormos: If you lie with dogs, you get fleas. The heckler has done it again. We have skated so close to the edge. We've been on our hands and knees and peered into the abyss, but we haven't fallen off. If we had, the Speaker would have been on his feet. The Speaker would have admonished me. The Speaker would have torn a strip off me. I could well have been reduced to just a shaking, quivering shell of what I was, as a result of the Speaker's glare. The fear of the Speaker's wrath is keeping me in line. I guess for some people, it's being respected; for other people, it's being feared. I'm not afraid to tell you, Speaker, that you are doing a stellar job.

New Democrats aren't eager to see the Liberals, who run all the way to their PR machine—this is fluff. I'll tell you what: If you don't think it's fluff, take it to committee and let external people audit it. Let them dissect it.

Look, I've only pointed out the one. I've pointed out the Mack truck. As a matter of fact, we've moved on to the Electrohaul. Electrohauls are bigger than Mack trucks. Electrohauls are big, big trucks. It's the Electrohaul loophole; that is, the only time the publication of an ad is offensive is if "the primary objective" is to promote the government. If it's a secondary objective, it's fine. It's not only fine, it's cool, it's OK, it's A-OK, it's kosher. If a secondary or tertiary objective is to promote the government or vilify another political party, then it passes muster.

The people who drafted this are very smart. I met them. They're smart cookies. They're grossly underpaid, but they're smart cookies. They knew exactly what they were doing. I admire that kind of shrewd approach to legislative drafting, but I deplore this government for trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the people of Ontario. I deplore this government for saying anything it had to and anything it could—and it did—to get elected, and then breaking promise after promise after promise after promise, breaking promise after promise after promise, to the point where you do that word association stuff, you know, sort of like the literary Rorschach thing, and you say: Liberal—broke a promise; broke a promise—Liberal; Dalton McGuinty—broke his promise. Who breaks promises? Dalton McGuinty.

Mr Baird: Liar?

Mr Kormos: Wait, wait. Please. Don't try to take me down with you, Baird.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Joseph N. Tascona): The member from Nepean-Carleton, can you just let the member speak? We'll hear him in his own words.

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Mr Kormos: I say to you, Mr Baird, you lie with dogs, you get fleas. You want to lie, you go ahead and lie. I say to Mr McGuinty, you lie with dogs, you get fleas. You want to lie? You go lie with dogs, you get fleas. Mr McGuinty lie? Yes. Dalton McGuinty lie? Yes. You lie with dogs, you get fleas.

This bill is fluff. This bill doesn't warrant any serious debate. This bill is a joke. It is an offensive joke. It's a mockery.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I can almost say I enjoyed the half hour, and the part I enjoyed most is that it's now after 4 on Thursday and, in a few more hours, we can get on to constituency business.

I do want to thank the member, though, from Niagara Centre for taking the valuable time offered by the ministry and ministerial staff for the extensive and thorough briefing. Obviously, he was paying close attention, because he's found a number of nuances that really don't exist, but he's managed to identify some single-word nuances and interpret them in a way that suits his particular needs, but not necessarily the needs of the people of Ontario.

I think, though, the briefings that occurred included, as he said, both the bureaucratic ministry staff from MBS and the political staff from the minister's office. Clearly, there was a need for a translator, and thus the minister's staff, so the member from Niagara Centre would effectively understand the intent of the bill. I'm glad to see that he spent that time. Unfortunately for the opposition, although an invitation had been extended for the official opposition to have a member or a critic at that briefing or another briefing, they didn't really find that that was going to be necessary, and thus I'm waiting on the balance of the debate. We've had some of it in second reading. We can talk again about some of the issues and repeat some of those kinds of things. It could have been cleared up at a briefing of that nature, but they were obviously extremely busy at that point in time.

There are a number of matters that have been raised, and I expect we're going to talk about them again over the coming hours and days—things like the Topical issue, the In House OPS newsletter that really is a staff document. I'm sure that we'll discuss colour schemes, and the member across from Nepean-Carleton at some point will be on his feet again wanting to deal with that matter and we'll have the opportunity to talk about that some more.

So there are a number of matters in the legislation that we look forward to continuing the debate on.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to rise to say a few words on the comments from the member from Welland. I had an opportunity last night to sit on one of the talk shows with Mr Kormos, a very interesting character to debate on a talk show. I'll be speaking to Bill 25 myself in a few moments, and I look forward to it, but he brings forth some good points.

This bill really doesn't mean an awful lot at this point. It's colourful. It's a new government type of bill. You know, you think you're going to clean up some old corruption or something like that and that you're the fresh start. Unfortunately, that won't happen. I've already seen some of your documents, and the fact that you don't tender some of your programs or some of your consultants, already means you're already off on the wrong foot. But certainly, it's one of those warm and cozy bills at this point. We don't really know what it means exactly, other than, apparently, according to Mr Phillips, it's a special bill to Mr McGuinity.

I would have thought that at this time the Premier would have wanted to concentrate on more important topics, such as health care. I understand he wants to be the Premier who leads Canadians in health care, but I haven't seen him do that. He's more concentrated on—worried about—this piece of legislation right now.

There's a lot of time to chat here, but again, I appreciate the comments from Mr Kormos and look forward to further debate.

Mr Baird: Sister Marilyn standing up.

Ms Churley: Sister Marilyn standing up for her brothers and sisters at the Sun, CEP local 87. I'm proud to be wearing this button in support of them today. I notice some of the other members—John Baird, the member for Nepean-Carleton is wearing one today. But I have to get on to my comments here.

My friend from Niagara talked about some of the loopholes in this bill, and he pointed out the major, biggest loophole in this, and that is the secondary objective of this bill, which means that whatever the first objective or the primary objective is, OK, that falls under it, but then, if the secondary objective, under that—

Mr Baird: I think Mike Harris wrote this bill.

Ms Churley: You would think Mike Harris wrote this bill, said the member for Nepean-Carleton.

It can sneak in as a secondary objective. That is a major loophole in this bill, so that's why it's not worth the paper it's printed on.

I know the government is trying to keep a promise that it made so it can hold this up. The Tories used to do that all the time too, John. Oh, the greatest names for bills and "We're doing what we said," but then when you read the fine print and looked at the loopholes in it, it was another story.

There's another loophole in here that I don't know whether my colleague pointed out or not. I considered it to be a loophole, and that is that the Provincial Auditor shall notify the head of the government office of the results of the review within the prescribed number of days after receiving an item for review. Guess what happens if they don't get to it, if they don't get to it within that prescribed time? Then, my assumption is from the bill—

Interjection.

Ms Churley: What if they have a backlog, which could happen—they get tied up with other things—and they don't meet the deadline? According to this bill, the Liberal Party can let her rip and just do whatever they had in mind in the first place anyway.

So those are two major loopholes in this bill which render it pretty ineffective.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I just want to make a few comments with regard to the comments made by the member from Niagara Centre. First of all, this is a promise delivered. We promised while we campaigned to eliminate partisan advertising. Bill 25 speaks to that and removes partisan advertising. For the past few years we've seen on television and heard on radio commercials that had the Premier or a minister

speaking. It was very partisan. This bill says you can't do that any more, and I strongly support this bill.

Oftentimes we hear the opposition saying, "The Liberals haven't delivered on a single promise." Well, this is another promise delivered, along with minimum wage, along with freezing auto insurance within an hour of coming into office. The list goes on and on. We hired water inspectors and meat inspectors. We froze tuition, and so many other promises were delivered.

The member for Niagara Centre, in his remarks, spoke about the Toronto Sun and the labour situation there. I just want to tie some of my comments into that.

This new bill, if passed, would prevent us from putting ads that featured a picture of the Premier or any other minister in the Toronto Sun if it was done in a partisan way. It would be subject to review by the auditor. It also covers billboards, television ads and radio ads. It's quite strong, and it's quite simple and straightforward. I'm proud to support it. I think it's something that's long overdue and will save the taxpayers millions of dollars.

1620

The Acting Speaker: Response?

Mr Kormos: That's what I've been trying to tell you. Trust me, you don't want to publish pictures of the Premier. Listen to what your pollsters are telling you and what the focus groups are telling you. Right now, Dalton McGuinty is the proverbial albatross. He is not a marketing feature. He is—who was that guy, Pee Wee Herman, right? He's about as valuable a marketing image as Pee Wee Herman, for Pete's sake. Dalton is not on the radar when it comes to personalities that you want to use to promote.

Speaking of broken promises, auto insurance—I just got a copy of a letter that a law firm, Heelis Williams Little & Almas, sent to my constituent Deborah Waldon. She was here yesterday to listen to our auto insurance question. She got ripped off by Co-operators down in St Catharines. Co-operators is a direct seller. Always avoid direct sellers. Any insurance agency with "state" as part of their name, avoid them like the plague. Avoid direct sellers in general because you don't have any broker to advocate for you. Do you understand what I'm saying?

But Vern Furtney ripped her off, and I know the whole story. So this woman—all the power to her—has been picketing. First Co-operators tried to have her busted. They called the police; they wanted her hauled away. The police laughed and said no, because they know what a rip-off scam auto insurance is in this province. They said, "We aren't going to bust her, for Pete's sake." The cop was probably saying, "I should bust you, the insurance broker, for fraud and theft vis-à-vis all those drivers and premium payers." Now they have a law firm threatening her with a lawsuit, so I think it's time. I think I'm going to join her on Saturday afternoon around noon or 12:30, maybe 1 o'clock, outside the Co-operators office and we'll set up a little picket line identifying Co-operators as the thieves that they are, along with every other private for-profit auto insurance company, along with their partners in crime, the Liberal government in the province of

Ontario, who promised lower premiums but delivered ongoing premium increases.

Mr Baird: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to cite two of the standing orders. In case you'd like to follow me, I'm on page 2, section 1 (b): "The purpose of these standing orders is to ensure that proceedings are conducted in a manner that respects the democratic rights of members ... to hold the government accountable for its policies." I go from page 2 to page 12, where 11(a) states, "The presence of at least 12 members of the House, including the Speaker, is necessary to constitute a meeting of the House."

Speaker, there's no member of the government in the House. There is no minister in the House, not a single member of the executive council of Ontario, not a member of the treasury branch—no one. There are 23 ministers, and how could we hold the government accountable today in this place, when there's no minister in the House? It's shameful. I wonder if you could rule on that, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order. The Chair recognizes the member from Scarborough Centre.

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): Just to let you know right at the beginning, I'll be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke North, so those who are listening who do get bored of my speech know that they have something very much in store for them in another 10 minutes. So they should stay tuned.

I'm pleased today to speak to the Government Advertising Act, 2003. It's an act to ban the use of partisan advertising by governments using taxpayer dollars. It's a bill that was put forward by our Chair of Management Board, the Honourable Gerry Phillips. I wouldn't normally do this in speaking to a bill, and it may sound almost like partisan puffery when I say this, but honestly it's not meant that way. It's actually very personal. I've known the member for Scarborough-Agincourt for many years, even prior to his time here in the Legislature. He's a member who spent 17 years of his life here in this Legislature. He's respected by all members of all sides of the House. He's respected by people right across this province. I say that because I'm proud, as a member from Scarborough, to call him somebody who very much has been—

Interjections.

Mr Duguid: It's a great place to be from, a great place to grow up and a place that's very, very proud of the member for Scarborough-Agincourt for all the great work he's done for this province.

This bill will be one of a number of items that I would say is going to be part of the legacy of Gerry Phillips. Mr Phillips has contributed a lot to this Legislature, a lot to this province. He has much more to contribute, but I know he takes a lot of pride in this particular bill because it's something that will change the way things are done. It's something that will contribute greatly to our efforts in terms of democratic renewal. It's groundbreaking legislation, something that I don't believe exists anywhere in the world right now, something I'm sure a lot of other

jurisdictions are going to look to and say, "We want to do things like this."

Don't take my word for it. There are many others out there who are saying that this is a good way to govern, a good route to go, a good way to start our democratic renewal process. Just look at what Professor Jonathan Rose has to say. Professor Rose is the author of a book called *Pictures In Our Heads*. He's a professor at Queens' University.

Mr Baird: He was my professor.

Mr Duguid: He was the professor of the member for Nepean-Carleton. I don't know if that speaks well of him or not, but having known this member for a very long time, it probably does. He graduated, I assume, as well. So that speaks very highly of the professor, the fact that he was able to get the member for Nepean-Carleton through.

Professor Rose had this to say about this bill: "I have argued for a long time that government advertising needs to be reviewed by some other appropriate agency or body, and that's how it's done in other countries as well. Ontario is following the lead of countries like Australia and Britain who have independent offices which review government advertising. The biggest problem with government advertising is the perception that it is masking partisan advertising."

I think it is vetted through an independent office like the Provincial Auditor. It not only makes the advertising seem more legitimate, but it eliminates the concern that there is any sort of political interference. This is a good way for us to proceed, a good way for us to get our democratic renewal efforts off to a good start.

Something the member for Scarborough-Agincourt said when he introduced this bill was, "We are setting high standards for ourselves because Ontarians want their hard-earned tax dollars used to serve them and improve critical services, instead of serving partisan purposes." This is extremely important, and frankly, it's almost exactly what we heard when we went out to the residents right across Ontario in our budget consultation process.

During that budget consultation process we heard a number of things. We heard that Ontarians told us they want the government to be accountable, ethical and transparent. We heard that Ontarians told us to be fair. They're willing to accept changes, but they want the most vulnerable in our society protected. They told us that they believe in conservation, that they're willing to pay the full cost of services to promote conservation of our resources. They told us as well that they value public services and want them improved, and that they're prepared to have us work to balance the budget over time, but whatever we do, don't gut those public services in an effort to try to balance the budget prematurely.

This is relevant to what we're doing here today. Ontarians told us they're willing to do their share, that they're willing to do their part, but they want to know that we're using their funds efficiently and effectively. I think that if they see partisan advertising out there, they'll know their taxpayer dollars are not being used to

deal with those core services they want to protect: health care, education, growing strong communities. This approach fits in very tightly with the McGuinty government, with all the things we heard during the recent budget consultations.

Another thing Mr Phillips said when he introduced this bill was, "Every dollar spent on self-serving partisan advertisements is a dollar less for our classrooms, our health care system and our water inspectors."

That's so true. I believe Ontarians recognize this. That's why, many months ago, they were absolutely outraged when they saw those Tory ads on TV, prior to the election, about how great our health care system was and what a wonderful job the previous government was doing in the area of health care. They knew the opposite was the case. People in the city of Toronto and across this province went through the SARS crisis at that time. They recognized that there was a shortage of resources. They recognized that proper attention was not being paid to taking into consideration the things that had to be done in our health care system to prevent these things from happening.

I was watching television last night, the Michael Coren show. I saw the members for Niagara Centre and Simcoe North on the show, and as well the member from Willowdale. They were all doing a fine job putting forward their positions. There was one caller I heard who really struck a chord. I don't know where he was from. He talked about just recently being diagnosed with a very serious cancer illness. He talked about having to wait potentially two to three months before he could access treatment. How would that individual feel if he looked at the television set tonight and saw us wasting our money on partisan political ads, money that could be going into the health care system to try to lessen those waits for procedures within the health care system?

1630

I think that's something we should be very proud of. We're trying to set the right priorities around this place. Partisan advertising is not going to be a top priority, and that's why we're moving very quickly to try to get accountability in the health care system. We know we can make a difference. We know we can make that health care system more relevant and more important. We know we can make that health care system better and improve the services that are being provided.

Earlier this morning I met with some members from TABIA, the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas. They're across Toronto—

Mr Baird: They said, "Thanks for raising our taxes."

Mr Duguid: They did want to talk to me about taxes. The other thing they wanted to make sure we were doing was spending their tax dollars wisely. They said they don't mind so much paying their fair share of taxes—that's exactly what they said to me—but they want to make sure the dollars are being spent wisely: people like John Kiru from TABIA, Lionel Miskin from Shanemark Management and Investments—the member for Scarbor-

ough Southwest would know him very well—and Alex Ling.

These are people who care very much about what we're doing. They feel it is important that we're very conscious with our taxpayers' dollars. They would see this partisan advertising as a waste of taxpayers' dollars. They would want us investing in our communities, investing in our health care system, investing in our education system, because they, like the people they represent, are working extremely hard in their communities to create a better quality of life, to create a better economic environment for their communities, and they're doing a very good job at it. They want government working with them in partnership. They want to make sure that what we're doing with their tax dollars is going toward the right things.

It's a pleasure for me to support this legislation. It's legislation that speaks very well to our efforts in terms of democratic renewal. It is something that years from now we can look back on and say it may well be a turning point in the way governments deal with the public, the way governments communicate. This doesn't mean we can't communicate the things that are important for people to know about. It doesn't mean we can't communicate to let people know the important initiatives that this government is taking. It means we can't communicate in a partisan way, the way the previous government did time and time again.

I don't blame the people for being outraged at that form of communication. I don't blame the people for rejecting the previous government for those efforts. I think that years from now this government will be respected for doing something that will very much put us forward in terms of our efforts at democratic renewal. I'll now pass it over to the member from Etobicoke North.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): To my honourable colleagues and, in addition, the MPP for Nepean-Carleton, and through you, Speaker, to the people of Ontario, it is a privilege, first of all, for me to speak in support of Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising. I would very much like to further and echo the remarks of my colleague the MPP for Scarborough Centre, Mr Brad Duguid.

What this bill envisions and encompasses is really at the heart of the democratic process. It's our public faith in democracy. It's the removal of this self-serving advertising, this partisan advertising that is essentially disguised as government information householders, which were even used to the point where the government of the day took on various groups, whether it was teachers or people in the health care sector, even unions, even the federal government. They really misused that whole capacity for partisan advertising. It was an abuse of privilege.

With this bill, we want to reintroduce a sense of transparency, accountability and fiscal responsibility. That's why we'll be engaging an independent auditor who will actually pre-screen these materials before general and wholesale distribution. That will invoke a standard of

ethics, prohibitions and really eliminate the self-congratulatory self-praise that seemed to be going on ad nauseam by the previous government.

Mr Baird: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to draw your attention to standing order 23, which calls upon you: "In debate, a member shall be called to order by the Speaker if he or she...."

"(h) Makes allegations against another member"—which this member just did.

"(i) Imputes false or unavowed motives to another member." This member is imputing a false motive to some members of the House.

"(j) Charges another member with uttering a deliberate falsehood."

I want you to consider this and call the member to order pursuant to the standing order. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. I never heard those, member. So continue—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker: Member, I am ruling. That's not a point of order. The member for Etobicoke North can proceed.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker, for that ruling. I would add that the MPP for Nepean-Carleton's rising on points of order on the decorum of this House is also slightly ironic and deserves even more applause.

The previous regime, for example, spray-painted all across Ontario, it seemed, the famous phrase "Tax dollars working for you," with the appended signature of the Premier of the day. In reality, that was tax dollars working for the PC Party.

The MPP from Simcoe North, for example, pleads with the government, "Why doesn't the Premier of this day actually spend the dollars on health care?" It's precisely for that fact, to eliminate the self-promotional, self-praising waste of money, to the tune of something on the order of about \$500 million over the entire mandate of the previous government that was wasted on this self-promotional advertising.

The MPP for Niagara Centre asked for independent commentary. Let's go it to. Here is an article from the Toronto Star titled "Slipping Propaganda Through the Loopholes." After the MPP for Niagara Centre finished his usual act of clowning, and I might say today laced, unusually for him, with a lot of soft pornographic references which, frankly, offended—

Mr Baird: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Again I refer you to sections 23(h) and (i). By accusing the member for Niagara Centre of engaging in pornographic acts in the course of his debate, he is making false allegations against the member for Niagara Centre. I, for one, will not stand by and watch the name and reputation of the member for Niagara Centre be besmirched in such a—

The Acting Speaker: I did not hear any of those.

Continue, member for Etobicoke North.

Mr Qaadri: I await the member's next point of order; perhaps third-time lucky.

In the Toronto Star, a Queen's University professor says, "I have argued for a long time that government

advertising needs to be reviewed by some other appropriate agency or body,” and that’s what we’re doing. He says, “The biggest problem with government advertising is the perception that it is masking partisan advertising.”

Let’s actually go to some samples of government advertising. Here is a brilliant ad. I commend the previous government for actually inducing, somehow—we’re not sure how—a legitimate smile in the previous Premier Mike Harris. The by-line in the Economist says, “Check out Mike Harris’s mug in an ad in a recent issue touting the glories of Ontario. We couldn’t help but wonder if the Premier is using this \$54,000 piece of puffery to get himself hitched to the corporate director gravy train. After all, he’s not going to be sticking around Queen’s Park for long. He’s barely there now.”

Let’s talk about some of the other householders on which were spent an individual cost of \$10 million—this particular householder, full of photographs of the previous cabinet members, including the ever-smiling Mike Harris with the perma-smile there.

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Another householder, essentially putting forth the Tory messaging, says, “Taxes must continue to come down so that more people can share in Ontario’s growing prosperity.” For \$10 million, this is what we got. “Please continue to let me know what’s on your mind, and have a great fall.”

Beyond that, here we have Mike Harris saying, “Ontario’s plan for smart growth recognizes that planning for the future means making some tough choices today.” Again, \$10 million to let us know what these choices were going to be. “Our plan is designed to protect jobs, keep families financially”—yes, sir?

The Acting Speaker: Please don’t refer to those props that you have out there.

Mr Qaadri: With respect, I will attempt to do so, sir.

The Acting Speaker: Just speak to the bill, please. I’ve asked you not to refer to that. Can you just speak to the bill, please.

Mr Qaadri: Yes, I will. I would like to refer to government advertising, both this government’s pledge for its future advertising and previous government advertising, which this bill particularly addresses. This is precisely what we’re attempting to outlaw.

For example, the previous government released an Ontario health update, which was really unbelievable for those of us working in the health care sector, talking about the reduction of waiting lists, the improvement of emergency services.

Here’s a slam at CUPE. There was a several-thousand-dollar ad placed in newspapers, “More Money for Nurses,” which was unbelievable if you happened to frequent any hospital in Ontario.

Here’s a slam on teachers.

The Acting Speaker: I already told you what to do with respect to those documents. I want to you speak to the bill.

Mr Qaadri: I’d be honoured to do so. With reference to these particular advertisements, materials, house-

holders, we in this government pledge, sir, that this government will not abuse the privilege, will not abuse the power of being the governing party and waste in total sum, as the previous government did, \$500 million, money, as the MPP from Scarborough Centre quite rightly pointed out, that should have been better spent on health care, on education, on building the foundations for tomorrow and laying the foundations for prosperity.

I would like to conclude by quoting Benjamin Disraeli, former Prime Minister of England, who said, “I repeat ... that all power is a trust”—including yours, Speaker—“that we are accountable for its exercise; that from the people and for the people all” power springs, and all power exists. It is for that reason that I have brought forth these many, many examples of previous government self-promotional, self-praising advertising and pledge that that day is now over.

Mr Dunlop: It’s warm in here. I’m kind of disappointed in some of the comments that were made in the last little while. We’re a peaceful group here and we don’t need to be accused of all these things.

I was very interested in the fact that he brought so many of the famous ON magazines out, or the brochures that we sent out to the citizens of Ontario. They were very, very informative. I had a lot of positive feedback on those documents. I’m glad the member today brought them forward to show.

I know, Mr Speaker, you didn’t want to allow them to be shown in the room, but the only thing I could find that would be in any way partisan would be the message from the Premier, and possibly a message from the Minister of Education.

Not too long ago I picked up a 1990 Ontario water regulations document, and do you know what? There was a message from, guess who?

Mr Baird: Jim Bradley.

Mr Dunlop: Jim Bradley. A picture, and a message from Jim Bradley on water regulations. I would call that—if the ON magazine is partisan advertising, I would call Jim Bradley’s document, in 1990, partisan advertising. It’s amazing how we forget where we were before and how we got here.

Now we’ve got all these perfectionists on the other side who are setting a new bar for politics, even though they’re all intertwined and there’s almost incest going on with the federal Liberals, and you know the sponsorship scandal. I guess that’s, what, a billion dollars now, another one of the boondoggles, and now they’re trying to get out of it. Quite frankly, I don’t think this message really went very far. I look forward to other comments and my future opportunity to debate here as well.

Ms Churley: I feel like I really have to stand up and defend the honour of my colleague from Niagara Centre here, because this debate has taken some pretty strange twists and turns this afternoon. Viewers might think we’re debating the Ontario Film Review Board or something, with some of the words that have been thrown around here today.

When we got into government in 1990—I'm going to do a little advertising here—some time after the member for Niagara Centre was Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, I became that minister. I remember that one of the first things I had to do—and I didn't know where this was all leading—was sign just one elevator licence with my very legible, schoolgirlish signature, the big loops, "Marilyn Churley," for the elevators, and the next thing I knew, my name was in every elevator in Ontario. In fact, there was a song. I don't know—

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Here we go again. Where am I going with this? I'll tell you, I don't know if you've heard the song. There's a song out about that called The Signature of Marilyn Churley, by Kurt Swinghammer. He's a local artist, a very good singer, and you can still look it up on the Web site. It's actually a very good song; it's a neat song. Everybody should go to that Web site and buy that CD, because it's a really good one.

Look, this bill before us today is an important bill. Unfortunately, it doesn't meet its objective. It's papering over the fact that they made a promise, and the Liberals are now appearing as though they're keeping it, but unfortunately, when you look at the loopholes that are in this bill, it really is not going to be able to do what you say you want to do today.

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I want to begin by congratulating my two colleagues the member from Scarborough Centre and the member from Etobicoke North for their very fine presentations on Bill 25, a bill which shows once again our willingness to move forward to keep our promises.

I think what's most interesting about Bill 25—and both of them touched on it—is that it's about a new era in politics. A lot of the old games that have been played in the past are over. And you know what? I'm not going to be partisan, because governments of all stripes have played them. We don't have the money and the resources, and I think the people of Ontario have sent that message to us here at Queen's Park and to the federal government as well.

We don't have the resources any more to play partisan games. The money that they give in their tax dollars has to be spent for what it's intended for. It has to be spent for education. It has to be spent for health care. To engage in this close-to-the-line, partisan, political advertising, standing up and telling the world how good you are, the voters of Ontario have no patience for it any more. I think both speakers pointed that out very clearly.

I want to take issue with the comment that was made by my friend here from Simcoe North. He said many people praised the advertising when the Conservatives were in government. I just want to tell you that during the campaign trail a number of people held up little pamphlets telling them how great their health care system was, how great their schools were, when they were faced with children in overcrowded classrooms, when they had relatives or friends waiting hours and hours in emergency rooms. They were offended by those documents. They

said to me at the door, "Why can't we take that money"—you know, it adds up to millions of dollars—"and use it to buy a new MRI or to relieve some of the stress in our school system?" These were the types of messages that I heard in the campaign, which is why I found this to be one of the most exciting commitments that we made, and I'm very pleased that we're living up to this promise in Bill 25.

1650

Mr Baird: I listened with great interest to the remarks by my two colleagues. One of them quoted something, a flyer or a blurb that went into an out-of-Ontario publication—"Why would the government want to waste money on that to publicize the head of government?" I would ask them why on page 4 of the bill does it give an exemption in section 6(2): "does not apply with respect to an item for which the primary target audience is located outside of Ontario?"

If Dalton McGuinty wants to run ads—we know Dalton McGuinty is already engaged in partisan advertising; he's on the front page with the big Ontario flag, the magazine—it's not called ON magazine; this one's called Topical. It's a magazine published by Gerry Phillips. It had his picture on the front of the next edition. Do you know what colour they used? They used exactly the same colour as the Liberal Party of Ontario. Pure coincidence. The public servant at the Management Board Secretariat said it was just a coincidence. So why is there this Mack truck loophole in this?

I have a question for Brad Duguid. I want to know: Does he stand by all the nice things that he said about John Tory? Does he stand by his endorsement of John Tory's leadership abilities? Does he stand by his fluffy comments about how great John Tory is? I want to know if he's going to stand with John Tory at the next election—

The Acting Speaker: Are you finished? OK. Response?

Mr Qadri: The National Post: The Tories have spent a good deal of money on advertising never before seen in this province—direct, unambiguous partisan advertising—

The Acting Speaker: Member, I want you to respond to the debate, please.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

Mr Baird: You're challenging the Chair. Take him out.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the Attorney General, if he wants to be recognized.

Hon Mr Bryant: Thank you, Speaker. A couple of things: It's standing order 24(vi)d. I think the interventions from the member for Nepean-Carleton are—

The Acting Speaker: Is this a point of order?

Hon Mr Bryant: Yes, it is.

Mr Baird: You're challenging the Chair.

Hon Mr Bryant: No, I'm not; I'm making the point of order. I think the member from Nepean-Carleton is violating that standing order as well as the Geneva Convention. Speaker, I'd like to say as well, while I'm on this point of order—

The Acting Speaker: Continue with the response.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me a point of privilege to actually complete my remarks, without hindrance from others, on Bill 25, An Act respecting government advertising.

I'd like to thank all of my honourable colleagues for their remarks. With this bill, we're looking to restore public faith in democracy, to remove the capacity for self-serving advertising, which I feel is an abuse of privilege, many examples of which I furnished for you, this House and the people of Ontario. It's a matter of restoring transparency, accountability and fiscal responsibility so that the taxpayer dollars, unlike previously advertised, are working for whom they should be working; that is, of course, the people of Ontario. That is the vision, the spirit and the embodiment of this particular bill.

Ms Churley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I hope you'll accept this as a point of order, because I really think it's important to this Legislature to have clarification, please, in terms of your ruling from the previous speaker when he was referring specifically to advertising, which in my understanding is the rationale for the government bringing forward this bill. So I think it's important to all members—

The Acting Speaker: It's not a point of order. We've moved on.

Mr Dunlop: I'm pleased today to join in this debate on Bill 25, the government advertising act.

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: Are we done?

I won't be supporting this bill. It's one of your warm and fuzzy pieces of legislation. It's a kind of motherhood thing for Mother Dalton over there.

I mentioned a little while ago, when I was doing one of my hits, about searching through some old documents. I came across the Ontario water regulations from 1990, and there was a picture of Jim Bradley with a nice, political message on it. I think everybody remembers. I think it was April 1990, and we know what happened in September 1990.

Mr Baird: Thrown out of office.

Mr Dunlop: Gone. Got rid of them.

This type of advertising, with messages from the Premier or one of the ministers: I guess one of the most obvious types—I guess you'd call it partisan advertising—are the actual signs that we put up on our highways or our construction projects across the province. In all fairness to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, when he gets this bill out, he will obviously have to pull down those signs. I expect it's likely we won't see any more of those types of signs in this term of government.

But there are enough loopholes in the bill, of course, that they could put them up at any time. Certainly by the

time the next election rolls around, if the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal is still the minister at that point, his name will be on the signs, the same as your family members' or Premier Peterson's name was on. Certainly Mr Rae's name was on signs.

I can remember—was it Ed Philips? Ed Philips was the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I believe, under the Rae government. We've seen all types of Ed Philips's signs. He was one of the first ministers under the Rae government who actually used the infrastructure program in conjunction with the federal government. Everywhere you went there were these Ed Philips signs stuck up, and they had some PRIDE programs.

Look, this has been going on for decades in Ontario. As a new government, seven months into power, we already have seen this pork-barrelling. We've seen, with the private consultants on their town hall meetings, this document—a couple of hundred thousand dollars untendered, as he spoke to 250 people on their advice to the citizens of Ontario on the budget. It clearly continues under Mr Dalton McGuinty, the Premier.

But sometimes I'm curious about what's wrong with some government advertising. I look across the room, and I don't know if people are interested tonight in hearing these sorts of comments. It's been a long week. I don't know how everybody else is feeling in here, but I find it's really getting warm in this building. I think from now on we're in for some difficult, hot days between now and the end of June in this Legislature, and I hope we can keep calm. I don't want you heckling me all the time and getting excited if I say anything. I just want you to keep calm, and we'll do our best to debate every bill possible.

But certainly there are all types of government advertising, and I don't know how you could possibly take that advertising away from the people. I think of something, for example, like Telehealth. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on Telehealth. Of course, that's included in your advertising.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Well, OK. But the next step you'll find is that you'll actually blame Telehealth and try to say that's partisan advertising because that's our program. We brought out that program, and we're very proud of Telehealth. We expanded it through the whole province. I believe that people in the province of Ontario should know the numbers for Telehealth.

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: Mr Peterson had nothing to do with Telehealth; you know that. The heckling that's going on over there—pretty soon you're going to be saying that Mr Peterson started the Taxpayer Protection Act. But Telehealth's a good example.

Second of all, things like all the information that we provided last year in a very, very difficult time for the citizens of Ontario around SARS. A lot of money went into that, first of all in warning people about the trouble with SARS, trying to indicate to people where they could get help etc and how to help the public health services.

But, certainly, I think it was important that the people of Ontario were actually notified about SARS.

Then I think we spent a lot of money—I didn't see the minister's name or the Premier's name on anything—thanking the health care professionals in the province of Ontario for the hard work and fine work they did in working with the SARS tragedy.

1700

Then we had the blackout. The blackout was a major issue. I know a lot of advertising went into that as we tried to work with the business community and the citizens of the province to make sure they would hold back on the amount of power they actually consumed over a few weeks so that we could get the power generation back up and working. I think that was needed. Of course, hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on that.

Then I think of things like the calendars we have on elder abuse. I don't know if you folks are going to continue on, but I think Mr Watson will likely continue on with the elder abuse catalogue. We went through literally thousands of those in our constituency, and my senior citizens really enjoyed getting those documents. They enjoyed having a calendar put aside, with all the information that was provided through all the different ministries. Of course, that would be considered government advertising. I don't know if it's going to be included or not now.

I think what we're really referring to here is something like ON Magazine, that we sent out a few copies of throughout the years. Some people didn't like it. I particularly thought that it was very, very informative. Maybe some people were offended with the picture of the Premier on it or the picture of the Minister of Education. But the loopholes are still in the legislation to allow that type of document to be printed today and to be distributed. One of Mr McGuinty's high priorities is this particular piece of legislation, because, as I said earlier, he's certainly not concerned about health care. As we look forward to the future in the province of Ontario, I think we will see governments continue to advertise.

Let's talk about their cousins for a moment, the federal Liberals. Certainly one of the documents that I was most proud of—and I would call this partisan advertising—was Mike Harris's leadership in his fight for more funding from the federal health care system. I think we'll all remember the ads that were put on TV. I think they used pills. The system used to be under Brian Mulroney, and it was 18 pills, where the province of Ontario contributed 82 pills. Then the new ads showed that, under the current system with Mr Chrétien, and now Mr Martin—because they gutted health care as we know it—13 pills versus 87 pills. It showed the decrease in the amount of funding, and they used the example of pills. Of course, Mike Harris led all Canadian premiers in the fight for additional health care funding from the Chrétien-Martin government, which had gutted the health care system here in our province, as well as other provinces across our country.

Now I understand the new Premier has decided now that he's going to be the health care fighter. This is the same guy who wouldn't sign the document asking for full funding from the federal government. The leader of the New Democratic Party, Howard Hampton, signed it, Mike Harris, the Premier of Ontario, signed it on behalf of the government, but Dalton McGuinty refused to sign it. He didn't want to fight for health care dollars. He was happy to see Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin gut the health care system here in Ontario, without adequate funding.

I was really extremely disappointed in Dalton McGuinty in the direction he took on that. If there's one time I thought that everybody in this House should have stood together to fight for fair health care dollars in Ontario, it was that day, and Dalton McGuinty refused to sign the document.

Now, Mr McGuinty didn't have any problems signing the Taxpayer Protection Act back on September 11. He made it a really good photo op; basically it was a publicity stunt, almost a charade, as he signed the Taxpayer Protection Act, desperate for votes in this province. He promised everybody and every little organization in every little community he visited what they wanted to hear, and it's coming back to haunt him.

It came up in the debate last night on the talk show that Mr Kormos and Mr Zimmer and I were on together. It's very clear that the people in the province of Ontario are very disappointed in the promises that Mr McGuinty has broken. I think we're going to see something next Thursday that will be extremely special. I think Mr McGuinty has got a real problem in the city of Hamilton. We're going to do our best to make sure a Liberal does not win that riding.

I have a number of things I could talk about here today. I'll continue on because I've got a meeting in a very short period of time.

I want to say that there are a number of other issues we should be concerned about with this legislation. One of them is the fact that—sorry, Mr Speaker, it's been a long day and a long week for me. I've got so many notes in front of me here and I'm trying to do the best—

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: I can tell you that we are working hard here in this House, and it's a long weekend ahead of us. This is Mother's Day weekend and Mother's Day is really special around our place. There are no appointments, no meetings and no events. Mother's Day is a day I spend with my mother and my wife.

I haven't got a lot more to say right now on this bill. I look forward to further debate on this. I appreciate the fact that I've been able to say this much today.

I'm going to give up my time at this time. We have another couple of speakers coming up a little while later. But I want to stress the fact that this particular legislation has a number of loopholes. It's warm and fuzzy. It's one of the Liberals' funny little promises that they probably will keep. For the time being, it has enough loopholes to make you kind of look good there. You will probably look fine as the bill is passed, but the loopholes will open

up over the next two years, then the third and then fourth year, and we'll see all kinds of partisan advertising. We'll be watching very carefully. We'll watch how many more town hall budget-style meetings you have without tendering for the consultants who handle it. As well, we'll watch very carefully the document that's coming out on May 18. That's the document that should balance the budget. Mr McGuinty signed the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): It will be here in the Legislature, not at Magna.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, it will be here in the Legislature. It will be right here. I understand that Mr McGuinty will have his budget right here in the Legislature. The problem is what's in the budget. That's what the problem is going to be. I'm going to look forward to seeing the kind of money you've promised and how many of the groups that you've—for example, autistic children, long-term-care facilities. There are all kinds of people who are expecting more money, the docs, the hospitals, certainly our education system. Dr Rozanski's recommendations have to be implemented this time around.

What I see is \$1.3 billion in class capping and that's a mistake in itself. I don't know what you're going to do with class capping. My little granddaughter is in a class of 21 in a beautiful little school called Marchmount Public School about seven miles west of Orillia. What's going to happen to her class? She's in junior K. Is she going to have to be taken away to another school so the class can be capped at 20, or is she going to be in a class of 11 and 10, so we'll have one teacher teaching 10 students and one 11? I just can't figure it out. No one in the school—all the parents are wondering. These are the kinds of questions we're getting in our constituency office as well now.

There are some real concerns around some of these announcements. The biggest concern is the moratorium. I can't believe it. The other day I couldn't believe what happened here. After that big announcement with Minister Kennedy saying there would be a one-year moratorium on the closure of schools, already—

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I sat in this House as you repeatedly interrupted our member when he was reading about advertising and talking about advertising. We have a member across here who is not on topic whatsoever. He has to be on topic, as you ordered our member to be on topic. I hope you rule for him to be on topic, Bill 25, not talking about moratoriums, talking about advertising—

The Acting Speaker: I've heard you, member. Take your seat. The Chair recognizes the member for Simcoe North. You've heard the other member: Try to keep on topic.

1710

Mr Dunlop: I'm glad he talked about the moratorium on school closures. Do you know why? Because in every announcement they make, they put this big bulletin board behind them. It's called wallpaper, Dalton McGuinty-

coloured wallpaper. All the money you spend on the bloody announcements—every day I see one. That's partisan advertising. He has no business standing there opening his mouth.

Mr Colle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Again, unparliamentary language by the member for Simcoe North. He's talking about children being in school. Children are watching this program and I hope he withdraws that unparliamentary remark he just made.

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order. You may continue, member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you. I'm going back to the partisan advertising, and here we're seeing it with the wallpaper on every bloody announcement you're making.

Mr Colle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: What's your point of order now?

Mr Colle: Again, the member for Simcoe North is using unparliamentary language not fit for the pages and not fit for the people—

The Acting Speaker: That's not a point of order. Member for Simcoe North, continue.

Mr Colle: He should withdraw that kind of language.

The Acting Speaker: You've already dealt with your point of order. I don't want to hear it again.

Mr Dunlop: This is coming from the man who swore at people during the election campaign, standing there on the streets of Toronto, swearing at people.

Mr Colle: Not in this Legislature.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, you were standing, swearing in the streets and that's why you're not in cabinet.

The Acting Speaker: Member for Simcoe North, withdraw that. I'm not going to have that.

Mr Dunlop: I'll withdraw the point that he—because he doesn't deserve to be in cabinet.

The Acting Speaker: Just debate the bill, OK?

Mr Dunlop: I go back to the partisan advertising on the wallpaper that all the ministers are using now, because that's a very important point. I think that should be withdrawn. I hope that the Provincial Auditor will look at that because it's Liberal colours, Liberal documents behind them, Liberal phrases. Quite frankly, it's partisan advertising.

Hon Mr Bryant: You're advertising right now. Those are NDP colours.

Mr Dunlop: Thank you. The fact of the matter is, they've got to practise what they preach. Quite frankly, the wallpaper they use in all their announcements is partisan advertising. So we'll be asking the Provincial Auditor to look at that, because it's clearly against the intention of this particular piece of legislation, which of course hasn't been passed yet. But it will be passed, I expect, by this House and that's when we'll start complaining about the partisan advertising that we see on the wallpaper you're using in all your announcements.

With that, it's a pleasure to be here today. I didn't mean for everybody to get excited because I said a few words. It's important that these types of things get brought out. But the fact of the matter is, this bill is filled

with loopholes. We won't be supporting it. I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: I listened carefully to what the member had to say. I also listened to the interjections and I consider entirely appropriate the efforts on the part of Mr Colle to bring some order and decorum to this House. I come in here every day and I know the rules and, if I have to live by the rules, why shouldn't other people have to live by the rules?

The standing orders are there for a purpose. I call upon all members, please, read those standing orders and then let them guide you as you live your parliamentary life here at Queen's Park. We'll all be better for it. If only we all played by the same rules, this could be a place of harmony and joy, rather than a place of discord. We could abolish the adversary air that permeates here. If we all followed the rules—I could just see it—we'd be burning incense and holding hands, chanting, "Ohm, ohm." We could levitate Queen's Park if only this place weren't so adversary, if only we all sang from the same hymnbook, if only we all agreed with each other. If only. Just imagine, we could bring peace and harmony to this place. When I see the interventions by well-meaning members who I know have a far different vision of the Legislature than, obviously, some of the members do, I encourage them to carry on with that noble, noble goal.

Mr Colle: It's interesting to note that the member from Simcoe North was talking about, at times, Bill 25. I recall, in Eglinton-Lawrence, I would almost welcome the government ads on TV because every time the Mike Harris ads and Ernie Eves ads were on TV, people would call me and say, "This is an awful waste of taxpayer dollars; I'm not voting for those Tories." Remember those pamphlets that would come like clockwork every month in the door? Again, the phones would ring off the hook, and all the voters would say, "What a waste of taxpayer dollars," so it was great to see those come in the door. The only negative was, obviously, this was the same government that was complaining it had no money for schools, no money for hospitals, yet they had \$500 million for partisan advertising.

Now, all of a sudden, we were doing what we said we were going to do. We made a commitment to listen to the people and get rid of that partisan advertising. It wasn't just the normal partisan advertising. It was unprecedented. It was \$500 million of advertising, spent by a government that claimed not to have any money. That's why this Bill 25 is necessary—because the people of Ontario don't want governments to spend their hard-earned money on self-promotion, like the previous government did under Ernie Eves and Mike Harris. They said, "Stop it." Bill 25 stops that gross expenditure of tax dollars.

It would be interesting to see how they vote. Do they vote for more, or do they vote to stop the gross—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, The Chair recognizes the minister.

Hon Mr Caplan: I wanted to comment on the member's comments because I think he should know that upon the swearing in of the cabinet and upon assuming the position in public infrastructure, one of the first questions I had to deal with was what to do with the proliferation of signs out on the highways. I instructed my officials immediately just to take them down without any fanfare because it is not a reasonable use, to promote a minister or a government. To provide information about what to do for health care services, as the member talked about, is an absolutely legitimate use; how to interface with a government department, how to get information, how to get help and assistance, but not to promote a political partisan ad. That's what the spirit of this bill is about.

I know that we have a lot of partisanship in here, as it should be. We have a lot of different views. I know my friend from Niagara Centre talked somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but I think we could all agree that we are sent here, to this place, to represent not our own interests, but the interests of the people who sent us here, that we should be spending our dollars to help and assist them. That's what this bill is all about. To remove what has been an abusive process, an abuse of taxpayers' dollars for partisan political purposes, takes a measure of leadership because it is awfully tempting to want to do that, but it's a measure of leadership to say no. We are going to do the right thing, which is to spend taxpayers' dollars wisely. I hope that the members opposite will support this bill because that's precisely what it does.

1720

The Acting Speaker: In response, the Chair recognizes the member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: I appreciate the comments from the members for Eglinton-Lawrence, Niagara Centre and Don Valley East. I saw on the news this morning the Premier, Dalton McGuinty, with the Dalai Lama, so maybe that's our first step. Maybe he'll come in here and give us a lesson on Monday and follow up with what the member for Niagara Centre was saying.

I take your comments seriously on that. I understand about the line, because I know when you start up that path, it can expand. If we set the bar at a certain level and no one moves from that, maybe that will be the bar that's left there for the future. Unfortunately the bill does have loopholes that would allow you to move forward with it.

Hon Mr Caplan: Introduce amendments.

Mr Dunlop: We probably will be introducing amendments on this if that's the intent of the bill. There are so many ways you can promote partisan advertising while you're a member of the government. Even as a member of the opposition, you're always—that's our job here. We're politicians. We belong to different parties, and certainly part of our job is to try to get re-elected. We do the best we can, and you'll do the best you can.

As you get closer to the next election—you're more confident right now and you certainly have the right to be. You guys have won a large majority government. You're in a position right now where you can be kind of

confident for a couple of years, but after a couple of years things may change. We'll watch very carefully the direction the government goes in with this piece of legislation.

I thank the members for their comments this afternoon. I appreciate it's been a long, difficult week here in the House. I look forward to—

Interjection.

Mr Dunlop: It's been difficult for me.

Mr Kormos: It's not been difficult. It's been a four-day week.

Mr Dunlop: I've been here at 6:30 every morning. I'm usually here until 11 o'clock at night. So it's been a long week for me. Thank you so much for this opportunity. I look forward to further debate.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): I'm very pleased to have a chance to speak about this legislation, and to share my time with my colleague from Perth-Middlesex. I want to spend my time talking a little bit about what this legislation really is about. Sometimes in the Legislature not a lot of factual information is provided. There's a lot of misinformation. Certainly it's a partisan place. But at its heart this legislation, I think, has a foundation of respect. That foundation is a respect for taxpayers' dollars, for the hard-earned money they give the government each and every year to spend on things that are important to them.

I know that when I had a chance to speak to my community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore about what they expected from a representative and what they expected from a government, it was very much that we would spend their dollars wisely, that we would give them value for their dollars.

The commitment we made during the campaign to ban partisan advertising was something that very much resonated with voters. Can you imagine? In my community, Wedgwood school had a gaping hole in the roof of the school. You're a parent who's being told there's not enough money to repair the roof on this school. There are many children in each of the classrooms. Yet at your door what you receive on a regular monthly basis is something that talks about how great the education system is, a very glossy brochure with pictures of the Premier and the cabinet minister talking about a real fictitious reality, about how great the education system is.

Similarly, I was talking to people in Mimico and Long Branch and all over my community about health care at the same time. We were fighting about the fact that many people in our community couldn't find family physicians, were on long waiting lists for assistance in health and home care, all those issues this government is actively working on right now. You would get a brochure at your door that would say, "The health care system is fantastic and it's all because of Mike Harris, Ernie Eves, Minister Clement," the many members of the former government.

You can understand, when you have had a chance to speak to people in the community, why they're cynical about government. They were certainly cynical because

they were being sold a bill of goods. They could see their tax dollars being wasted. Those brochures came in the door and they made them angry. They looked at them, they made them angry and they threw them in the recycling bin. Their money was wasted.

That cynicism and concern about getting value for tax dollars continues to this day. I had an opportunity to travel the province on behalf of the Premier and speak to people at the regional town halls. So many people are cynical about government wasting their money. I can agree. I understand why they're cynical, because frankly we've lived through many years of waste.

As a member of the public accounts committee, having an opportunity to examine other areas of government waste, we certainly see a history of disrespect for taxpayers' hard-earned dollars. We need to re-examine that. This government is taking leadership. This is the first step to say, "We're going to meet a commitment that we made, and we are not going to waste your hard-earned dollars on partisan advertising."

Certainly there's a lot of information that does need to be given to the people of this province. The people in Etobicoke-Lakeshore need to understand what information I'm making available to them as their MPP. So I want to just spend a minute talking about what this legislation is actually going to do.

What this proposed legislation is going to do is require the office of the Provincial Auditor—the same individual to whom we give the responsibility to determine and ensure that taxpayers get value for their tax dollars on public accounts—to review government advertising in advance. In so many instances when we've been sitting through our public accounts committee and had a chance to look at waste and misspent funds, we've said, "Wouldn't it have been nice if someone like the auditor had examined this before?" And that's what this legislation is going to do on the advertising front. The Provincial Auditor is going to review government advertising in advance. He's going to review ads that would appear on television, radio, billboards and in print, as well as printed material—that very same type of material that would have been distributed to households across Ontario by bulk mail—and he'll be the one—either he or his appointed designate, the Advertising Commissioner—who will determine whether it promotes partisan interests. That's the key fact. Absolutely, a government has a responsibility to inform the public, but they don't have the right to waste taxpayers' dollars on what would be partisan advertising, advertising that really should be paid for—and certainly in advance of the last election we saw the volume of information increasing in terms of the brochures advertising what the government was doing. It was advertising that was very partisan in its nature.

The advertising will have to meet certain standards under the proposed act. It must be reasonable in that it must "inform the public of current or proposed government policies, programs or services ..."—that information is legitimate; and "inform the public of their rights and responsibilities...." Clearly, your right to work in a safe

environment, your right to not be discriminated against—all of those are important things that the government does need to let people know about regarding their rights and, in return, also their responsibilities.

“To encourage or discourage specific social behaviour, in the public interest.” We had a very poignant moment recently in the Legislature when our colleague brought forward legislation in recognition of his son, to talk about the fact that we should advertise the consequences of fetal alcohol syndrome. That is something that discourages a certain type of behaviour, and that, again, is a legitimate role for the government to play.

“To promote Ontario”—tourism. We certainly know, after the SARS crisis in our province, that we need to help our tourism industry, and we need to promote, in our own communities, that it’s “a good place to live, work, invest, study or visit.”

It’s also going to be important in the proposed legislation that the government of Ontario states that it is paying for the advertisement, so that there’s not a misunderstanding about who is paying. If we believe it’s not partisan and we’re prepared to put our neck out and say, “This is important information that we’re going to deliver to the people in this province,” we’re going to say right on it that it is an advertisement paid for by the government.

“It must not include the name, voice or image of a member of the executive council or a member of the assembly.

“It must not be partisan.”

So clearly, it must not be in the Minister of Health’s riding that a big, glossy brochure comes out saying how great the minister is in achieving his various ends. We know he’ll be doing a good job. He can do his own work in his own community, but we’re not going to have taxpayers’ dollars.

There’s certainly a caveat in terms of the legislation. We’ve heard a lot about caveats and I want to talk about it. Advertising done on “an urgent matter affecting public health or safety,” public notices required by law, government of Ontario tenders and job advertisements will be exempt from the legislation. So it’s certainly well-thought-out legislation. There are strong and stringent rules that will be put in place.

What our new government is going to do is put the public interest first, give you value for your tax dollars and respect the hard-earned money that you give us to spend wisely in this province. The previous government wasted millions of taxpayers’ dollars on partisan, self-promotional government advertising. We said at the time it was wrong and inappropriate, and with this legislation we’re taking action to ensure that that does not happen any more.

1730

We’re committed to restoring public faith in government and the fact that governments are there to represent the people of their communities. Certainly we want to make government more accountable, transparent and fiscally responsible. Those are really important messages

that we heard loud and clear in advance of the election when we travelled across the province. When we talked about what individuals in Etobicoke or Oakville, or wherever they were, wanted to hear from the government and wanted to see in their budget, it was: accountable, transparent and fiscally responsible.

It’s easy to be a critic, and sometimes in this Legislature we don’t really have a debate about what the good and bad things are in legislation. We hear that there are a lot of bad things. It’s very easy to be a critic; it’s very difficult to take leadership and to take ground-breaking steps.

This government is taking leadership. This proposed legislation is believed to be the first of its kind in North America. It would ensure that government advertising is appropriate and fiscally responsible. That leadership is being demonstrated by a government that I’m very proud to be part of. It’s something that I know those in my community in Etobicoke-Lakeshore wanted to see and were supportive of in advance of the election. It’s a commitment that we’re making, and it’s a commitment that we’re keeping.

I’m very proud to be speaking to this legislation today and to be in support of it.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I hoped I could start with a brief indulgence. Earlier, one of my colleagues mentioned that one of the pages here was the third generation. I want to note that page Conner Hodes from Perth-Middlesex is the third son in his family to be a page in this place. Conner, we just want to appreciate the commitment of your family to this place.

Mr Kormos: His father or grandfather?

Mr Wilkinson: No, three sons. He’s number three.

Mr Kormos: Oh, three siblings.

Mr Wilkinson: Three siblings, yes. I’m one of four boys myself.

I’m proud to stand up and speak to Bill 25. Bill 25 has to do with choices, because that’s what we have here: choices in regard to money. How is the money raised from taxpayers and how is it distributed, not just back to taxpayers but to all Ontarians? There are people in this province who don’t pay taxes—people of small means; children don’t pay taxes. I’ve always felt that the government is supposed to be for all of the people, not just for the taxpayers. But it seems that we focus a lot of our attention on taxpayers, and I guess we should, because it’s all about choices, about the money that we take from people and how we distribute it back.

The question here is, should the government spend money to sell its message? I have a background in sales and in marketing and I know something about advertising. I know something about the fact that you need to make your message, and this bill has to do with marketing and advertising. What strikes me as odd is, is it acceptable for the government to spend the taxpayers’ money to promote itself in an obvious and partisan way? I say that because our party heard loudly and clearly, while we were forming our platform, that the good people of Ontario were sick and tired of having their

money wasted by a government that wanted to promote itself.

Where it really went over the line—it was almost like a tipping point. I remember driving down the 401, and there were always signs to say that the project was being done by the province of Ontario, usually in conjunction with the federal government. Do you remember, there used to be those blue signs? Maybe it was the colour—there was some comment earlier about the colour choices of government. There were those blue signs on the 400 series saying, “Your tax dollars at work. Premier Mike Harris.”

Do you know the thing that was really galling? When the former government decided to change leaders and Mr Harris decided it was time to get out of Dodge and when they decided to replace Mr Harris with Mr Eves, we actually paid those great public servants at the MTO to run around with little paintbrushes to all of those signs all across the 400-series highways of Ontario and, with a little can of paint, actually paint out “Premier Mike Harris” and paint in “Premier Ernie Eves.” Surely there are better things to spend the taxpayers’ money on, when we have challenges that we face so that our children will do better in school, when we have these lineups at hospitals—these problems that we have. Surely there are better things to spend the people’s money on. Are we talking about a little bit of money? No.

I was reading the Provincial Auditor’s reports, the last ones that were published prior to the last election. About three years before the last election the government spent about \$200 million or so on this type of advertising, and within two short years they were spending \$600 million on advertising promoting the government’s agenda.

It is important for the government to be able to speak to the people, and I think the bill takes that into account. The question is, should we have the shining mug of the Premier? Should we have the beautiful smile of all our cabinet ministers plastered on all these government pieces of advertising? I think that was the tipping point for so many people. I’m not a cabinet minister, and I don’t pretend that I ever will be a cabinet minister, but perhaps it happens something like this: The cabinet ministers had their staff come to them and say, “Minister, here’s a new advertising campaign for the ministry, and by the way, look at the top corner. Minister, there’s your picture.”

I tell the good people of Ontario that you really can’t get to this place without having a substantial ego. It’s probably the worst problem we have here, but it’s hard to have low self-esteem and get yourself elected. With all due respect to previous cabinet ministers, and this doesn’t really apply to our current cabinet ministers, but perhaps in the previous government civil servants were able to come and prepare these advertising campaigns that prominently featured the visage of the minister. The minister probably looked at that and said, “Boy, that’s a fine piece of advertising. I’m going to approve that.” Then, once that was approved, other things were approved.

It reminds me in the early years of the introduction of the Common Sense Revolution, as it was then called, of former Premier Harris. Mike Harris went on television to pitch the message, “Really, I’m going to cut your taxes. We’re going to hurt everybody but you, the person watching the ad, everybody but you. We’re not going to hurt you. We’re going to hurt all these other people—people on welfare; we’re going to hurt them.” He would go to them, and I remember the one where he was in a hockey arena: Mike Harris, just a regular hockey kind of guy. He used that as a backdrop to explain the government. Then I remember the other one where they had this kind of spider’s web of electrical connections showing, “Government is not very efficient. We’re going to yank all of that out and we’re just going to rewire it.”

But you know, if that’s the message, why did it require the Premier? Why was the government taking our taxpayers’ money to pitch that to us? I think it’s very simple to decide whether or not you should be in favour of this bill. I ask this simple question: Are any of the parties that are opposed to this bill honestly willing to go to the good taxpayers of Ontario and say, “You know what? Those Liberals kept their promise”—because we promised to do this—“and passed Bill 25. We”—the New Democratic Party or the Progressive Conservative Party—“think we need to repeal that bill because we think we should be able to take your tax dollars. We think we should be able to selflessly promote ourselves. We think if there’s a Premier who’s in our party, we should put our colour on it, we should put his or her picture on it and we should tell everybody what a good job we’re doing”?

If you’re doing a good job, do you really need to tell people? In business, that’s always the question. If you’re doing a good job, do you really need to tell people, “By the way, I’m doing a good job”? So here, when your case is somewhat iffy, it just strikes me that if we do this—what I understand is it’s international. I don’t think any democratic Legislature like ours has ever contemplated a piece of legislation that would ban partisan, government-paid advertising.

I have nothing against partisan advertising. If the Ontario Liberal Party wants to pay for an ad that features our leader, the honourable Premier, or our cabinet ministers, that’s absolutely fine; or the people who support us politically make donations and we buy advertising. There’s nothing wrong with that. The question is, should the taxpayer pay for it? Should money not be spent in our hospitals? Should money not be spent in our schools? Should environmental standards not be enforced? Should the people from the Ministry of Labour not investigate questions of impropriety? I don’t think so. I think that money needs to go there. I don’t think it needs to be going to these government ads.

1740

I challenge our opponents in this House to state today, on the record, that they are so vehemently opposed to Bill 25 that if they ever have the privilege of serving the good people of Ontario, that’s what they’re going to do,

they're going to repeal this bill and tell everybody straight up, "God, we think we should take your taxpayers' money and tell you what a wonderful job we're doing. As a matter of fact, we think we should spend not \$100 million, \$200 million, \$300 million, \$400 million, \$500 million, but \$600 million a year like we used to, and tell you what a wonderful job we're doing."

If we use that logical test, I challenge anybody in this House to actually stand in his or her place and vote against this bill. We have a chance to set a new and higher democratic standard for the whole world. There is no other jurisdiction that has come to this. To be fair, we've come to this because of the excesses of the previous government. If they hadn't tipped over the point, if they hadn't been so cynical about this process, if they hadn't been so plainly obvious, the regular person watching television, the person who opens up their mail, the person who reads their mail, wouldn't have said, "My God, I'm getting solicited by the people with my own money." That's why it's so offensive.

I'm hoping that all the members here will support Bill 25. I know that the members of my caucus, who are so happy to fulfill yet another election promise, are more than happy to do that. I urge all to support Bill 25. I challenge those who are opposed to it to stand in their place and tell the good people of Ontario that they plan to repeal this bill because they think they should be spending taxpayers' money selflessly promoting themselves.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I want to affirm a couple of the comments that have been made by my colleagues for Perth-Middlesex and Etobicoke-Lakeshore. First of all, this piece of legislation acknowledges the fact that governments must provide information to citizens. Governments must provide information on matters of public health, on urgent matters of public safety, on new laws. It's imperative, and there's nothing in this bill that would prohibit it. In fact, it makes it clear that that is what government is to do.

The bill, as my colleagues have said, really has been prompted by a government, particularly the previous government, that engaged in the dissemination of partisan, hollow advertising masquerading as information. That's really what my colleague from Etobicoke North was saying much earlier, that that's what prompted this legislation. So we're putting in place legislation that has prohibitions in it, that sets standards, and what we should be debating in this House with the opposition members is what the language of those standards should be.

As the member for Perth-Middlesex has said, there really isn't anybody who's going to argue that there shouldn't be some parameters around how governments can spend taxpayers' money on this kind of promotion of information. I have to say that in Don Valley West, when I was campaigning, this was one of the issues that was high on people's agendas in terms of irritation. People came to the door; they didn't like what they were getting through their door, and they were very happy to know that we were going to take a step that was going to change that, that we were going to be a confident, mature

government that didn't need to put the name of the Premier on road signs and could give people the information they need.

Mr Kormos: Listening to the comments, I was reflecting on what would be a genuinely non-partisan publication by the government. I was thinking if maybe the Minister of Public Safety were to produce a poster with Norm Gardner's image on it, saying, "Careful, man armed, known to shoot, not a particularly good shot, dangerous, in possession of 5,000 rounds of ammunition which he didn't pay for, has a sense of entitlement as a result of prestige jobs resulting from political connections and patronage appointments he's received such that he believes himself to be above the law."

He is a shooter. You know that. He shot the guy. Norm is not only a bad shot, he's not particularly bright. You've got to understand that, when you're trained in firearms, and police officers know this full well—

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: No, I'm talking about the sort of thing the government could publish that would be truly non-partisan and genuinely in the public interest.

So Norm shot the guy in the knee, and he tries to pretend, like in the cowboy movies—

Mr Colle: He shot him in the rear end, not the knee.

Mr Kormos: Well, he was aiming for the knee, and he got him in the butt.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: That's right. So Norm is a bad shot, and he's also—well, he's a thief. He stole the rounds of ammunition, and we're not sure that he's discharged all of them. And we also know he got the gun.

So if we're just trying to look at an example of a publication that would pass a true test—not the test in the bill, which is a very weak test—for a genuine non-partisan ad, I think I would endorse this government releasing a poster that should be on milk cartons, saying, "Norm Gardner. Be careful. This man is armed, dangerous and in possession of thousands of rounds of ammunition that he did not pay for, high-powered weapons that he had no intention of paying for, until he got caught, and now is going to take the taxpayer to court to try to hold on to a job that he should be fired from."

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Bill 25 is a bill that keeps government advertising about a government message, and not about a party message. I call Bill 25 the don't-even-think-about-it bill.

Government advertising wasn't always politically partisan. Government advertising began to become politically partisan because there was nothing wrong with it. You could get away with a politically partisan message.

So I'd like to talk about this bill not in terms of why we need to pass it, but what will happen once it is. This is a bill that reminds government members and those in cabinet that, as we get more and more involved with our jobs, there are some checks and balances, and your picture and your party message can't slide into your government message.

More importantly, Bill 25, once it's implemented, is a guide for staff, advertising agencies and creative types of what the boundaries are: What can you do? What can you not do? Bill 25 tells you what's OK. Bill 25 says, "This is how far you can go. This is where you cross the line." This set of independent checks and balances into how billions of dollars are all going to be spent is what's going to keep government advertising focused on a government message.

Government is about the responsible use of taxpayer resources. This is how to effect a sensible degree of responsibility into advertising. This is how to use advertising, which governments need. Governments need to have control over the content and the ability to repeat it. This is how to address legitimate public needs and separate government information from party politics. That's why Bill 25 is important. That's why I'm supporting it.

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I'm going to be speaking on this bill a little later on, so I'm probably going to keep my comments fairly short.

As I recall, growing up as a youth, the fishing regulations were something that I looked forward to every year. Quite frankly, it was something. I can remember Lyn McLeod's comments when she was the minister there. It was something to look forward to, to find out what that person who was leading the ministry was about. Now I don't see any of those comments there on behalf of the new minister. It's somewhat concerning that you don't get a sense of that, but that's your government's choice.

That's what this is all about. You're the government, and you'll come forward with your platforms. Quite frankly, if the people don't think they should spend money on those sorts of things, that it's not a priority—and we heard, from the last government and the previous government about how much everybody else spent on these issues—then just don't do it. Because we're going to have committee hearings on it. We've got it in the Legislature today. Just don't do it. Don't be moving ahead with things like this, when we could really be dealing with things such as health care and other aspects.

Thank you, and I look forward to my comments later.

The Acting Speaker: Response, the member for Perth-Middlesex.

Mr Wilkinson: I do want to thank my colleague the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for her comments, as we work together yet again on one of these bills. I always enjoy doing that. We had people who joined in on the debate, and I appreciate the comments, and I'm sure she does as well, from the member for Don Valley West, the member for Niagara Centre, my colleague from Mississauga West and also the member from Oshawa.

You know what I found interesting? I distinctly remember challenging the other parties to tell us whether or not they're willing to stand up, vote against this bill and go beyond that and say that in the next election, they will have a platform of repealing this bill. I didn't hear that. I heard the member from Niagara Centre talk about Norm Gardner. I don't remember Norm Gardner having

anything to do with this. The member from Oshawa spoke briefly on the issue, but I don't remember him taking up my challenge. I guess that kind of makes the point that if you're in Oshawa—one of the advantages of being from Perth-Middlesex is not really having to worry about Norm Gardner.

1750

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: We are. In my riding there are about 100,000 people, but we have at least half a million hogs—

Mr Kormos: And no Norm Gardner.

Mr Wilkinson: —and no Norm Gardner. We've got about 120,000 dairy cattle and no Norm Gardner. So every place is unique. I encourage the member to come out to Perth-Middlesex, the home of the Stratford Festival. I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

I think it makes our point that the opposition parties cannot stand in their place and say, "We think this bill is such a bad piece of legislation that it should be repealed." People are telling us that this is exactly what they want. We ran on this. We listened to people, we ran on it and we're delivering on our promise.

Actually, I'm sure the committee will enjoy taking this out to the people. I believe the people will reinforce the message to all of us in this House that they are tired of this and are looking forward to the passage of the bill.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Ouellette: I would like to speak to some of the aspects of Bill 25, and when you go through it, I would say to the government, don't back yourselves into a corner on some things. As I said before when I spoke briefly on this, in subsection 1(2) it says that for the purposes of this act, the deputy minister is in charge of this aspect of the legislation. I'm going to get into some of the details on that and why I have some concerns with that very specific aspect.

I happen to know there are quite a few outdoor writers from the United States and other areas. I've been trying in the past to bring outdoor writers to Ontario to experience the great things that happen. We looked at bringing a fishing editor up from the United States from one of the three big magazines. These individuals are read monthly by about eight million people, so when you get an article in a magazine like that, you get a response rate for interest of about 10%, which may not sound like a big response, but when you have eight million people reading a magazine, 10% is 800,000 responses to that. Where are you going to get a group or an organization to handle 800,000 responses? Is it e-mails, phone calls? What kind of inquiries? That's substantial.

Out of those 800,000 inquiries, you get about a 10% committal rate, which means you get about 80,000 individuals who are interested in dealing with that specific topic. This was from when I used to work in the industry before I made the decision to run politically. Trying to get out and promote the great things in the province of Ontario is very important. Out of those 80,000 individuals you would average about five overnight stays, and

when you get 80,000 having five overnight stays, that's 400,000 overnight stays by bringing an individual in.

The point I'm getting to with this is that, when you're dealing with subsection 1(2), I couldn't get the Ministry of Tourism at that time to think about the value of bringing these people in. "Send us a resumé on the individual," when they were the fishing editor for *Field and Stream* magazine. It was like pulling teeth. It was a bit of a deterrent for those individuals to come up and say, "Gerry, what's going on? Can't they pick up a magazine and see I'm the fishing editor for *Field and Stream*?" They wanted to go through the whole process.

Mr Kormos: And you were minister.

Mr Ouellette: No, this was before I was the minister.

What I did at that time was, rather than go through the bureaucracy and having—the point I'm making here is that subsection 1(2) gives the deputy minister the authority to make those decisions on how the funds are going to be spent, and in certain areas. When you get somebody like this coming forward who wants to do an article—it was on Pickle Lake. I organized the CAO from Pickle Lake to have a community group, their chamber of commerce, their business development, come forward and cover the costs of this individual to come up. Then I started negotiating to have them come up, and guess what? It's not an immediate process. They come up. They experience the experience they want, which in this case was fishing. It's a great spot, a great part of Ontario to promote. Then afterwards they write about it, which usually comes out the following year, and it's the year after that. So it's about a three-year process.

Some deputy ministers look at that and say, "Why would we invest in this? It's not going to be an immediate, quick response." Quite frankly, you get that number of people, predominantly Americans, and one of the ways it worked very well for this particular case was that they were trying to target the Midwest states, and this article was very much targeted toward drawing people from the Midwest states to Ontario. You have to look at the impact that piece of legislation and subsection 1(2) are going to have in situations like that when you're trying to bring people in to promote things for the province of Ontario.

Something else: I'm trying get a question out of the Minister of Tourism, and hopefully he'll be able to take this to heart. The CRTC has made some changes in advertising requirements. What that means—for example, I know that a number of TV shows have gone off the air because a new interpretation says that if it's a Black and Decker drill and you're showing it on the air, and it says Black and Decker, that's classified as advertising time. So they've given them some of the options.

This dramatically impacts the film industry in Ontario. Now, according to the CRTC regulations, it's advertising. So if somebody wears a hat that says Shamano or is fishing with a Shamano shirt on, that shows it as advertising time. The same thing takes place with snow-

mobiling. If they show that it's a Ski-Doo or a Polaris or whatever the case may be, that's classified as advertising time. The difficulty comes in in that a lot of the films to be shown this year were filmed last year. So we get into a lot of difficulty on promotion and advertising.

When I was minister, I was very adamant about promoting pride within the ministry and the great work it does. One of the things I tried to do that was initiated through the ministry—I allowed the deputy to make all the decisions on that case—was to look at various aspects of promoting the good things that were happening within the Ministry of Natural Resources at that time.

There were a lot of good things happening. We released 10 million fish annually throughout over 1,200 waterways in Ontario. I believe it's one of the great things that happened, but we need to make sure that people realize those things because their tax dollars do come in. In that case it was the special purpose account or the protection enhancement account that utilized that. But I know a number of other members whom I don't see here were questioning the fact that the ministry had me in. There was never any time at all that I was in any of those, to my knowledge. We do a lot of things in various aspects within the Ministry of Natural Resources. It was an area of personal pride that I had, as all ministers take a pride in their ministry. You try to promote the good things within that. When you move that into place and give it to the deputy minister, it kind of takes a bit of that authority away.

Some other aspects: In subparagraph i of paragraph 1 of subsection 6(1), to inform the public about proposed government policies, current programs and things—I'm looking at the clock, Mr Speaker, and I'm looking at you. I see the various things but there are a lot other aspects regarding this that should be addressed as well.

When a minister or the Premier makes an announcement of something very new that they're proud of, then they want to put up a plaque to say that it was the province of Ontario or the Premier or a cabinet minister who did that at the time.

I know when we were in government we weren't allowed, as cabinet ministers, to actually promote the good things we were doing, whether it was the Second Marsh or some other aspect within the ministry that we were moving forward on. I think there should be some allowance to make sure that the good things the ministry does are not classified as advertising. You have to pay for that; it says the Premier or the province of Ontario. There should be some areas, whether it's a new bridge, a new structure or something that they're very proud of, that they then need to move forward on.

Seeing you looking at the clock, Mr Speaker, I see we're near 6 of the clock on a Thursday, so I will end my remarks at this time.

The Acting Speaker: It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 pm.

The House adjourned at 1758.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Alvin Curling

Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller

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		Oakville	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)
		Oshawa	

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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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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.

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Ontario budget Mr Baird	2076	
Physiotherapy services Mr Ruprecht	2076	
Education tax credit Ms Scott	2076	
Minimum wage Mr Marchese	2076	
Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One Mr Berardinetti	2076	
Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital Mr Hardeman	2077	
Ontario drug benefit program Mr Kormos	2077	
Mr Tascona	2077	
Optometrists Mr Dunlop	2077	
TTC right-of-way Mr Ruprecht	2078	

Continued overleaf