



No. 45

N° 45

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 10 May 2004

Lundi 10 mai 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

Hansard on the Internet

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

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

Index inquiries

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

Copies of Hansard

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

Le Journal des débats sur Internet

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

Renseignements sur l'index

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

Exemplaires du Journal

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



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 10 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 10 mai 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BOB BALTIN

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): This morning at Rideau Hall, the Governor General invested a total of 17 Ontario recipients into the Order of Merit of the Police Forces. The order was created in October 2000 to recognize members and employees of Canadian police services whose contributions extend beyond protection of the community. I am familiar with many of the 17 Ontario recipients and heartily congratulate each and every one of them for receiving the badge of honour. I regret that I only have time in this statement to focus on one of the recipients.

Constable Bob Baltin was recognized this morning for his outstanding leadership as president of the Police Association of Ontario and for his active role in the creation of the Canadian Professional Police Association. Fortunately, I have come to know Bob quite well through the process of consulting on and preparing my two private member's bills that help police. I always value and appreciate Bob's input.

I'm personally very proud of Bob's achievement, so I wanted to tell Ontarians a little more about what he has accomplished for policing. Bob has served for 24 years with the Peel Regional Police Service. He has worked with distinction in the uniformed division and as a detective in the morality, auto theft and intelligence divisions. Bob was elected president of the Police Association of Ontario in 2001. He was so highly respected by the association's membership that he was acclaimed president for another two-year term in August 2003. Under Bob's leadership, the Police Association of Ontario has grown from 13,000 to 22,000 members and has embraced community safety as a priority with the new model, Preserving Safe Communities.

Again, I congratulate Bob for a well-deserved award.

MAYOR'S YOUTH ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): It is with great pride that I take this time to discuss one of the most recognizable youth organizations within Mississauga, the

Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee. In 1982, Hazel McCallion founded the Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee as an organization that would meet periodically to discuss youth issues within the Mississauga community. Throughout the past 22 years, the organization has continued to grow and is now one of the primary youth volunteer movements within Mississauga.

Beyond offering a political voice for youth as well as volunteer opportunities, the Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee organizes Mississauga Youth Week, which celebrated its fifth year on May 1 to 8. With various sports tournaments, a leadership conference, an essay competition, a park cleanup and a city-wide public-transportation-only scavenger hunt, the week was filled with numerous opportunities for the youth of Mississauga. With their promotion of an active lifestyle, education, environmentalism and energy conservation, it is clear that this group embraces the pillars of this government's message.

Mississauga MPPs were active as well, participating in Mississauga Youth Week, in order to promote this great community group in any way they could. I urge all members to become involved in youth initiatives in their communities, because building stronger communities through youth is an important part of changing the way our government works for all Ontario.

SARAH JANE WILLIAMS
HERITAGE CENTRE

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm proud to announce the official opening of Ontario's newest museum. A couple of Saturdays ago, on April 3, the Clarington Museums and Archives opened the Sarah Jane Williams Heritage Centre in Bowmanville. Our new heritage centre is in the former public library building and gives more space to displays and treasures from our community's past. These include century-old artefacts from the Dominion Organ and Piano factory, plus a doll and toy collection that is one of the largest in Canada.

I would like to congratulate the museum's chair, Keith Isnor, and his board of directors. I'd also like to pay tribute to the dedicated museum volunteers and staff, including administrator Martha Rutherford Conrad as well as curator Charles Taws. As a former council representative on the museum board, I know how hard the whole community works to support the museum.

Sarah Jane Williams was a true friend to the Bowmanville Museum. Her generous donation in 1961 founded the museum. However, Mrs Williams and her

husband, Dr L. B. Williams, had a lifelong passion for preserving local history and recording the sites of Durham county. The late George James, owner and editor of the Canadian Statesman newspaper, also supported the preservation of local history. Gloria Roth, granddaughter of Sarah Jane Williams, brought greetings from the family and assisted in the dedication. Congratulations also to Al Storie and Donald Air, who received recognition awards for organizing the museum fun run.

With the opening of the Sarah Jane Williams Centre, the museum is making history on its own. I would like to invite my colleagues, and everyone, to visit Clarington and tour our outstanding museums.

WORLD ASTHMA DAY

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): Last Tuesday was World Asthma Day. As a legislator, and as a physician who has dealt extensively with this condition, I rise to draw attention to the importance of combatting it. This condition afflicts 12% of children and 8% of adults worldwide. Something like 300 million people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds, on a worldwide basis, are suffering from this condition. The global burden of asthma on the health care system, and of course on patients and their families, is increasing. In some countries, the prevalence is rising by about 20% to 40% every 10 years. Asthma is the number one reason for childhood hospitalization in Ontario.

The Ontario Lung Association is proud to be a partner with the Ontario government's asthma plan of action. The association's Asthma Action Helpline provides those with asthma and their caregivers access to health professionals who offer information and advice on managing this condition. This association also provides continuing medical education to health professionals in Ontario to ensure they are aware of the guidelines for optimal treatment and management.

On behalf of the people of Ontario, and on behalf of all the members of this Legislature, I would like to thank the Ontario Lung Association and their many colleagues, volunteers and staff for the time, effort, attention and expertise they bring in dealing with this condition.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): On May 15, this very weekend, there will be a large gathering in Rockton, Ontario, at the World's Fairground. That's on Highway 8, just north of Highway 5—about 15 kilometres. It is a meeting of people from across this province who are upset about amalgamation of their cities and towns by the previous government, and who are upset that the present government is not listening to their pleas.

There will be citizens there from Kawartha Lakes, Hamilton, Stoney Creek, Ancaster, Toronto, Ottawa and Kitchener.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): Hamilton East.

Mr Prue: Maybe Hamilton East as well.

There will be speakers: Dave Braden, a local councillor from Stoney Creek, and Margaret McCarthy from Hamilton. There will be writers: Ken Bosveld and Joe Cooper. There will be politicians from the New Democratic Party, the Conservative Party and the Green Party to address the crowd, but nary a Liberal will dare show their face in that location. There were no Liberals because they have violated the trust of the people of Kawartha Lakes by ignoring their democratic referendum. They have ignored that, and they have further hidden the ministerial response to their many petitions that have been presented in this House.

We invite people to show up at the World's Fairground on Highway 8, 15 miles north of Highway 5. For further information, please contact Dennis Noonan at 519-624-1755. Come on out Saturday. See what democracy is all about.

1340

INTERNATIONAL CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORKERS' MONTH

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): May is International Child and Youth Care Workers' Month. Around the globe, nations are celebrating the unique contribution of child and youth care workers to the lives of vulnerable children and their families. Thousands of these hard-working professionals give of themselves on a daily basis to better the lives and futures of children and youth in this province. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of these people who have chosen a career that requires such a special level of commitment to their work and to their communities across the province.

Child and youth care workers promote the development of children, youth and their families in diverse settings, including mental health centres, school programs and youth detention facilities. The work these people undertake is challenging and demanding. Over 60,000 people throughout the country work daily with children and youth. Often they work under extremely difficult conditions, with little remuneration or recognition. Their efforts benefit every one of us in Ontario by helping to build stronger, more capable youth, families and communities.

International Child and Youth Care Workers' Month gives us all an opportunity to recognize and celebrate their hard work and dedication. Let us join in celebrating their commitment and achievements and in recognizing their contribution to helping children, youth and families all across Ontario.

HIGHWAY 7

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): On the day this government was sworn in, I handed the ministers of environment and transportation letters urging them to proceed with the four-laning of Highway 7 as quickly as

possible. As Minister of Transportation, I worked very hard to ensure that this project remained in the forefront. I earmarked an \$85-million investment and committed to completing the project by 2007 or sooner.

Area residents who travel this highway between 417 and Carleton Place know how critical this four-laning work is to saving lives and improving traffic flow. There is not a person in my part of the province who doesn't know someone who has been injured or killed in a collision along this section of highway. Last night another life was lost and two people were injured in a head-on collision near the planned first stage of construction.

My constituents and I appreciate the Minister of the Environment's decision last week, clearing the way for the beginning of construction. I rise today to urge the Minister of Transportation and the government to act quickly. No one knows for certain if last night's tragic events could have been avoided. However, now is the time to ensure that no more lives will be lost in the future. On behalf of my constituents and residents throughout eastern Ontario, I urge the government to proceed post-haste with the construction on this killer strip of highway.

WORLD LUPUS DAY

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): Today is World Lupus Day, and I have been asked by my local lupus organization in Niagara to share the following proclamation with the people of Ontario:

"Whereas lupus is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks the body's own healthy cells, causing tissue damage, organ failure and, in some cases, death;

"Whereas more than five million people suffer worldwide from the devastating effects of this disease and each year over 100,000 men, women and children are newly diagnosed with lupus, the majority of whom are women of childbearing age;

"Whereas medical research efforts into lupus and the discovery of safer, more effective treatments for lupus patients are underfunded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity;

"Whereas many physicians worldwide are unaware of the symptoms and health effects of lupus, causing people with lupus to suffer for many years before they obtain a correct diagnosis and medical treatment;

"Whereas there is an urgent need to increase awareness in communities worldwide of the debilitating impact of lupus;

"Be it resolved that the World Health Organization recognizes and declares May 10, 2004, as World Lupus Day and joins the lupus organizations around the globe in calling for an increase in public and private sector funding for medical research on lupus, targeted education programs for health professionals, patients and the public, and worldwide recognition of lupus as a significant public health issue."

World Lupus Day is announced in conjunction with the seventh International Lupus Congress in New York City, held to advance the science on lupus.

BY-ELECTION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I was in Hamilton just a few days ago and gathered up some interesting pieces of literature. I went through the local Liberal candidate's literature, three different pieces, and guess whose picture was totally absent? Dalton McGuinty's. There was not a single picture of Dalton McGuinty in local Liberal advertising. You had to have a microscope to even find his name anywhere in the documents—only one reference in three pieces of literature.

I cannot blame the local Liberal candidate, because when people see Dalton McGuinty's picture, what do they think? Twenty major broken promises higher taxes, higher hydro rates, multi-year deficits, and that old-school politics where you say one thing before the election and do something entirely different once you get the keys to the Premier's limousine.

Tara Crugnale, a prominent local business person, is proudly carrying our banner. She is proudly and prominently standing with our leader, Ernie Eves.

Dalton McGuinty, the Premier: disappeared, hidden, gone, not to be seen; Dalton McGuinty, the invisible man of the Hamilton by-election.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I rise on a point of order pursuant to standing order 97(d). The 24 sitting days are up for my order paper question of March 23, 2004, to the Minister of Education on the status of the new elementary school in the Georgian Glen subdivision that he promised in my Barrie riding. The minister is in contravention of the standing order, he is over the deadline, and he's not the only minister in this position.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I have checked our record and see that the answer to your question is due today. Seeing that it's not the end of the day, I would say you don't have a point of order.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

KEVIN'S LAW (CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2004

LOI KEVIN DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Mr Jackson moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 78, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario / Projet de loi 78, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et la Loi sur les coroners pour mieux protéger les enfants de l'Ontario.

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

1350

ONTARIO WORKERS'
MEMORIAL ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004

SUR LE MONUMENT COMMÉMORATIF
DES TRAVAILLEURS DE L'ONTARIO

Mr Ramal moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to establish the Ontario Workers' Memorial / Projet de loi 79, Loi visant à ériger le monument commémoratif en hommage aux travailleurs de l'Ontario.

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

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I am pleased to introduce my private member's bill to the House. Every year, hundreds of workers die on the job or from diseases they catch on the job. According to the WSIB, in 2003, 552 workers were killed; in 2002, 596 died; and in 2001, 453 lost their lives.

There are memorials to workers killed or injured all over this province. There is one in London at the Tolpuddle co-op on Adelaide Street, but there is not one dedicated to all workers killed or injured in Ontario. This bill would provide for such a memorial, here or nearby the legislative area.

I am looking forward to working with my colleagues here, and hopefully they will support my bill.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the standing committee on general government and the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. I believe we have agreement by the opposition parties to do this.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent for the House leader to put forward this motion? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that the standing committee on general government be authorized to meet on Friday, May 14, and Friday, May 21, in addition to its regularly scheduled meeting times to consider Bill 27, An Act to establish a greenbelt study area and to amend the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, 2001, and that the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly be authorized to meet outside of its regularly scheduled meetings on Thursday, May 20, Friday, May 21, and Thursday, June 3, to consider 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.

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

All those in favour of the motion, say "aye." All those against? I think the ayes have it.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I rise in the House today to reinforce our government's commitment to public transit in Ontario. Improved public transit is at the heart of our vision for strong and liveable communities. This government has a plan to ensure that seamless, safe, reliable and affordable public transit systems are available to Ontarians.

Today, Ontario's 65 transit systems together move 680 million passengers each year. GO Transit carries 44 million riders annually. The TTC, Canada's largest transit system, carries over one million passengers daily.

The average car in Toronto usually carries one person. A single GO bus would replace 50 cars, and one GO train would replace 1,400 cars. Only by investing in transit can we reduce the congestion that affects the economy and robs Ontarians of quality family time. Investing in transit will improve air quality, conserve energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

A strong public transit system also benefits business and helps local, provincial and national economies. Industries want a more effective transit system to support the efficient movement of people and goods. The strategic investments this government is making in transit will increase service, increase access and ultimately make transit a more desirable alternative.

Our vision includes expanding existing transit lines and adding new ones; adding more parking spaces at transit stations to get people on to the system as conveniently as possible; seamless transportation, so that GO Transit, the TTC, rapid transit and city buses all connect; and the new integrated ticket will mean commuters will be able to travel across the GTA, from one transit system to the next, with one card.

Just last week, the Honourable David Caplan joined me, along with our federal colleagues and MPPs Bob Delaney and Tim Peterson, in announcing \$1 billion in GO Transit improvements in the greater Toronto area. These 12 projects will have the same impact as building a new Highway 401 through Toronto.

It is worth noting that, over the next 30 years, each person who takes GO instead of driving their car will save three tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions yearly.

Last week, I was joined by MPPs Tony Wong and Mario Racco as we announced funding for phase one of

York region's new rapid transit system. We were joined there as well by the member from Oak Ridges, Frank Klees.

In March, the province, the city of Toronto and the federal government made history with a \$1-billion funding agreement to keep the TTC in a state of good repair. This is possible, thanks to a new spirit of co-operation between all levels of government. For the first time in Ontario history, governments are working together to improve public transit.

These transit agreements are an investment in the future. We are investing in a better quality of life by getting people where they need to go faster. In turn, this will help to keep the economy moving by freeing up space on our highways and roads to get our products to market in the US efficiently and effectively.

We will continue to consider innovative ways to make transit a better, more compelling choice for commuters. We will ask everyone to do their part and take public transit whenever possible. Start by leaving the car at home once or twice a week and take public transit to the movies, out to dinner or to and from work.

This government is building a better, more reliable transit system. In connection with our road safety improvements, investments in highways and action on strategic border crossings, our government is committed to making Ontario's transportation system one of the best.

1400

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I am pleased to respond as the transportation critic for the official opposition. I find myself in some conflict, because on a personal level I really do like the Minister of Transportation, but when it comes to the reality, over the last number of weeks, every time I ask the minister a question, he responds by saying I'm simply looking for publicity. Well, the minister will know, and you will know, Speaker, that what this announcement is really all about is seeking publicity. The minister knows that the announcement he made this past weekend is, in fact, a reannouncement—a particularly extreme example—of what we announced.

I was present, as the member indicated, in York region. The announcement that was made in York region was a \$50-million commitment on the part of the provincial government and a \$50-million commitment on the part of the federal government. Minister Collenette and I made that identical announcement with regard to the other, and that, by the way, was in August of last year. So I suggest that the minister is probably responding to a demand or a request from his Liberal federal colleagues, who need some ink at this point in time, and is simply providing a platform for them to make their political announcement.

With regard to the exact announcement related to GO, this again is a duplication; I looked at the words. Minister, you could have at least had them rewritten. The difference is that you make reference to consultation.

This government hails their consultation, and yet Mayor McCallion had some very harsh words for the minister after he signed this agreement and made this commitment, and the harsh words were: "Why didn't you consult with the municipalities so that we can at least have some input as to where our contribution is going to come from?" No, this government simply made a reannouncement.

They make reference to a vision. It is in fact re-vision. The fact of the matter is that the policy that was announced here was the policy that we announced.

Having said that, this government has broken every single promise they made to the people of this province in the election campaign. At the very least, I hail the fact that they are attempting to keep our promises to the people of this province. On that count, I give them credit. The fact is that the people of this province are becoming more and more cynical. The people of York region knew that we made this announcement of \$50 million to a very important transit program in August of last year. The funds were committed. Now this staging of a recommitment simply adds to the cynicism that people are holding this government in. Broken promises; this government has zero credibility.

I might say that it's interesting that this particular announcement was absolutely void of reference to the important contributions that should be made to other parts of the province. I'm going to allow my colleague to speak to that issue.

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Between the years 1995 and 2003, the province of Ontario—the previous government—invested over \$300 million in transit in the city of Ottawa. Mr Speaker, I like Toronto and I like to see Toronto helped out with regard to their transit, but there are other areas of this province that have problems with their transit systems.

The previous government helped out other municipalities with regard to their transit systems. We put, as I said, \$300 million into public transit, and \$300 million into highways in eastern Ontario. What have we heard from this government with regard to transit for Ottawa? Nothing. We have received nothing in Ottawa with regard to public transit.

It's about time this government stopped thinking that the Ontario border stops at Ajax and included all of Ontario, including eastern Ontario.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): Here again we have a commitment, or a so-called commitment, to public transit in Ontario. When you first open up the paper, when you first see the minister, when you first see the assembled politicians standing on a platform, you have to think, "My God, there's finally some money coming for public transit." But it doesn't take very long to read the fine print, and when you read the fine print, you realize this is nothing more than another government reannouncement.

In fact, it's a reannouncement not from this government but from the previous government. It is nothing more than a plan rehashing the Tory plan of June 6, 2003.

It is a plan that is now some 11 months old, a plan that was never put into action, a plan where no money was spent and a plan that the Liberals are now embracing in their new guise as Conservatives with red ties.

We have seen this announcement before. When it came around in its first iteration, it was announced by Hazel McCallion, the ebullient and wonderful mayor of Mississauga, who was on the Ontario Smart Growth panel. Hazel McCallion had the honour at that time, 11 months ago, to announce \$645 million for GO Transit—money that was never, ever spent. She made an announcement about all the other monies that would be spent on public transit in the greater Toronto area—monies that the were never spent.

Only two things have changed from that day. The first one is that the federal Liberals are now caught up in this. Can one possibly be cynical enough to say that this has something to do with the election that's going to be called in a week or two? I am not going to be that cynical, but the public just may be. Are they looking, because of the dismal prospects they have, those federal Liberals here in Ontario, having done so many things badly, having tried to cover up so many problems of their own making?

The second problem is an even bigger one, in that this minister forgot to tell the mayors of Ontario how they were going to be involved in this plan. The last time, at least the Conservatives had the wherewithal to invite Hazel McCallion and to involve her and let her be the spokesperson. This time, although the Liberals invited Hazel McCallion, she was very blunt that this is not a tripartite agreement, that this is not something she was consulted about, nor were the other 20 or so mayors of the greater Toronto area ever consulted.

Mayor Miller, for his part, said he was absolutely shocked. Mayor McCallion, of course, being erudite and able to put words immediately, said that although the municipalities were the so-called children of the province, they were not even treated as children.

In fact, the newspapers went on to quote some of what went on that day. I'm quoting here from Alan Findlay of the Toronto Sun, that good union newspaper. Here's what they said in the Saturday Sun, May 8: "He"—talking about Miller—"echoed McCallion's earlier remarks and said the city simply doesn't have the \$100 million to chip in over 10 years, as suggested by Ontario transportation minister Harinder Takhar. 'Although we are obviously happy there is money coming to GO Transit, we're concerned because any further obligation on us we won't be able to meet,' Miller said.

"As the federal and provincial politicians shook hands and signed the deal in front of the cameras, McCallion (who actually emceed the event) took back the microphone and told reporters the agreement is actually worth less than \$800 million.

"There's one party missing from the table this morning signing the agreement, and that's the local municipalities," she said."

Here we have this great plan, and I want to tell you it's not a great plan; it's a Tory plan for which the money

was never spent. But there was nothing in here about the Liberal plan. There was nothing in here about the two cents on the gas tax that was promised in the last election—something that would really make a difference to the city of Toronto and to Mississauga. Nothing at all was said about the two cents on the gas tax. Nothing at all was said about the powers of the municipalities and how the municipalities would be given power to make sure they could solve their own transit and internal problems. Last but not least, nothing was in here at all, and certainly the actions were contrary to the consultation and the new era you promised to municipalities that you would consult with them. You did not, and the plan, quite frankly, is not worth the paper it's written on.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): On a point of order, Speaker: I would like to ask for unanimous consent that this House pass my notice of motion number 18, which calls for the government to fund municipalities and property owners to aid them in complying with provincial water quality regulations. Do I have unanimous consent to pass that resolution?

The Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

1410

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): My question is to the Premier. Last September there wasn't a promise that you wouldn't make. Today there's not a promise that you're not going to break.

Last week it was confirmed that you are going to commit the mother of all broken promises: You are going to rip up the Taxpayer Protection Act that you signed with great fanfare last fall. Do you know what this means? It means higher taxes and runaway multi-year deficits. This week in your spin you're calling it "closing tax loopholes." Well, it smells and looks to me like a coming tax hike.

Tax exemptions or incentives in the province exist for children's clothing, investments in new mines in northern Ontario and the thousands of jobs in Ontario's film industry. Is this what you mean by tax loopholes? Are these now on the McGuinty hit list?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the member's continuing interest in the contents of the budget. I'm not prepared to speak to any of the details in that document, which we very much look forward to introducing in this Legislature. But I can say is that we have a number of overriding objectives. One of those is to breathe greater life into health care in Ontario, another is to revitalize public education and of course we want to put this government on a sound financial footing, unlike what the previous government did when they saddled us and, more importantly, the people of Ontario with a \$5.6-billion deficit.

The Speaker: Supplementary.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): Every time the Premier stands in his place and refuses to answer a question, or simply attacks our government, the people of this province are becoming more and more cynical about whether or not they can trust this government or this Premier for anything.

The Premier will know that he signed a pledge not to increase taxes. We now have seniors in this province who are experiencing an increase in property taxes because this government cancelled the property tax credit that they were expecting. Seniors, as they're opening up their electricity bills this month, are experiencing increased costs of their electricity. Call it what you want, seniors are seeing this government burden them with additional costs.

I'd like to ask the Premier why he can't stand in his place, or will he do so today, and simply say to the people of Ontario, "I told you something that was not true. I told you that I would not increase taxes and I am." Will he stand in his place and at least admit that to the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think what seniors and other Ontarians are particularly disappointed about is the fact that when the previous government introduced the 2003 Ontario budget over at the Magna auto parts centre, they indicated that the budget was balanced. And then on numerous occasions leading up to the campaign, in the thick of the campaign itself and even during the leaders' debate, then-Premier Ernie Eves reassured the people of Ontario that the budget was balanced.

In fact, it is not balanced. We are coming to grips with this reality. We're going to provide a wonderful budget from a seniors' perspective—I can tell you that much—and we intend to put special emphasis on health care, education and bringing to ground this runaway deficit that was left to us by the previous government.

Mr Klees: Those seniors, who are going to be hit with increased costs as a result of their electricity and property taxes, are going to have to do what this government refused to do. They're going to have to balance their budgets in spite of the increased costs that are being burdened on them by this government. Do you know what they'll have to do? They'll have to look at their budget, they'll have to look at places where they normally spend money and not spend that money.

That is precisely what this government should have done. That was their responsibility: to look at their books, for every minister to do the program review and to balance the budget. This Premier had an option, and the option was to direct the Minister of Finance to balance the budget. They chose not to. They chose to continue to lay an additional burden of tax on the people of Ontario. The Premier will have to answer at some point as to why he broke his promise. Why did you not go to work, Premier, and balance the budget? Why?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can say that our predecessors, the Conservative government, did answer for their sorry record on the state of seniors at the time of the last

election. Let me just remind you about some of the things they did to seniors—not for seniors, but to seniors.

They increased copayments for seniors' drugs. They tried to sneak through increases in long-term-care fees on a Canada Day weekend. They downloaded costs on to municipalities, which caused property taxes to go up, leaving seniors on fixed incomes at the mercy of property tax hikes. I can provide every reassurance to the people of Ontario, but to seniors in particular, that we do not intend to do to them what the Tories did to them.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is to the Premier—and I'm glad to hear that the Premier is going to be treating our seniors with the dignity and fairness they deserve. But I will tell you, based on the letters and e-mails that we on this side of the House have been receiving, that there is growing concern, particularly from seniors, about the fact that you are going to be reducing universal access to health care by delisting chiropractic, podiatry, optometry and physiotherapy services. As you know, many of those are services that people on fixed incomes—seniors—simply could not afford if they were not funded by the provincial government through OHIP. So I ask you today, will you commit that your government will not reduce or eliminate funding for chiropractic services?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I thank the member for her question. I know there's a real interest on the part of the members opposite to kind of pick and choose and score some one-offs with respect to what is in and what is out of the budget. You know, Speaker, as does the member opposite, that it would be inappropriate for us to reveal details of the budget, but I can say this much: We are working as hard as we can to wrestle this deficit to the ground in a reasonable and responsible way and at the same time to deliver when it comes to health care and education, and we will not lose sight of Ontario's seniors and their special needs.

Mrs Witmer: Well, I can tell you, Premier, seniors are very concerned. They see that if delisting does occur, this is going to be reducing universal access to health care, and you have promised that you would not do that.

I want to focus on podiatry. As you probably know, about 60% of those people who do receive podiatry services are seniors, and of that 60%, at least half are people who suffer from diabetes, so it is a very, very significant treatment. I ask you today, will you commit that you will not reduce or eliminate OHIP funding for podiatry services?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I am not going to engage in speculation about specific details. I can say that on this side of the House—as on that side of the House, I can presume to say—we have a tremendous sensitivity to the needs of our seniors and we feel a sense of responsibility to them. It was their investments in our colleges, universities, schools and hospitals that have so much enhanced

the quality of life that we all benefit from today. So we will not lose sight of our seniors, either in this budget or throughout our term as a government.

Mrs Witmer: I have to say, Premier, that personally I'm disappointed in your response. You could reassure people in this province who are concerned, particularly our seniors, about the fact that you may be delisting some of these services. It's pretty easy. Just say, "No, we are not delisting; no, we are not reducing OHIP coverage."

But if you take a look at physiotherapy, the Toronto Star says, "Seniors and people with disabilities who cannot afford to pay \$20 to \$40 for treatment would be left incapacitated." In fact, more than 80% of the schedule 5 patients are seniors.

Will you end the speculation today? Will you commit to providing universal access to health care services and will you reassure people in the province today that you will not reduce or eliminate funding for schedule 5 physiotherapy?

1420

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I really do thank the member for the question and for the concerns that she raises. I'm hoping she is not trying to fan flames of fear among our seniors. Nobody would ever want to do that.

But let me just say this: Let us consider the previous government's record when it comes to seniors. Again, they increased copayments for seniors' drugs. They tried to sneak through increases in long-term-care fees on a Canada Day weekend. Seniors felt the brunt of the costs downloaded on to municipalities when the municipalities had no choice but to look to their municipal tax base to cope with their new responsibilities.

We're not going to bring that kind of approach to governing. We do not intend to burden seniors further.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. While gasoline prices skyrocket across the province, your Liberal government is engaging in blatant promise-breaking. Before the last election, the member for Sudbury, Mr Bartolucci, now Minister of Northern Development and Mines, introduced a bill to first roll back gasoline prices and then freeze them for at least 90 days. But now that you are government, you want to pretend that this bill never existed.

Consumers are being hit hard at the gas pumps. The government of Ontario has the legal capacity to regulate gas prices. A simple question: Will you pass Mr Bartolucci's bill, now introduced as Bill 74, to roll back and freeze gasoline prices?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I know the Minister of Energy will want to speak to this in more detail shortly, but let me say off the top that I appreciate that many members of this government have in the past introduced a variety of bills, and I do not doubt their sincerity for a moment in that regard. But I think it's important that the public

recognizes the difference between government policy and laudable initiatives made on the part of individual members. I know the member opposite would want to make that clear.

We're not divorced from the public we happen to serve. We understand that gas prices are a real issue. We have an ongoing concern with respect to that. The Minister of Energy is monitoring that very closely, I know the federal government is now looking at this very, very closely. We're paying very close attention.

Mr Hampton: I'm surprised that the Premier now believes the ideas he and his colleagues promoted in opposition no longer apply.

Let me quote Mr Colle, who also had a lot to say on this issue. In fact, I'll use his supplementary:

"Mr Premier, when it comes to gas price gouging, you're all talk and no action. You, as the Premier of this province, have the power to protect Ontario consumers when it comes to pricing...."

"In 1975, Bill Davis stepped in to protect consumers.... Pass this bill today. You can stop the belly-aching and take concrete action.... Stop whining and do something."

So said Mr Colle, a member of your government, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. If it was good enough for you Liberals then, why isn't it good enough now? Pass the bill. Live up to some of the promises you made.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The Minister of Energy.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I think it's important to remember what all members of the House have said in here.

Let me tell you what Jenny Carter, the NDP energy minister, said when gas prices went up under their government. She said, "I don't have a magic wand to wave to iron out these problems." That's what she said.

Let me tell you what Brian Charlton, the energy minister, said to this House on May 27, 1992: "The primary responsibility for ensuring that there is no price-fixing ... in this country" falls to the federal government.

What did the NDP do about gas prices when they were in government? They raised the tax 13% in their 1992 budget. That member is full of histrionics and ironics. He forgets his own record. You ought to remember it, sir. No one has a worse record on gas prices than your government did when it was in power.

CHILD CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Premier, I enjoy reading the Liberals' words back to them, and I want to read your words back to you on child care. You promised \$300 million of provincial funding for child care. We know there is a crisis in child care across the province, whether it's in large cities like Toronto or smaller communities like Fort Frances, Kenora or Sioux Lookout in my riding. They are either losing spaces, driving up fees or closing their centres. But

it's not just the \$300 million you promised; this year you are receiving \$58 million from the multilateral agreement of federal money and \$187 million from the early childhood development agreement. Just in federal money, that is \$245 million that should be going to child care. My question is, will you immediately announce that all of that money, \$245 million, is going to be passed over to the municipalities so they can properly and adequately fund child care?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I know the Minister is anxious to speak to this.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): This government is committed to enhancing child care. We heard the same stories over the years that we were in opposition. My honourable colleague the Minister of the Environment was the critic for children's services during the last four years, and we are very well aware of the challenges out there and we will enhance child care money. And yes, sir, I have said at least three times that the \$58 million coming from the federal government will go to child care for this province.

Mr Hampton: It is not just the \$58 million. The \$58 million is from the multilateral agreement on child care. You are also receiving \$187 million from the early childhood development agreement. That is \$245 million. Then there is the \$300 million that you promised. Even if you only gave part of that, say one quarter of it, that would come to another \$75 million: total, \$320 million. Will you commit today that you are you going to pass on the \$245 million of federal money that you already have or are going to get and the \$75 million you promised in provincial funding—\$320 million that our child care centres desperately need today? Will you make that commitment, or are you going to hold back some of that money?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: There isn't one penny held back. A lot of the money that the honourable member mentioned was given by the former government to children's services and, quite rightly so, I was also disturbed that a lot of that didn't go to child care.

What my ministry and I are presently doing is reviewing all the programs from the federal government as well as the provincial monies that are going into early years child care and early years children's services. Some of those children's services are actually excellent. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. There are others that are questionable. We are doing an analysis of all that, and we will improve child care and the early years in Ontario, I can assure you.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): My question is to the Premier. Cancer Care Ontario is building one of the finest cancer treatment programs anywhere in the world. On April 29, its CEO reported that we are expect-

ing a 4% increase in actual cases and that last year's actual costs for new drug treatments were almost \$12 million more.

Yet, you have officially notified Cancer Care Ontario that this year's budget for new drug treatments will be frozen at last year's lower rate, significantly short of actual treatment costs. You have also advised Cancer Care Ontario to withdraw treatment from prostate cancer patients by no longer paying for zoledronic acid injections.

Why are you capping Cancer Care Ontario's new drug budget well below the actual treatment needs of Ontario cancer patients, and why are you specifically withdrawing funding for new drugs for breast and prostate cancer in Ontario?

1430

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): First of all, let me speak to the issue of cancer and the devastation it causes to our families.

I had the opportunity to deliver a speech within the past hour, and one of the things I talked about was how, by the year 2028, the number of diagnosed cases of cancer is expected to double in Ontario. So we've got a real challenge on our hands.

To be more specific to the questions raised by the member opposite, my understanding is—and I don't have the minister here to double-check it with—no final decisions have been made. It is certainly not our intention to compromise the ability of Cancer Care Ontario to address cases of cancer in Ontario.

Mr Jackson: You may have made a speech last week, but I have in my possession—

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): No, today.

Mr Jackson: Today. I have in my possession a memo from your government, dated January 27, 2004, confirming, "Provincial funding for the new drug funding program will be restricted for the 2003-04 fiscal year. As a result, Cancer Care Ontario will delay the implementation of the decision to reimburse Zoledronic" acid injections "for the treatment of hormone refractory prostate cancer. Treatment given patients initiating therapy prior to January 28, 2004, will be eligible for reimbursement."

If you needed it after that date, you were no longer able to get it in Ontario. These patients are mostly seniors. They are not able to fight for access to this treatment.

Premier, this drug was cut because of budgetary restrictions put on by your minister, not for clinical reasons. Will you reinstate this drug therapy now and not create two-tier access to cancer care in our province?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, my understanding is that no final decision has been made with respect to this particular matter. I undertake, on behalf of the member, to look into it and report back to him.

Again, I want to say this with the greatest possible emphasis: It is not our intention to compromise cancer care for Ontarians.

GO TRANSIT

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Last week you joined with the federal government to announce the signing of an agreement to jointly fund construction projects to improve the GO Transit rail and bus system in the greater Toronto area. This is a significant investment—I understand \$1.05 billion. I'm from Hamilton, which is just outside the formal GTA area. My constituents are wondering aloud just how this investment will benefit Hamilton commuters.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First of all, I want to thank my colleague from Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. The GO announcements we made on Friday are really intended to improve the service in the GTA area in general, but let me just talk about some of the improvements that will happen in the Hamilton area.

We are expecting to add a third track between Port Credit and Oakville and between Burlington and Hamilton Junction in the lakeshore area. That will tremendously improve the service and reliability of GO Transit in that area.

Mr Klees: I made these announcements.

Hon Mr Takhar: These planned improvements, together with the system improvements at Union Station, will support additional trains to Hamilton and help us improve congestion.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): Many thousands of people commute from Brampton into Toronto every day. I and my constituents were pleased to see the government follow through on its commitment to enhance GO Transit service. Minister, how will the funding you announced last week specifically benefit Brampton commuters?

Hon Mr Takhar: Again, I want to thank my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale for his question. My friend from Oak Ridges says he made all these announcements, but there was never any money tied to these announcements.

The announcement we made on Friday will tremendously improve GO Transit service on the Georgetown corridor, which serves the Brampton area. This includes improving track capacity and road-rail grade separation. We also plan to actually expand the parking areas at Bramalea and Malton. This will ensure that the safety of road and rail will increase, and we will increase the service on the Georgetown corridor as well.

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Education. The entire province is aware of, and has felt the effects of, the mess and the backlog of the processing of birth certificates in this province. Now my constituents are being told that their children will be denied entry to kindergarten, come

September, if they do not present official birth certificates to the school. My question is, are you going to allow this to happen?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I'm a little surprised that the member opposite wants to highlight the mess his government left us in terms of the Registrar General's office, and I appreciate the opportunity, which we can provide in a supplementary, for us to exhibit the great job that the minister is doing in dealing with that backlog.

What I would say is that we only became aware today of the particular question that the member is raising. We are talking to the board. We can't speak to the specific case. It is the board's prerogative to set those kinds of policies, but we do like to believe there is a way to work around that, working with the board. Obviously, in general, we want to make sure that students get access to the improvements we're making in education, and I'll be happy to let the Minister of Consumer and Business Services tell you about what they're doing on the birth certificate backlog.

Mr Tascona: Many of these applications are not even close to being processed and, according to your ministry, they don't even qualify for emergency or expedited service because apparently kindergarten is not considered mandatory. At this point, people across this province are submitting a photocopy of their children's application. Some school boards are accepting them for now and some are not, but they won't accept anything less than the official certificate come September. Will you stand today and promise Ontario children that each and every one of them will have an official birth certificate in order to go to school this September?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I thank the Minister of Education, who undertook that he would look into the situation with respect to the school board aspect. I would be pleased to speak with the honourable member about a specific case. Obviously, because of privacy laws, we can't deal with a specific case on the floor of the Legislature.

But I am pleased to report that as a result of the McGuinty government's commitment to cleaning up the situation we find ourselves in, we now have 173 new staff processing applications. Just in the last five days, 5,000 new applications were processed and sent out, and this is the result of a \$2.6-million investment. Regrettably, your party cut the Office of the Registrar General by 11%, a total of \$6.3 million. We're cleaning up the mess, and we're going to continue to do so.

ENERGY ISSUES

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is to the Minister of Energy. I want to ask you about this government's action on electricity and how it will affect the people in my riding. You have spoken several times on how you will work with farmers to ensure fairness for all communities in Ontario. Distribution costs tend to be higher for farmers and people in rural areas. What has

been done to ensure that these individuals have fair and predictable prices for electricity?

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): The energy plan we introduced last fall will help ensure stable prices going forward for small consumers, particularly in rural communities. I'd like to review for a couple of moments some of the things that I think are of benefit to the rural community.

Recognizing that the cost of distributing electricity is more expensive in rural areas, rural residents will continue to receive a \$28-per-month subsidy to help make their costs more affordable. We've also made a number of announcements with demand shifting, smart meters and so on, which can be most beneficial.

I should also say that the Premier announced our intention to do net metering, which should allow farmers particularly to benefit from being able to sell excess generation that they create into the grid to help reduce their own costs. We were assisted, as you know, by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. The member opposite should be applauded for her work in this effort as well.

1440

Mrs Mitchell: We must have an adequate and reliable supply of electricity. That's absolutely necessary for Ontario's prosperity. The August 2003 blackout was an example of how when our system goes down, the vitality of our economy is jeopardized.

Recently, the Canada-US joint task force on the August 2003 blackout released its report. Energy issues are a concern for me. As you are aware, Bruce Power is in my riding. It employs several thousand people and provides much-needed supply to the province. Minister, what role did Ontario play in the August 2003 blackout, and how was Bruce Power able to help with that recovery?

Hon Mr Duncan: I recently asked key players in the sector to participate in a discussion about how we responded to the blackout and what we've done since to improve energy response capabilities. Bruce Power—interestingly enough, the member references it—was able to have three of its four units at Bruce B back on the grid between three and five hours after the blackout occurred, which contributed in large measure to Ontario starting to get back on its feet after the blackout.

The IMO, Hydro One, OPG, OEB and Bruce Power have all thoroughly reviewed their operations and made important technical and operational changes to further improve our ability to respond to these types of events. There have also been additional actions in addressing our province's "black start" capability; that is, when the power goes right down to nothing, it takes power to get the nuclear reactors back up. These are being done in accordance with the system requirements that we have.

TAXATION

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My question is to the Premier. You have proved over these last several months that you are adept at reaching into the

pockets of ordinary Ontarians, a virtual modern-day Artful Dodger. First there was the 8% soup-and-salad tax. Then there was the out-of-control gas taxes that you and your cabinet promised to control. Now we have the spectre of stealth property tax increases.

In the past, education property taxes were reduced as property values rose, and the new rate was always revenue-neutral. My question to you is, will you continue with this policy, or is it your plan to make a secret property tax grab of \$600 million by simply doing nothing?

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

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I'm surprised that my friend from Beaches-East York's research is so out of date. This is a question that could have been asked perhaps a month ago, but if he had done any follow-up work between last month and this, he would have found that we have set education tax rates for this year. We have lowered the rate to 0.296% in order to make sure that overall across the province the effective rate is absolutely revenue-neutral; that is, people will be paying the same amount this year as they did last year. If the member wants a quick tutor update on what has happened, I'd be delighted to meet him after question period.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Prue: No, thank you.

WATER QUALITY

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question today is for the Minister of the Environment. We've been getting feedback throughout the province on regulation 170/03. I have been getting it from my riding and stakeholders in my riding. I'm sure, as a member with a sizable rural contingent, you've been hearing it too, as all rural members have.

The implementation of this regulation will bring unprecedented hardship to stakeholders in my riding and all across rural Ontario. It is being mean-spirited in its implementation. I understand that two of your own ministers speculated that there may be some changes. Minister, I'm asking you today: Will you stand and do the right thing and halt this regulation now before the damage to businesses and community halls and campgrounds in rural Ontario is irreversible?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I certainly have been hearing a great deal from people right across Ontario around regulation 170, that was crafted by the previous government. It's interesting that the honourable member now suggests he has been receiving lots of feedback. I would suggest that, had the previous government looked for more feedback before the implementation of regulation 170, we would not find ourselves in the situation we are in today.

I can commit to the honourable member that, in addition to our government's commitment to ensure that we have safe drinking water across the province, we most definitely are prepared to deal with regulation 170 and

ensure that communities across Ontario will have a regulation they can work with.

Mr Yakabuski: My supplementary is to the Minister of the Environment as well. The unprecedented opposition to this regulation transcends simply stakeholders and people who are going to be directly affected; it affects all members of the community. Businesses within the villages where there is a treated water system are feeling the effects of this as well, because they're going to be affected financially if this is not pulled back.

We have discussed in our ridings, and our stakeholders have discussed, the tremendous financial hardship that this is going to have on them. Have you talked to the Minister of Finance and have you studied and looked at what the ramifications will be to the finances of this government if these businesses start to close because of the implementation of this regulation?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: It's very obvious that the previous government did none of the consultation that the honourable member is suggesting we should be doing now.

On Saturday, I actually had the pleasure of meeting with some of the honourable member's constituents. I have explained that—

Interjection: Nice folks.

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: They are lovely people, and they had very valid issues. I was very happy to listen to what they had to say. I was able to share with them that this week I will be making an announcement on regulation 170 and describing this government's plan to deal with the mess that we inherited from your government.

TOURISM

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): My question is for the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. Ontario truly is a province that is yours to discover, with a multitude of places to visit, things to do and sights to see. As you know, this resource, known as our tourist industry, plays an important role in the economy of all communities across this province. What are your ministry's plans to market Ontario across the country and around the world?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): It's an excellent question and I think I can find some material here that will fit it. I want to tell the member that my ministry continues to aggressively market the province of Ontario, as he would know, in a variety of ways aimed at improving the provincial image in the minds of consumers and increasing the number of tourist dollars being spent. This government has wisely invested in marketing dollars and advertisements widely seen in US publications which draw valuable American tourists to this province.

Now listen to this: To assist in this effort I spent the morning extolling the virtues of Ontario on several Buffalo radio stations. The people who listened live close

to the Canadian border and serve as an excellent market for potential tourists.

While my ministry recognizes the importance of Toronto as a valuable resource to tourism experience in Ontario—as we've shown evidence of that—we're interested right across the province. Only last week Tim Peterson, my PA, announced \$375,000 for marketing for Muskoka. We produce experience guides in both languages. We serve consumer guides, trip-guiding guides—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. I'm sure you'll get that going in the supplementary.

1450

Mr Ramal: Minister, I'm pleased we are letting the world know about our beautiful province. The job of promoting tourism also falls on the shoulders of municipalities and townships across this province. In my riding of London-Fanshawe, the city of London, along with many cultural organizations, is promoting our city and its attractions in unique and innovative ways. Minister, what plan does your ministry have to support local communities and their effort to promote tourism?

Hon Mr Bradley: Regional managers and tourism industry consultants from the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation work with the operators of the attractions and accommodations to build packages and develop products that will draw people to a local area. This government believes the best results can be achieved working with municipalities and with the industry, and together we are enhancing the diversity of experiences and attractions that Ontario has to offer.

In the case of your riding, my ministry worked with Tourism London to develop a marketing package, and \$100,000 in provincial funding was recently provided to assist the Forest City in achieving our tourism goals. Also, I would like to congratulate the city of London on their recent successful bid for the 2005 Memorial Cup, an event sure to draw tourists from across the country. By using such tools as the premier-ranked tourism destination framework and the destination marketing partnership fund, my ministry will help re-energize and revitalize the tourism industry with Ontario communities.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Minister of Transportation. On May 6, I asked you a very clear question. I asked you to name the specific police agencies which you consulted before drafting Bill 73. This is the act that refers to specific weights, heights and ages of children while in transit. In order to enforce Bill 73, it will require a lot of resources by our police services. You responded, "Yes ... I have talked to the police forces and they're very supportive of this legislation." Minister, please specify by name exactly which police services or associations you consulted before you drafted Bill 73.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I don't have all the names with me. I will be

more than pleased to share those with the honourable member.

Interjection: Name one of them.

Hon Mr Takhar: Peel police. I talked to them personally.

Mr Dunlop: Minister, I'm sorry for that answer. The Police Association of Ontario was not consulted on this legislation, and it represents 22,000 uniformed and civilian members of police services across our province, nor was the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, which has more than 1,000 members. In fact, the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police was asked to send a representative to act as a human prop at your press conference but has yet to even form an official opinion on the legislation. They're doing that, as we speak, at a conference.

Minister, why would you tell this House, and why would you tell Ontarians, that police were consulted on this legislation when in fact they weren't? Why would you do that to the men and women who are expected to enforce the legislation without the 1,000 police officers you and Dalton McGuinty promised to the citizens of our province?

Hon Mr Takhar: Last week, I was at the opening of a police centre in Peel region, and there were police forces from almost all of Ontario present there. Most of them complimented me on the introduction of this legislation. Not only that, but all the other stakeholders have been very supportive of this legislation, and I'm really proud that we were able to introduce this legislation which, if passed, will save lives here in Ontario.

ENVIRONMENT AWARDS

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Like many Ontarians, the environment and our relationship to the environment is of great concern to me. We've seen citizens and community groups taking positive steps toward conservation and preservation. While these movements have been the most obvious, private business and institutions have been making significant contributions to Ontario's environmental health.

Minister, you recently attended the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment Pollution Prevention Awards in Ottawa. Could you advise this House how Ontario performed at these awards?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm delighted to have this opportunity to inform the House that there were five awards presented at the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment Pollution Prevention Awards. Three of those awards went to Ontario companies. Beach Solar Laundromat, which is located in the Beaches community in Toronto, have promoted pollution prevention in their community by using green technologies. They've actually installed solar panels on the roof of their operation and heat all of the water for their operation with them. Warren's Imaging and Dryography has lowered their energy consumption

and reduced emissions and solid waste, becoming the industry leader in waterless printing. Lastly, The Hospital for Sick Children was recognized for its progress in reducing gaseous, liquid and solid waste emissions. This is complemented by their conservation of power and water. That is an example of institutional conservation in the province.

Mr Berardinetti: It's good to hear that Ontario businesses and institutions are being recognized for their creative pollution prevention initiatives. How can your ministry encourage and support other companies and institutions to follow the lead of these award winners?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: We believe it's very important that the provincial government play a role in showcasing best environmental practices. The ministry does have several projects underway to support pollution prevention. The ministry contributes to funding the Clean Air Foundation, which supports pollution-prevention-based programs like Mow Down Pollution. The Ontario government also has the Ontario Environment Business Directory, managed by the Ministry of the Environment. It is a tool that can be used by industry to identify providers of environmental goods and services that can assist industry in meeting pollution prevention goals. Also, the Green Industry Office, which is managed by Ministry of the Environment, assists Ontario-based companies offering products, services and technologies to prevent pollution and to protect or clean up our environment. Also, my ministry participates each year in the Globe conference, where we take the opportunity to showcase green technologies available in Ontario to the rest of Canada and North America.

WATER QUALITY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. You've refused to review the Conservative well water regulation that has been described by the Canadian environmental law association as inefficient and unenforceable, and your refusal as alarming and shocking. You were quoted in a CP story that in your perspective, and in the perspective of the MOE staff, regulation 903 is adequate. I want to ask you, in arriving to this view, did you consult with the provincial well coordinator, your own expert on this issue?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): With regard to regulation 903, we consulted the Walkerton inquiry report. We read what Justice O'Connor had to say in terms of what is the government's responsibility with regard to protecting well water. O'Connor was really very clear. He indicated that the provincial government should provide the public with information about how to supply water safely and should ensure that this information is well distributed. The government should also maintain a system of licensing well drillers and ensure the easy availability of microbiological tests. That is, in fact, what is accomplished in regulation 903.

Ms Churley: You didn't answer my question. I asked if you've consulted with your own expert on this. You're breaking your own promise if you don't allow a review of this. It is unbelievable that, post-Walkerton, you are actually lowering standards for our drinking water. Minister, I'm going to ask, will you make the commitment today to speak to the Ontario well coordinator, your own expert, about regulation 903, and then report back to this House what he has to say about the effectiveness of this regulation in ensuring public health and safety? Will you consult with this expert and report back to this House?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: This government has an initiative underway, the source water protection initiative. We have established two committees, the implementation committee and the technical experts committee. These are made up of experts in their field from across the province who are charged with the responsibility to provide this minister with recommendations on how to ensure that all source water in this province is protected. We are awaiting the reports of those committees to provide us with direction to ensure that on a go-forward basis our legislation and our regulations will do just that: ensure that water is safe in Ontario.

1500

RED HILL CREEK EXPRESSWAY

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. On Saturday I had the opportunity to be in the great city of Hamilton with our Conservative candidate, Tara Crugnale. While we were there, we challenged your candidate to sign an IOU on behalf of the people of Hamilton, and it related to the Red Hill Creek Expressway. The fact of the matter is that after many years, that expressway is finally going ahead. As a result of an extended period of time and extended environmental assessments, the costs of that expressway have increased significantly.

Minister, you will know that we had committed to support funding to 75% of that cost. The IOU that we challenged your candidate to sign was to match that and to in fact come up with the \$55 million that Hamilton will require as the 75% contribution to make that project a reality. Will you stand in your place today and agree that you will honour your candidate's call and our call to match that level of funding?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Let me just tell you what we are doing about Hamilton in terms of the Red Hill Creek Expressway. We are absolutely committed to providing \$106 million regarding the Red Hill Creek Expressway. In addition to that, we are fully committed to funding 100% of the interchange with the QEW. This government is not just talking about it; we are actually going to do it and we're going to provide funding for it.

Mr Klees: Why am I not surprised that the minister didn't answer the question? The minister will know that an additional \$19 million of costs have been identified by the city of Hamilton. Will the minister stand in his place today and confirm for the House and the people of

Hamilton that he will, as the Minister of Transportation, commit that additional funding? Will he do that today?

Hon Mr Takhar: My friend from Oak Ridges seems to have a lot of ideas after leaving his portfolio. He tells me he has this commitment and that commitment. He told me he had a deal with the 407, which we never found. I asked him in writing if he could provide me one. He couldn't do that. Now he tells me he had a commitment for the people of Hamilton. We are absolutely committed to providing \$106 million, and in addition we will be fully funding the QEW interchange.

SCHOOL SAFETY

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Education. On Friday you made an announcement at the character and citizenship conference. You announced the expansion of a pilot project that has been shown to reduce bullying and aggression in children while increasing their emotional literacy. Can you give us a little bit more detail about the program and how it will help to reduce bullying in our schools?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I'm very pleased to report to the House that the government has taken an initiative to try to get at what really is easy to call a scourge but hard to do something about. Bullying exists in every school we have. We have rules about what to do when bullying goes wrong and harms somebody, but very little in terms of coherent effort underway to prevent bullying. This is what this program is about. It's called Roots of Empathy. It puts infants from a neighbourhood in a school with young children and tries to bring out those aspects of their emotional well-being to make sure it develops at the same time as other aspects, because we have found there's a strong connection between bullies and the absence of that development. It's a proactive program, proven to work, that is now going to be available in 80 more locations around the province.

Mrs Sandals: Minister. I'm absolutely thrilled you're going to be providing pilot funding for Roots of Empathy. This is a program I've been a big fan of for a long time. One of my frustrations in my former role as president of the public school boards' association was that the former government would not fund Roots of Empathy.

Could you, however, tell us a little bit more about how this is going to improve access to bullying programs for schools all across the province?

Hon Gerard Kennedy: Thank you to the member opposite who, from both her former and present interests, has helped us to develop some of our thinking around safe schools. This particular program—everyone should know about it—was a made-in-Ontario innovation, using very basic technology, if you like. They were just insights that were brought together by Mary Gordon and an organization called Roots of Empathy. But to get funding they had to go to the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. They couldn't get funding in their own home province—from the province at large—and school boards

were having to scrape together dollars. This will allow boards that never had the program before to access it. It will allow boards that have had the program but are having a hard time hanging on to it make sure they'll be in a better position to do it.

It costs us only about \$25 per child for the entire year, or a dollar per session. This is a cost-effective program, but because it was about prevention, because it was about public schools doing better, for some reason it couldn't attract the attention of the previous government.

Research in British Columbia showed 88% of the kids exposed to it had reduced aggressive tendencies. This program has a new component for research to make sure we have the full benefit now—

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

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. When in opposition you said, "Gas prices all over Ontario continue to be too high and the government of Mike Harris is doing nothing about it. The Liberals have given the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations a solution, but we see no action from the Mike Harris government."

Minister, I asked you this question last week and you didn't talk about your solution in your response. Could you try again? Northerners want to know what your solution to high gas prices is.

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): The question is a valid one. As Minister of Northern Development and Mines, I believe it's incumbent that the petroleum products industry understand the significant impact that gas prices have on the people of northern Ontario. So within the last two weeks I met with the senior vice-president and representatives of the Canadian petroleum price industries, because I believe it's critical that they understand there is a negative impact from higher gas prices in northern Ontario. It was the first time in many years that they met with a northern minister. I believe the Minister of Northern Development and Mines should be articulating the concerns of northerners.

What I did in opposition I would never apologize for. We had a government in place for eight years, before we took over, that did absolutely nothing for northern Ontario. Therefore, we in the opposition had to be very creative and articulate the concerns of northerners.

Mr Miller: Minister, I hope you were talking about your solution, because you said you have a solution: "The Liberals have given the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations a solution." I'd like to hear about that solution.

In the north an automobile is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Your government has made announcements of extra funding for the TTC. In the north, there is no public transit in most locations. As Minister of Northern Development and Mines, how do you intend to help

northerners, who rely on an automobile, to deal with these record high prices? Tell us about your solution, Minister.

Hon Mr Bartolucci: Clearly, the people of northern Ontario should understand that our solution will not be appointing gas busters. We will not be sending people across the province of Ontario. We will not be raising false expectations or hopes, and we will not, as the previous government did, make 14 recommendations and address only one of them.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question today is to the Minister of Citizenship. On May 3, 2004, the Prime Minister and our Premier announced new funding to assist persons with disabilities in gaining access to employment. While this was a positive step, the location chosen for the announcement was one of concern for disability advocates. In 2001, Famous Players was found to have violated the human rights of Ontarians with disabilities. This was in regard to significant barriers faced for individuals with disabilities when they tried to enjoy the services.

The Famous Players theatre now is a fully accessible venue and a leader in employing individuals with disabilities. However, accessibility in this province continues to be a very serious issue for many individuals. Minister, with over 1.5 million Ontarians—an estimated 13.5% of the population—living with a disability, and considering that these numbers are expected to rise as our population ages, I would like to ask the minister what her ministry is doing to improve accessibility in the province?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to thank my colleague not only for the question but for the wonderful work he did in opposition as the critic in this area.

As the announcement last week pointed out, accessibility is an issue that affects all Ontarians. Everyone benefits from improved accessibility, and that is why the McGuinty government is committed to strengthening the Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Our government is committed to building a province where all people have the opportunity to fully participate and achieve their potential. We have just completed a series of consultations, and we are reviewing the data in order to strengthen the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

1510

PETITIONS

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition from a group of names. It now has upwards of 6,000 signatures.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital has asked for ministerial consent to make capital changes to its facility to accommodate the 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 this petition as I totally agree with it.

PENSION PLANS

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

“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.”

I have signed this petition as well.

PRIMARY CARE

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

“Whereas the community of Peterborough is suffering a crisis in terms of accessibility to health care, brought on by the severe and growing shortage of family physicians; and

“Whereas the community of Peterborough has demonstrated extraordinary strong local leadership in developing a proposal for primary care reform which is very innovative and will provide access to primary care for the growing list of more than 20,000 residents in our community without a family physician; and

“Whereas this proposal has been endorsed by the county of Peterborough, the city of Peterborough, the Peterborough County Medical Society, the Peterborough Community Care Access Centre, the Peterborough Regional Health Centre and the Peterborough County-City Health Unit;”—

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): What a group.

Mr Leal: An extraordinary group.

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

“To work with representatives of the local community to ensure that all residents of Peterborough have access to an appropriate primary care provider through the timely implementation of the proposed integrated primary care model, as this model provides appropriate and equitable compensation for family physicians while incorporating sufficient interdisciplinary health care providers, community linkages and appropriate administrative, infrastructure and information technology supports to enable health professionals to enjoy a more realistic, healthy work-life balance.”

I’ll put my name to this petition.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of seniors. This group in Fort Erie includes Norma Jean Garlow and the Caverson family, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas during the election campaign the Dalton McGuinty Liberals said they would improve the Ontario drug benefit program but now are considering delisting drugs and imposing higher user fees; and

“Whereas the Liberal government has increased costs to seniors by taking away the seniors’ property tax rebate and increased the price of hydro;

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

“The Dalton McGuinty Liberals should keep their campaign promise to improve the Ontario drug benefit program and abandon their plan to delist drugs or increase seniors’ drug fees.”

In support, my signature.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I have another petition relating to the issue of senior care.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I have a petition from the Ontario Federation of Health Care Workers local 1110. This is with respect to the issue of long-term-care cutbacks.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas on April 22, 2004, the Ontario government announced \$60 million in funding cuts to the seniors living in long-term care in Ontario; and

"Whereas the impact on long-term care results in a reduction that is equivalent to the elimination of an entire housekeeping and laundry services department in each long-term-care facility;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Liberal government to reverse this decision and immediately reinstate full and equitable funding to long-term care in Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of long-term care in my riding of Durham.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition here and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

"Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly condemned the actions of his own party's government;

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

I've signed this petition, as I agree with it.

WATER QUALITY

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I have a petition concerning the new Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002, regulation 170/03.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario government is implementing regulation 170/03, and in doing so will affect town halls, churches and private property owners including small

businesses, local community centres and campgrounds; and

"Whereas meeting the requirements of regulation 170/03 has meant and will mean excessive costs and financial burdens for all drinking water system owners; and

"Whereas there is no demonstrated proof that this new regulation will improve drinking water that has been and continues to be safe in rural municipalities; and

"Whereas Ontario regulation 170/03 was passed without adequate consultation with stakeholders throughout Ontario; and

"Whereas stakeholders should have been consulted concerning the necessity, efficacy, economic, environmental and health impacts on rural Ontario;

"Therefore, be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario abandon the implementation of and immediately repeal regulation 170/03, as well as amending the pertinent enabling legislation;

"We, the undersigned, support the attached petition."

I signed it as well.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL PARKWAY

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to present the petition on behalf of my riding.

"Whereas Alexander Graham Bell, renowned inventor of society-altering technological inventions, such as the telephone, greatly revolutionized the daily lives of people in Ontario, Canada and indeed the world; and

"Whereas Alexander Graham Bell's contributions to science, technology and society as a whole, were in part developed and tested while he lived in Brantford, Ontario; and

"Whereas Brantford lies at the heart of the section of 403 which runs from Woodstock to Burlington;

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

"To adopt and pass into law Dave Levac's private member's bill, Bill 44, the Alexander Graham Bell Parkway Act, renaming Highway 403 between Woodstock and Burlington as a tribute to this great inventor."

I'm pleased to affix my signature.

1520

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): This is a petition to the Parliament of Ontario signed by good citizens of Cambridge.

"Whereas gasoline prices have increased at alarming rates during the past year; and

"Whereas the high and different gas prices in different areas of Ontario have caused confusion and unfair hardship on hard-working Cambridge families;

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

“(1) That the Ontario McGuinty Liberal government immediately freeze gas prices for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate; and

“(2) That the Ontario McGuinty Liberal government and the federal Martin Liberal government immediately lower their taxes on gas for a temporary period until world oil prices moderate; and

“(3) That the Ontario McGuinty Liberal government immediately initiate a royal commission to investigate the predatory gas prices charged by oil companies operating in Ontario.”

DRIVER EXAMINATIONS FOR SENIORS

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

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Thank you, Speaker. I'm so grateful to you. Indeed, I'm probably indebted—not likely.

I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads:

“Whereas regarding the AZ driver testing, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“The following are some of the concerns which truck drivers and driver-owners between the ages of 65 and 75 years have incurred:

“We feel that the province of Ontario discriminates against AZ drivers once they reach the age of 65 by requiring them to be retested in the same manner as a person who has no experience, ie, written test, air brake test, road test, medical and vision. These tests can become very costly by losing time off work; renting or leasing equipment for road tests.

“This form of testing is only required by the province of Ontario. Every other province in Canada and every state in the United States only requires vision and medical exams for licence renewal.

“A driver's history can be checked through the licence point system and also through CVOR system. The testing system in Ontario is so overloaded with new applicants, it doesn't make sense to require drivers with 25-30 years' experience to add to the problem by being tested. Some drivers have to make appointments 100 miles from their home to be retested before their birthday. There are cases where an independent owner-operator has been tested and failed and not been able to drive his own truck home because his licences have been downgraded on the spot. Now he has to absorb more costs to get his equipment home. It seems common sense has become rather uncommon.

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: This does not follow the format of a petition; it's a speech.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you for your advice. It's been approved, I take it.

Mr Kormos: Thank you, Speaker. Where was I?

“The ministry seems to have the attitude that once we reach 65 years of age, we wake up one morning and

forget everything we ever learned. Maybe we should hold our doctors, lawyers and especially our political leaders to the same standard.

“We feel that an annual medical and vision test should be adequate to maintain our AZ driving privilege.”

I have affixed my signature as well.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

I affix my signature, as I am in hearty agreement.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition to the Parliament of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

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

I'm pleased to sign this in support of the constituents throughout Ontario who are outraged about this retroactive, regressive tax.

ONTARIO BUDGET

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

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

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

“Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly,”—the Honourable Gary Carr—“condemned the actions of his own party’s government;

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

I will sign this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AUDIT STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2003LOI DE 2003 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA VÉRIFICATION
DES COMPTES PUBLICS

Resuming the debate adjourned on April 19, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor / Projet de loi 18, Loi concernant le vérificateur provincial.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): The member for Simcoe North has the floor.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I understand I have five or six minutes left in my comments from the previous day of debate. I’m pleased again to stand and make a few comments on Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor.

It was brought forward by the Honourable Greg Sorbara, the Minister of Finance, who will have a very difficult job coming up next Tuesday, May 18, budget day. It should be an interesting budget, trying to keep all those promises made to the citizens of Ontario, particularly that one promise. Mr Speaker, you probably remember that one, where Mr McGuinty says on TV, “I will not raise your taxes.” That will be the most interesting piece of the budget we’ve ever seen.

I’m hearing today some of these pathetic petitions on keeping the budget in the House. If you remember, just to put it on the record, the budget in 2003 was read outside of this House, only. All pre-budget consultations, all debate, all the lead-up, all the committee hearings, everything was done according to what you would call parliamentary tradition and it was done in the Parliament of

Ontario. You tried to demonize our government for doing something very innovative at the time, and of course we paid for that. We lost the election. There’s no question about it.

That was seven months ago, and they’re still treating us like the government. We’ve had seven months to listen to this nonsense of the Liberals trying to demonize the Conservatives. Now, here we are with this new Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor, and we’re going to debate that as well.

One of the things I’m really concerned about is the democratic renewal process that we talk about and how it fits into fixed election dates and the Americanization of politics here in Ontario. I wonder, will we be called governors and congressmen and all those sorts of titles or will we remain MPPs? I’m curious about that because, as you try to work into fixed election dates, you are definitely Americanizing the politics here in Ontario.

I know that’s one of Mr Sorbara’s pet peeves. He’d just love to have fixed election dates. He had a private member’s bill on this and he went out of his mind when we called it the Americanization of Ontario politics, prior to his being the Minister of Finance, back when he was on the front row right over here. He was very upset about that.

1530

On this side of the House, we call this the Sheila Fraser act, because, of course, what a neat year to bring out a Provincial Auditor—an Auditor General is what it will be called. This is the one year we’ve got an Auditor General who’s really out there, working hand in hand and doing her very best to clean up what we would call, basically, corruption in our federal system. We don’t know how many millions it is now. I guess it’s over a billion dollars that had been paid to advertising firms, etc.

Yes, I agree with Sheila Fraser. We need to have more accountability and more transparency. There’s no question in my mind about that. Sheila Fraser has brought that forward in Ottawa. I give her a lot of credit as the Auditor General for a job that I consider well done under extreme pressure from the new Prime Minister, Paul Martin, who thought he was going to coast to victory with 51% of the support of Canadians back in October when he took over the role. Now he’s dwindled down to, what, 27% or 28%? He looks like the cat that swallowed the canary right now when you see him out in public. I guess he’s afraid. He’s obviously afraid because he may, in fact, not gain a majority government, may not gain a minority government, and he’s got his back against the wall because of the transparency that we could not see in the federal system.

I know that when we go through this bill, there are a lot of very interesting points to bring forward, but we look forward to it going to committee. We look forward to the comments that will be made at the committee, bringing in different people to speak on this particular bill. I’m interested a lot more in how the bill affects democratic renewal here in our province. I know we’re also paralleling this with the Government Advertising

Act, and we continue to talk about government advertising, what's partisan, what's not partisan. We're quite interested in how all these sorts of things will come together as a piece of legislation.

I know that some of my other colleagues have a few comments to make today as well. I want to thank God that it's finally got warm out, because it will help our tourism operators to have some nice weather, but I'm telling you, this building is like an oven here. I don't know how everybody else is finding it. It's very warm as far as I'm concerned. But hopefully the nice weather will bring out the golfers and get our recreational activities going, the resorts around the province. There are a lot of people who have had a difficult winter and a very, very difficult 2003, with SARS, mad cow, the blackout and all those sorts of things. So let's hope we do have a good summer this year and that the tourism operators thrive.

I was glad to hear the Minister of Tourism this afternoon mention very briefly some of the programs the government's operating—of course, the programs that our government had as part of the Ontario tourism marketing partnership. They are programs that are well worth marketing our great province.

So, Mr Speaker, I look forward to more debate on Bill 18, the Auditor General act or the Sheila Fraser act, and I thank you for this opportunity to speak to it today.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments?

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm going to be taking the floor in around eight minutes' time to speak to this bill on behalf of the NDP, but during the course of these two minutes, I think it's interesting—oh yes, the Sheila Fraser bill, how interesting—because, hot off the wires, on the Globe and Mail Web site, I just read the news item that charges have finally been laid.

Two actors busted in Ottawa—"popped," as they say out on the street—undoubtedly not having to rely upon their legal aid duty counsel lawyers. I read in the paper, just fresh, as I say, hot off the wires, one Mr Charles Guité charged with six counts of fraud, totalling \$1,967,000. Another accused is one Jean Brault, the president of Groupaction Marketing, also charged with six counts of fraud, totalling \$1,967,000.

What's newsworthy—because, of course, these people are presumed innocent—is that Mr Guité is now going to sing like the proverbial Tweety Bird. Mr Guité is now highly motivated to talk like he's never talked before. Mr Guité is now highly motivated to no longer protect political players in this scandal. In fact, if anything, he has, I dare say, an incentive to let the cat out of the bag, to spill the beans.

Interruption.

Mr Kormos: That's OK. That child is better behaved than most of the members of the Legislature ever have been, I tell you. She's welcome here any time.

So I'm looking forward to—there was a young person—

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): You scared her.

Mr Kormos: That's right. This is a scary place for children. It's a scary place for any rational person. But

there's a young child up in the gallery who wanted to participate in the debate. Quite frankly, her contribution seemed as valid as any that has been made today.

I will be speaking to this in a few minutes' time and look forward to the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? The member for, and I want to get it right, Stormont-Dundas—no, I'm going to get it wrong.

Interjection: Ajax-Pickering-Whitby.

The Deputy Speaker: Ajax-Pickering-Whitby. I apologize. I get the two of you mixed up.

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): We're close, but I'm not sure the member opposite, who's from Whitby-Ajax, would necessarily appreciate that. It's Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, at least for the balance of this Parliament. Subsequently, the riding will be redefined yet again. It seems to be redefined each and every time there's a realignment, and probably that speaks in part to Bill 18 and redefining the Provincial Auditor as the Auditor General into more current parlance, as well as some of the roles. But my riding, as I was just saying, has gone from Pickering to Pickering-Ajax to Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge. Next time around, it will be either Ajax-Pickering or Pickering-Scarborough East. It's a constant change.

The change from the Provincial Auditor to Auditor General will, as I say, bring things into more current parlance in respect of the function and descriptors of that particular role. But it's really interesting, as you begin reading the legislation itself, some of the items that have come to the fore that the public wouldn't be aware of and how important a role the Auditor General will be playing if this legislation is passed.

I want to draw attention just to one part, and that's section 11, the power to examine under oath. It says, "The Auditor General may examine any person on oath on any matter pertinent to an audit or examination under this act." That speaks highly, I think, to the democratic principles by which we operate and highly to the Auditor General and that function: to be able to call upon individuals to provide evidence under oath, to ensure that the finances of the province of Ontario are being managed in a fashion appropriate with the legalities of good fiscal management. This is good legislation that will reflect well on this Legislature.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I have spoken in the past on this Bill 18 by Mr Sorbara, but I was impressed when listening to the comments made by the member from Simcoe North. He does put his heart into a couple of very good issues that I think need to be listened to, and his advice respectfully to the Minister of Finance, Mr Sorbara, in his considerations for the role of the auditor. That is that our federal experience—you know, when you see Sheila Fraser, the work she has done, I think the same empowerment here in Ontario—I have nothing whatever to criticize on any of that.

Paul Martin in Ottawa, if you want to look at a Liberal example of what's going on, is kind of shutting down the Liberal-dominated public accounts committee, not

allowing them to report because, "There's an election." I'm not sure if it's the \$100-million scandal, for those viewing, that the Liberals in Ottawa are trying to cover up.

I look forward to the expanded role. I'll be supportive of the expanded role of the auditor. There are a couple of sections here: the freedom to ask questions, and certainly under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act—I don't want to suggest it, but the more intrusive government becomes, the more the privacy of the individual becomes a concern to me and to others. If you have nothing to hide, I guess you have nothing to fear.

But I really think that in our circles here, we need to have openness and accountability and transparency. We've all heard those terms, but if they really wanted to strengthen this—because I support it—they would be requiring that pre-election promises, platforms, should be costed and audited. That clearly wasn't the case—Dalton McGuinty had 230 promises. There was a 60-page document that we tried to get. We've been denied access to that report, and the Liberals clearly don't want to commit on any of the promises. But you know, if they do the right thing here and accept just one amendment that I'm bringing in, bring in the disclosure of pre-election, I'll be supportive of it.

1540

Mr Levac: I'm not going to spend any time talking about what previous governments did or what federal governments did; I'm going to talk about the bill. The bill itself is what the people want. The people have been telling us, over the time that I've been elected, that they want transparency; they want accountability; they want to be able to know that if there are going to be taxes, it's going to be spent in ways that we want to focus on.

The Auditor General—it is now going to be the Auditor General, by the way, in this bill; they're going to change that—is going to basically say that if you're a funding organization and you receive money from the government through the taxpayers of this province, you're going to be audited: value-for-money audits. What is wrong with that? That is the thing that tells me that we're on the right track. It says very clearly that those monies coming into these coffers and the way they're going to be spent are going to be looked at by a third party, a reputable person who knows the audit of the province of Ontario, and they're going to say, "You know what? This is where you're spending the money; here's where you're wasting the money. Here's where you're spending the money; this is where you can improve spending the money." The other thing about the legislation is, it's going to come back to the Legislature and it's going to hold the government accountable for making sure that those audits are paid attention to.

The second component to it, in a nutshell, is saying, "You know what? We are sick and tired of party after party, government after government, saying that your budget is over here, and then we get hold of it, it's over here. A curse on all their teams."

Look, the people of Ontario have caught on. They're making it quite clear that all they want to see is that when an election comes by, we won't be playing this game of, "Well, you're actually over-budget or under-budget or this budget or that budget." The auditor is going to give you a transparent picture of what those finances look like in the province of Ontario when the election comes. That's the second component to this that I know, no matter how you try to twist or spin on all sides, is what the people of Ontario want. They simply want to know that you're spending properly the money, the taxes, you're collecting from them.

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

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to thank the member from Niagara Centre, the member from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, the member from Durham and the member from Brant for their comments on my speech on Bill 18. I appreciate their efforts on the piece of legislation and their comments as well.

I would like to talk a little bit about what the member from Brant mentioned. I guess the whole purpose of making sure that our transfer agencies, which receive, of course, most of the money we collect here in the province of Ontario, are accountable. My understanding—this is going to be the difficult part with this piece of legislation—is that all of these organizations are already audited. If you go to a school board, they have an auditor who comes in and gives a financial statement at the end of the year. My understanding is that it's very detailed and very complex.

I don't know how much more you can do with those audited statements. I'm not an auditor; I don't know. But the fact of the matter is, maybe this legislation will allow you to overrule the audit that they already have or overrule the audit that the hospitals have. But I simply don't know how you intend to implement a piece of legislation in that manner.

Second of all, as taxpayers, I think we want every penny that we collect in the province—or the federal government or the municipal government—spent as efficiently as possible. All governments talk about accountability and transparency and all those key words, but it's always a challenge to make it happen.

So we'll listen to other comments on Bill 18 and take our judgment based on that. I thank you, Mr Speaker, for this opportunity to say a few words this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Kormos: Speaker, if I may, I seek unanimous consent to defer the NDP leadoff on this until the critic is here.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been requested that unanimous consent be given to stand down the NDP leadoff. Do I have that? Agreed.

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker.

I'm going to speak to a couple of elements of the bill. One of the issues, of course, is that you can give the auditor all the powers in the world, but if the auditor doesn't have the budget to do the work, it's academic; it's really academic. So all of the talk about enhancing

the auditor's power, increasing the scope of what he's to examine, means zip, zero, nada if the auditor doesn't have the resources, including the staff and the budget, to do the work. You know full well that that's been a serious concern of our now retired auditor Erik Peters for a good chunk of time. You've got to put your money where your mouth is, I say to the government. You can't call upon the auditor to increase the scope of his or her work—its work—without enhancing the budget.

One of the backdoor means or tactics, strategies, used by a government in manipulating the auditor and the auditor's office is to control the purse strings. The last government did it to the point where it was becoming embarrassingly obvious. And I say this to you: That's why I look forward to this bill going to committee, and one of the people I hope we call upon, should this bill go to committee, is Erik Peters, the retired Provincial Auditor, who has some real expertise and insight. We're in the process now of hiring, because the auditor of course is an officer of the assembly. Hopefully, the government will uphold the tradition of there being unanimity around the appointment of the new auditor. So that's a very important issue.

The other interesting element is section 6 of the bill, which amends section 4 of the Audit Act. It creates a clear 10-year term, with no entitlement to reinstatement or a renewal of the term. You take a look at section 4 of the act as it exists now, and it was basically an appointment for life, subject to the retirement age of 65. Now we're seeing a clear 10-year term with no prospect of renewal.

That takes us back to the interesting debate we had—not much of a debate, because only New Democrats were speaking to it—about a motion to renew the appointment of our privacy commissioner. That was precisely what some of the comments from the New Democratic Party were all about: The fact that there is a prospect or a possibility of renewal of a term doesn't mean it is a necessary avenue that's going to be pursued. So I've got to tell you—and I'm interested once again in committee—the 10-year term is one that I find particularly appealing.

As I indicated during debate around the privacy commissioner's appointment, it's important that the people in these roles of officers of the assembly do not feel beholden to any government or any individual within government. It's important that they know they've got absolute freedom. Quite frankly, it's tantamount to the independence that we give our judiciary, for instance. A fixed term says to that person, who in this instance will be the newly named Auditor General: "Your function for the next 10 years is to do this particular role or task with no fear of recrimination. You don't have to worry about sucking up to the government that happens to be the government of the day toward the end of your 10-year term because you're not going to get renewed anyway. So there's nothing to be gained by sucking up to the government of the day."

In our experience, at least in the recent past—my recent past here at Queen's Park—we've been especially

blessed with the personality of Erik Peters, one tough, effective auditor, no two ways about it. Peters is smart, he's tough and he was an equal-opportunity auditor. He tore a strip off governments of all political stripes, and did it without hesitation.

I should tell you, like everybody else, I was back in my riding on the weekend—yesterday—for Mother's Day, at the Hungarian Hall, down on Hellems Avenue in Welland. They had a Mother's Day lunch that they have every year. I was sitting at a table with some just incredible people. I was sitting there with Mary Stucz, who turned 90 in October last year. She's going to be 91 this year. She was there for the Mother's Day lunch with two of her daughters: Lillian, who's her middle daughter, and her youngest daughter, Mary Jane. Again, Mrs Stucz is going to be 91 this year, looks a fraction of her age, sharp, just a delightful woman. But a fascinating story. Her maiden name was Ellis. It's a Hungarian name, believe it or not. Ellis is the Anglo pronunciation. Mr John Stucz, her husband, passed away. He was Hungarian as well. Mrs Mary Stucz was a Hungarian from Transylvania, a Romanian-Hungarian, because, as you know, that Transylvanian part of Romania is Hungarian ethnically and, quite frankly, during the communist regime Ceausescu in particular was very oppressive. He tried to Romanize the names and tried to snuff out and crush the Hungarian language, the Magyar language.

1550

The fascinating thing about Mrs Stucz was that she was born on Sixth Street in Welland and, at a very young age, in 1922, as a matter of fact, at the age of eight or nine, her family goes back to Romania, to Transylvania, from Welland—what was Crowland—where she was born. Then, at the age of 13, her father, a labourer, takes his family to Havana, Cuba, to live. So in 1927 this woman is living in Havana, Cuba, until she reaches the age of around 15, when she moves back to Canada, gets married at the age of 16 and has her first child, which wasn't unusual in those days. But just an amazing history.

I talked to her about Havana. Many people, of course—Canadians—flock to Cuba. She has vivid, clear recollections of old Havana. I encouraged her daughters, for instance, and said, "Please, take your mother." They've never been back to Cuba. The daughters have never taken mom, Mary Stucz, back to Cuba. I said, "Please take your mom to Havana." Havana, as you know—it's not as if it's been torn down to build new high-rises. Havana hasn't changed. It's like a living museum. As a matter of fact, the United Nations has recognized the core of Havana as an internationally acclaimed world site.

I was just so pleased that Mary Stucz—the thing that would just tickle me to no end would be to talk to her after she's done a couple of weeks in Havana and had a chance to visit some of the very spots that she lived in as a Hungarian immigrant, as a Magyar immigrant.

Imagine the courage of these people. Think about that. Here's a woman who's own family was the Hungarian

minority in Romania, had to deal with that; moved to Canada, where she was born, on Sixth Street in Crowland. So she grows up learning Hungarian with her parents and probably a few words, at least, of Romanian, plus English, which was the language of her mates and students, and then to go back to Hungarian Romania, where she would reinforce her Hungarian language skills, and then move to Spanish Cuba—from the age of nine or 10 to 13, through to 15, living in Spanish Cuba. A fascinating woman, like so many people out there in our communities and so many of that immigrant community—I just wanted to tell you a little bit about Mary Stucz. She's a great Canadian.

You know, we've got all these big, high-profile, TV kind of people, those reality show personalities. Jeez, give me a break. Real heroes are people like Mary Alice Stucz, still living on her own in the family home down on Hellems Avenue in Little Hungary. You know what I'm talking about—Park Street, Griffith Street, where the Hungarian Catholic Church is, the Hungarian Hall, and of course the Hungarian Presbyterian Church of Reverend Maria Papp is just down the road. That was the core of the Hungarian community. Fascinating people.

I say to you that when the next Liberal takes the floor with respect to Bill 18, there should be a strong, clear, commitment to (1) public hearings around this issue; (2) that we in this Legislature have to be told in no uncertain terms how the auditor is going to maintain its independence, when an essential element of its independence is adequate funding. I say that the funding, the approach to funding, and the formula, have to be as transparent as the auditor's work and what the auditor is called upon to do; and (3) the control of that funding has to be removed from the political personalities. In other words, the auditor's office itself has to play a far more critical role in determining the adequacy of funding. I'm not purporting—I'm not pretending—to have that formula at the tip of my tongue here and now, but as I say, I know that Eric Peters would be interested. I'm hoping he would be interested in participating and giving us some insight into that.

I mentioned earlier, the auditor—again, we're adopting the federal title, Auditor General, for the Provincial Auditor, because other speakers have mentioned Sheila Fraser, the federal Auditor General, who of course blew the whistle, blew the top off the Liberal corruption scandal in Ottawa, which is far from over.

Today, yet another interesting stage, when we see very serious criminal charges laid against Charles Guité, a former public works and government services Canada official; and Jean Brault, the president of Groupaction Marketing. They were busted. Now, let's be fair. When people like this get busted, it's not like Cops on TV, where they go running down the street in their undershirts and the cop tackles them and twists their arms up around their back. It's not like that. It's sort of, "Mr Guité, would you mind dropping by with your lawyer and we'll process this. We won't ruffle your \$2,000 suit." Again, it wasn't like Cops.

You see, if you get busted for stealing \$2 million of taxpayers' money, like Mr Guité does, you get treated with kid gloves. If you're some kid and you scoop an Oh Henry off the shelf, they do a real number on you. So what's the moral there? What's the message there? Go big or go home?

In any event, the scandal in Ottawa—Guité was the guy—people across Canada know Guité's name because he was the proverbial Tweety Bird. He sang at the House of Commons hearing on the Liberal theft of taxpayers' money. Who was it who acknowledged that Guité had showed such incredible restraint working for the Tories—in other words, didn't rat them out—therefore, he was suitable? Remember that? The reference was made that when Guité was hired, one minister said, "You were so good not ratting out Mulroney and the Tories—

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Dingwall.

Mr Kormos: Dingwall, yes. So Dingwall said, "Yeah, you're a pretty solid guy. You're like a made guy, like one of Tony Soprano's guys. You're a good guy. You didn't rat out the Tories, so we'll hire you too, because we don't want anybody to rat us out." The fly in the ointment here of course, is that Guité is now busted. Down where I am come from, \$2-million frauds get you anywhere from, what, two to six years, Hudak?

Mr Hudak: What are you asking me for?

Mr Kormos: You just might know. I don't know. You're the only person here who would be willing to assist me in this.

So two to six years is maybe—and I don't want to be inappropriate. So this guy's looking at two to six. Let's say six years. If he goes down on it, six years. Now he's not going to do hard time. We're not talking about KP, Kingston pen. We're not even talking about Millhaven.

We're talking about some rich guys' jail where they've got tennis courts—maybe with the murderer from Saskatchewan, Thatcher, the guy who murdered his wife. Maybe the same joint that Thatcher's in. That's right, put one of these guys in the same cell with Thatcher and they can take turns being cellmates.

The thing is, if you thought Guité sang at that hearing in Ottawa, just wait until he gets together with his lawyers. He's going to sing arias. He's going sound like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He is going name names. He's going name names ad infinitum. He is, because he watched—what's that HBO series—Oz, or something about jails? Guité watches that TV series Oz and goes, "Holy moly, I don't want to go jail. Not my style." I've got to tell Mr Guité that jail isn't the worst place in the world, but guys like him don't want to go to jail. So he's going rat out, I bet you. But the problem is, he's not going rat out soon enough.

1600

It's fascinating. Isn't this a cute little diversion for Mr Martin? All of a sudden he can say, "Oh, no, it wasn't me. I didn't have my hands in anybody else's pockets." Oh, please. "It was this Mr Guité, this renegade." You see, the problem is, that might cut it but for the fact that Guité has only popped for \$2 million of the \$100 million

plus, as much as \$250 million, of taxpayers' money that was stolen.

So you can lay off some of this on to one Charles Guité, but there's still \$248 million left unaccounted for. Please understand me: Mr Guité is innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Quite frankly, Mr Guité may be the fall guy here. He may be the scapegoat. How convenient—what do you think?—to have Mr Guité charged.

Does it take some of the heat off Paul Martin and his gang of thieves? Does it? What do you think? Does it take some heat off Paul Martin? Do you think there's some design to this? I'm not suggesting collusion in any conspiracy on the part of the RCMP or whoever busted Guité, but it's just oh so convenient. So Martin thinks he's going to now get away with saying, "See, it was Guité." But Guité is only busted for \$2 million of the \$250 million. There's still \$248 million. So there are a lot of charges to go around. That's all I'm saying. There's going to be lots left for Paul Martin and other major Liberals. There'll be jail cells ready with their names on them in due course, make no mistake about it. What can I say? Fascinating.

Of course, the Paul Martins and the political hacks will say, "Oh, the matter is before the courts now. We can't speak about it." Oh, yeah, that's a convenient cop-out. Jeez. I'd like to be a fly on the wall in the room when Guité's high-priced lawyers say, "Well, crown attorneys, have we got something for you. Let's make a deal." Monty Hall's Let's Make a Deal, that's what it's going to be. We'll make a deal, all right. We'll give you some big carp because all you've got is a minnow here, all you've got is little, teeny—

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the member for Niagara Centre in the last two minutes could refer to Bill 18, please.

Mr Kormos: I've only got a minute and 45 seconds left, and if I didn't throw Bill 18 into the hopper at this point, I have been delinquent in my sense of responsibility to you, Speaker, and your colleagues, your brother Speakers, all of whom I have the utmost regard for and whom I respect and admire sincerely, and for whom I have affection as well. Please, don't take it the wrong way, but I just want you to know that I respect and admire the Speakers in this chamber, and I appreciate your direction because you basically tipped me off. You said, "Look, there's only a minute and 12 seconds left, and if you really wanted to wrap this up the way you started"—because I started with Bill 18. I got around to wonderful 90-year-old Mary Stucz, the Transylvanian-Canadian who I just have the greatest admiration for, with a fascinating life. These people are living bits of Canadian history. Fascinating.

Of course, then we got talking about Guité getting busted and about how Guité undoubtedly will sing now and rat out a whole bunch of high-profile Liberals because he ain't going to jail alone. You know what I mean? He ain't going to be on that prison bus all by himself. There are going to be some cellmates there, and

they can take turns doing dress-up, or whatever the case might be. But he ain't doing that time all by himself; he's sharing. I suspect, as I say, there are going to be some cells with some high-profile Liberal names on them at any number of posh federal penitentiaries, because again, he ain't going to Millhaven. If Martin goes down, he ain't going to Millhaven either. They'll be bunking with Thatcher and riding horses and golfing, but time is time.

So there you are, Speaker. I thank you very much for your patience with me this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise in the few moments given to me to speak about Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor. It's in the name of the Minister of Finance, the Honourable Greg Sorbara.

This is a very important bill. The Provincial Auditor is one of the most respected persons who assist this Legislature and, by extension, the people of Ontario. With this bill, the Audit Act is amended to change the title of the Provincial Auditor to Auditor General.

Just a bit ago there was mention made about what the democratic renewal that we might bring forward would do to titles and names here in this provincial Legislature. There was a suggestion that perhaps "MPP" could change to "MLA," member of the Legislative Assembly. I know that when I talk to students in particular, they are somewhat confused from time to time about our role here as MPPs as opposed to the member of Parliament, which is the federal jurisdiction.

There was also a comment made about, would the leadership here become a governor? I don't suspect we might go that far in our democratic renewal, but I know that one of the Premiers here in Ontario, Mr Harris, was referred to as having a governor style. His poor attendance record was one of the things that contributed to that, as was his American style of politics.

We have had changes here. In the past, the Minister of Finance was called the Treasurer; the person was the Treasurer of Ontario, and we made a change to finance minister.

It will be interesting to see all of the changes brought forward under Bill 18.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): The Provincial Auditor act, Bill 18, is looking to enlarge the powers of the Provincial Auditor, who's renamed the Auditor General by Bill 18, to conduct special audits of grant recipients, crown corporations and their subsidiaries.

There's an issue with respect to the definitions in terms of reviewable grants and whether they are wide enough to include school boards, universities, colleges and hospitals. The province at present has the authority to order special audits of these institutions. Now the Auditor General will be able to carry out such audits without formal request.

While this bill may be sufficient as far as it goes, it should be amended to give the Auditor General the power to begin to operate under it immediately. I really

don't know why the delay to another fiscal year, which would be 2005.

The other question is, what's the balance to be achieved between the protection of privacy and the use of information by the Auditor General, and what resources will be dedicated to the Auditor General to ensure the ability of the office to carry out work under this act? I know the previous Provincial Auditor was always looking for more money and more resources to deal with the issues that were put before him. That had been increased over the years, and that's certainly what we'll be looking for under this particular bill.

The term of office of the Auditor General is to be 10 years, non-renewable. I think the question is, as the member for Niagara Centre put it, does this apply to the present auditor? That's something that is not addressed in this bill.

Once again, the bill doesn't go to work until April 1, 2005, and that's too bad.

Mr Levac: I'm glad the previous speaker mentioned that it's too bad it's not quick enough, because he realizes there's a problem and we have to address it right away, as soon as possible.

Some 80% of total government spending is outside the auditor's domain, and what's rather interesting is that we had that much time to deal with it. Again, 80% of the spending is outside the domain of the auditor, and the auditor can't take a look at that expenditure. That doesn't make sense. We've got to get it in there. That's what this bill is doing. That's the good news. The good news is, we've recognized that.

Here are some of the things that were failed in the previous report, the last fiscal year's report, which I find rather interesting: We had \$60 million of unpaid fines that the auditor saw; we saw 150 different types of security risks that weren't dealt with by the previous government; We had delinquent parents, shall I say, in terms of their payments to the Family Responsibility Office, to the tune of \$1.3 billion—\$1.3 billion uncollected.

1610

The auditor needs the authority. He needs to expand the scope of his purview. I will address the member from Niagara's concern. It was stated in this House—and we can check Hansard to make doubly sure, because I don't want to say it unless it's true. The bottom line is, there was reference to the fact that it was identified that, with these extra responsibilities we're giving the auditor, there was an acknowledgement that it would require more staff and finances in order to accomplish that.

Having said that, here's another one I think you'll find interesting: 90% of the calls to a call centre in the Family Responsibility Office get a busy signal. That requires repeated phone calls.

These are the types of things that the auditor will do. He's going to take a look at value-for-money audits for institutions such as school boards, universities, colleges, hospitals and crown-controlled corporations, like Hydro. Somebody earlier mentioned the internal audit. This is

the audited Auditor General and it will be complete and tell us what's wrong.

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm honoured to rise in this place to speak in support of this bill. After I listened to many speakers in this House, I gathered a lot of information about Bill 18. I think it's very important to our government to pass that bill in order to deliver accountability and transparency to the people of this province, who give us the honour to be in this place and to protect their interests.

I listened to both sides of the House about the importance of that bill and how Bill 18 will bring transparency and accountability to all levels of government. I was listening to Mr Kormos. I will speak, in my 10 minutes' time, in detail about his comments on Bill 18, and also to the member from Simcoe North.

It's very important, as I mentioned, in this bill to put the whole agency, the whole institution, under the control of a person who knows exactly how to spend the money and will make people accountable for every penny being spent. The people of this province work hard to give us taxes to be reinvested in the institutions like schools, hospitals, daycare, infrastructure, etc—not to be wasted, like it has been in the past eight years, on friends and people who are in the favour of the past government. That's why I'll speak in support of that bill.

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

Mr Kormos: As Mr Ramal indicated, he'll be taking the floor in a few moments' time, so his folks in London should be tuning in to listen to Mr Ramal speak to Bill 18.

One of the interesting observations is that there's a suggestion by some of the participants in this debate that somehow the Auditor General, as head office will be called if the bill succeeds, should be doing more investigations. That's what causes me concern, because it is basically putting the auditor into a supervisory role.

I say to the member for Brant, do you need the auditor to tell you that it was stupid to have 90% of the calls to a call centre not being answered? That's what ministers are for. That's why they're paid the big bucks. You shouldn't have to have the auditor come in and spend thousands and thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money doing that investigation. You don't have to be a rocket scientist. Shelley Martel and I, back in 1996, simply walked into the joint. Mind you, it was very early in the morning and we had a video camera with us—

Mr Levac: It was legal.

Mr Kormos: —and all charges were eventually dropped.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist. You didn't need an auditor in there with a team of accountants and forensic people. Go in there and look.

So what's going on? We increasingly have ministers—and not just in this government; we've seen a pattern over the course of the last 10, 15, even 20 years, in this country, federally and provincially—who don't fulfill their role in the ministry, who aren't asking the

tough questions of their bureaucrats. Now, mind you, there's a danger inherent in ministers doing that, because the DM, of course, doesn't report to the minister; the DM reports to the Premier. If the DM is not pleased with how that minister is probing conduct in affairs within that ministry, that DM can have you cut off at the knees. But it causes me concern. They were saying, "Oh, we need the Auditor General to do this." We need ministers to accept the responsibility, and accept the responsibility toward taxpayers.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Ramal: I'm rising this afternoon to speak in support of that bill because, as I mentioned in my two-minute speech a few minutes ago, it's very important to our government to pass that bill. This piece of legislation is about accountability to the people of this province and giving the Auditor General more authority and more power in order to control and monitor the spending in this province.

Before I go on, because I have a lot of things to say about it, I'd like to mention that I'm sharing my time with my colleague from Kitchener Centre. I think he'll also do a wonderful job in support of that bill.

I listened with great interest to the member from Niagara Centre about Bill 18. I didn't find anything mentioned about Bill 18, except for a few minutes in the beginning, when he was talking about finding enough resources for the General Auditor to do his job, which I agree with. Unfortunately, I guess the member was just talking about an honourable lady whose name is Mary Stucz. She's a Rumanian-Hungarian-Spanish-Canadian lady, which is wonderful. Many of the people in this province came from different places to enjoy the freedom and democracy of this land and to enjoy the services of the government. I'm one of them.

But what happened? In the last eight years we had a government that wasted our resources, mismanaged the whole revenue in this province. That's why the honourable member from Brant mentioned that about 90% of phone calls had been unanswered and the honourable member from Niagara Centre said it was the minister who was not doing the job. Well, that's correct. It's a good answer to a good question. That's why we have to have the Auditor General in charge, to make every person—every member at the government level or every organization that receives money from the government—accountable for every penny they spend, for every job they do and for every time they spend.

I went to the records to look at some information about Bill 18. What astonishing information. I think the member from Niagara Centre will love this information: The Tory government failed to address the serious backlog in the court system; millions of dollars have not been collected; the family responsibility act about deadbeat parents not paying the money for their poor kids, who badly need the money, which is about \$1.3 billion, and on and on. The list grows every single time you open a file for any ministry, for any agency the past government was looking after.

It was also interesting to listen to the member from Simcoe North talking about how come every member from the government stands up to talk about the deficit, the \$5.6-billion deficit they left for us to deal with, how come every single time we manage to do it. I think he said it's been seven months and we're still crying about it. We're not crying about it. That job over the last eight years is very difficult to correct in only seven months. I can tell the member from Simcoe Centre that I guess we're going in the right direction. That's why we're bringing forward Bill 18, to control and monitor all the activities in the government, and then we wouldn't have the problems. We wouldn't have to face such a dilemma as we're facing right now.

1620

I was also listening to the member from Niagara Centre when he was talking about the federal government, about the Sheila Fraser report and how Mr Paul Martin's government made everybody accountable and laid charges on the people who were responsible for wasting taxpayers' money. Maybe some people are saying, "It's not important to us; it's not relevant to talk about federal government issues." But as Ontarians we live in a great country that we call Canada. We are part of this waste and we are part of the mismanagement. That's why we are looking to the federal government and the government of Ontario to be accountable to the people of this province and of this great country to manage our spending and not let anyone—it doesn't matter what title or position they have—waste our money.

I was happy today to hear that the people responsible for mismanaging the money in the federal government are going to be prosecuted, charged and also jailed. It's very important, and it's a great signal about the importance of transparency and accountability that the federal government will apply to the people of this country. In the same fashion, our government is trying to apply accountability and transparency and make every person in this province accountable for taxpayers' money, unlike what happened in the past, when we had a government that didn't care about wasting money and about mismanaging money. For example, at Hydro One they had a lot of people employed and the CEO was making \$2 million. One person, writing one e-mail, got how much? One hundred and five thousand dollars, and others and others. At the same time, we have a disaster in the hydro institution in this province because all the money that was supposed to be going to enhance and update the institution was going to friends of the past government. We have to pass the law to make every person accountable for the money of taxpayers who work hard to make sure our revenue is enough to look after health care, education, social institutions and the infrastructure in this province.

Philosophically, every person gives up his or her rights to a body we call the government to act on our behalf, to manage our daily life. We trusted the body that we call the government for the last eight years, and what happened? They mismanaged every penny we paid,

mismanaged every minute of responsibility to give to the people of this province. That's why we inherited chaos in the education system. We inherited chaos in the health institutions. We have a disastrous infrastructure across the province that will cost us billions of dollars to rebuild and fix. That's what we call accountability. The Auditor General would be responsible to manage and monitor very well every minister, every government official, every person in this province to make sure he or she is doing the job right for the people of this province.

That's why I'm honoured this afternoon to rise and speak in support of the bill. I believe this bill puts the McGuinty government on the right track to restore democracy and freedom, restore accountability and send a clear signal to the people of this province who gave us the right to be here on October 2 to look after their interests, look after their tax money, look after their institutions, health care, education, infrastructure, streets, hospitals, everything concerning daily life in this province.

It's important to our people and to members on both sides of the House to support this bill. This is not just about our government, the Liberal government, but about every government that will come in the future, to make sure that every penny that is being collected in this province is spent wisely and efficiently, is spent in the right place, and that it benefits everyone from north to south and from east to west.

I'm honoured I've had the privilege to speak in support of this bill and I hope every member of this House will speak in support when it comes to voting on it, because the passing this bill is important to all of us and the people of this province.

Mr John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): I want to begin by congratulating my colleague from London-Fanshawe for his presentation on this important bill, Bill 18. I will be speaking in favour of the bill today because I think it's an excellent piece of legislation which I imagine will find support on all sides of this House.

I think it might be worth a second look at what the specific purpose of the bill is, both for the debate here and those watching at home. The purpose of the bill, as has been noted by other speakers, is to strengthen the Provincial Auditor's powers. In fact, the bill will rename this officer the Auditor General. What would it do? It would expand the Auditor General's powers to allow him or her to conduct value-for-money audits of institutions in the broader public sector. These would include things like school boards, universities, colleges, hospitals and crown corporations, including Hydro One, OPG and their subsidiaries.

A lot of people have thrown around the term "value-for-money audits" today, and it might be worthwhile to define it before getting into the essence of the debate. The question the Auditor General will be asking when he or she looks at these institutions is, was the money spent with due regard for economy and efficiencies? He or she will ask whether appropriate procedures are in place in these institutions to measure and report on the effectiveness of the program.

Under the bill, organizations affected by the legislation would be required to provide the Auditor General with information and access to their books and records. The Auditor General would also receive the authority to include the results of any examination in his or her annual report.

I think it's important to stress a few things as we get into the essence of the debate here. The Auditor General reports to this Legislature. The Auditor General is an officer of this House. When I look around at my 102 colleagues, I can't think of a reason why any of us would vote against having an officer of Parliament have more power to report back to us, the elected representatives. Individual MPPs are often criticized because they don't seem to have a lot of power. Here is a bill which gives us power. It gives us power to have an independent officer of Parliament go out and ask the tough questions, go out to institutions which up to this point were not covered directly by his or her powers and get to the bottom of the state of their finances.

What's behind this bill? I would argue that there is a new attitude toward government spending in our province, a new political culture. I believe the people of Ontario—and this was highlighted during the recent election when for the first time I had an opportunity, as a candidate, to knock on doors, to find out that people don't believe in the old ways any more. This isn't a partisan observation. I think when you look at what's gone on in Canada, in difference provinces, in different governments of different stripes, we see an old culture.

Everyone in this Legislature, I would gather, is interested in politics. Many of us could tell old stories of 20, 30, 50 years ago, when you'd go to a certain rural area and wonder why there was one beautiful paved road, and you'd find out that the Premier of that particular province had a cottage there. You hear the old stories of driving through rural parts of a particular province where you'd notice the road was smooth and wonderful till you came to a particular point, and then it was rough and bumpy. You'd go on and it would be smooth again and then it would be rough and bumpy. You'd ask someone what was going on and they'd say, "Well, that's a government constituency where the road is smooth, and that bumpy road in need of repair is an opposition constituency."

I'm old enough to remember candidates who would run for office saying, "I'm going to go to Queen's Park"—or Ottawa—"to get a particular institution for our riding." "I'm going to bring home the bacon," they'd say. It's no surprise that Kingston, the home of our first Prime Minister, is also the home of the prison system, which back then was seen as bringing home the bacon.

When I talk to voters in my riding, they're telling me it's over. Yes, they want a fair share. The people of Kitchener Centre want proper services and their fair share of provincial programs etc, but do you know what they want more than anything? They want to know there's a careful use of our dollars by the government, that the money is spent wisely, that the money is spent efficiently and that there are real results.

1630

As we look around at government, we see ourselves with black holes. We see ourselves with programs, with institutions, which just ask for more money, which just suck in the money, yet we have no accountability.

What the voters have told us as a government, and certainly what they told me as a candidate, is that tax dollars are far too precious. They want governments to account for their money. People tell me they don't mind paying taxes, don't mind if once in a while there's an increase for a particular service, but they only want that if they can be certain that the money is being spent wisely and efficiently not only for that service but across the board, that there aren't other programs or institutions where the savings could be found first.

The interesting thing about this bill is that it complements this view. People say that government is government is government. There are all sorts of institutions out there that receive government funding, yet for many years they've been sheltered. They haven't been counted. There have been two classes of government. There's what goes on at Queen's Park, with the immediate Ontario government, and then there's that list of institutions I outlined in the beginning: crown corporations, hospitals and the like. The voters are saying to me, "Hey, enough is enough. We are giving those institutions public money, taxpayers' money. We have every right to make sure that money is being spent efficiently and effectively."

This isn't about going after anyone. Many of these groups I've talked to—that is, the institutions in question—support this bill. I remember during the campaign meeting with some representatives from my hospital board. They said they'd welcome having the Provincial Auditor come in. It would demonstrate to people that they are running an efficient organization. The other thing to realize is that auditors aren't always about "gotcha." They're not always about coming in and finding the scandals, finding the front-page headlines. They're about coming in and asking the tough question and saying how you could do things better. Many good managers will look at an auditor's report and find in it a tremendous amount of value, a tremendous amount of instruction and a record of how they have done things and how to improve things, how to make things more efficient and cost-effective.

There is a sad dimension, though, to this bill, that the public has unfortunately lost a lot of faith in politicians and governments and have put more and more into auditors who they rightly seen as independent. I think this level of cynicism has reached its height in Ontario with what happened in the recent election.

The Premier, the other day—I'm just going to take a second to review. The Premier shared with this Legislature—I have the quote here from Thursday, May 6—some of the things that were said by the former Premier, the now Leader of the Opposition. I'll quote our present Premier. He said, "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.' On CKVR, on September 30, he said, 'We will balance this year.' Then, during the course of the leaders' debate," which obviously our Premier would remember, "right in the thick of the campaign, he told the people of Ontario, 'There won't be a deficit this year.'"

When we came in we discovered, unfortunately, a \$5.6-billion deficit. Talk about raising the level of cynicism in this province. What has the opposition's response been? I'd like to quote from Wednesday, May 5, when the member for Simcoe-Grey—Mr Speaker, you will know that the member for Simcoe-Grey is a long-standing parliamentarian, a former minister. He stood up and asked the Premier a question. He said, "I want to ask how you, Premier, in good conscience, could tell the people of Ontario that you would balance the books and not raise their taxes when you knew there was a deficit last year.... Your own finance critic ... said there might be a deficit.... The Fraser Institute said there would be a deficit." In other words, the member for Simcoe-Grey stood up asked the Premier of this province why we trusted his government. This is how surreal it is. We have a party that went around saying the books were balanced. Now they are criticizing us for trusting them.

The only answer is to have more independent verification. The only answer, unfortunately—and this is the sad dimension of the bill—is that the only person the voters can trust in this sort of surreal situation is the Auditor General. That's why we are standing four-square behind the Auditor General, that's why we are giving the Auditor General increased powers and that's why we are making sure that every nickel of public money spent by the Ontario government is spent fairly, justly and efficiently, which is why I stand in support of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr O'Toole: I just want to comment on the remarks of the member for Kitchener Centre. He drew me into this because of his outrageous remark. I always remember that when you're involved in an election with enthusiasm, when you know everything is on the line, the people you're speaking with, the trust—they're vulnerable and are hoping or assuming that what you're saying is true. I remember those multi-million-dollar TV commercials with Dalton standing there, kind of smugly, actually, leaning up against a phone booth or something and saying, "I won't raise your taxes, and I won't lower them either." He was trained. He had special communications people training him. He still looked insincere even then, with all that multi-million-dollar backdrop.

But if I look at the heart and soul of this place, I remember quite well, as a member of the finance and economic affairs committee, Gerry Phillips, who really—I shouldn't say this because I don't mean to insult Mr Sorbara, but I think Mr Phillips said it. He should actually be the finance minister because he has no cloud over him. The first audit function I think the new auditor

should do is to audit Greg Sorbara and this whole Royal Group Technologies issue. Mr Phillips said, “Really, what I want here?”—

Mr Levac: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I’ve referred to this standing order several times in the past, and this one seems to be outstanding in terms of the accusation he’s making against a member in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr O’Toole: I think the whip of the party is trying to get the rest of the people in line, because they all see this. They see what actually happened here. When he was promising the people of Ontario, Mr Phillips said that they knew there was a hole in the road, that there was a problem. Premier Eves at that time said, “We’re going to fix it.” We had some serious numbers in the budget, about \$3 billion worth of expenditures that were going to be paid for by the sale of certain assets.

But I can tell you this: The one thing is that you have to trust the leader and the Minister of Finance. Clearly, the first function of the audit should be to trust—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: I was pleased to hear the comments by the member for London-Fanshawe. I want people to know that he spoke without notes. He spoke off the cuff. He spoke from the heart. I disagree with him fundamentally about Bill 18, but so be it.

We still get back to the issue, though. I’ve seen auditors’ reports now for a good chunk of time, a whole lot of years. What is going on? Why aren’t ministers—most of the stuff ain’t rocket science. Most of the stuff that the auditors have unveiled over the course of years and years and years isn’t stuff that’s hidden away. From time to time it is, and then the auditor’s role becomes very obvious and important. But for most of it, like I say, it ain’t rocket science; it’s there, it’s obvious. I mean, any doughhead could witness it and blow the whistle on it. So most of the preoccupation with the auditor becomes, “How can I weave and bob and avoid any direct blows to my government”—to one’s government—“to my ministry”—one’s ministry—“in the course of the auditor’s report?”

It was interesting. I saw the newspaper article that Mike Harris is taking some weekend courses in ethics at the Rotman School of Business. Far be it from me—the irony is obvious. But having said that, maybe some more contemplation by ministers about what their ethical responsibility is and what their commitment ought to be would relieve the auditor of a whole lot of the incredible new burden we’re putting on them, for which I am confident this government is not going to adequately resource the auditor. The government is sucking and blowing once again. It looks good, sounds good, but at the end of the day, taxpayers are going to get screwed again.

1640

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It’s a pleasure to rise today and join with the members from London-Fanshawe, Kitchener Centre, Durham and Niagara

Centre in the debate on Bill 18. I come from local government, as you know. We’re extremely accountable to our constituents at the local level. That’s why I was a little surprised when I arrived here and saw how things were treated—treated a little differently than they are around a council table.

What we do at the local level, at budget time, is we have our citizens come forward. They bring us ideas and advice. Sometimes it goes on for three or four evenings. The treasurers from the region or the town are there. All the appropriate staff are there to answer the questions. As a politician, you get to look your constituents in the eye and say, “Yes, I’ll support that,” “No, I won’t support that,” “I think that’s a good idea,” “I think maybe we should change that.”

What you cannot do, what it’s illegal to do at the local level, is to run a deficit. As a municipality, you’re not allowed to run a deficit. That’s something that certainly should be illegal. I hope, as a result of this, we’ll make it illegal to run a deficit and not tell the people about it, as happened during the last term of government. If you’re going to run a deficit, tell the people about it. If you’re not running a deficit, than it doesn’t really matter, does it?

What I hope this act will do as well is prevent another boondoggle at Ontario Hydro and Ontario Power Generation. That should have never happened in the first place. Under the previous government, it did. It will never happen again, I hope, as a result of the passage of this legislation. What this legislation does, if passed, is it gives the Provincial Auditor expanded powers that that person sorely needs to make sure that the conduct of the finances of this province are always in order, are always open to scrutiny and are always available to the public.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I want to comment on the presentation from the member from Kitchener Centre. He mentioned that people don’t mind paying more taxes. Well, they’re certainly going to get their way under this government, because they’re going to be paying and paying and paying. When they’re done paying, they’re going to pay some more.

I want to talk about this deficit he keeps talking about. When that budget was tabled, no one could have predicted the impact of SARS, mad cow, the power outage and all of these things. But during the campaign, the then Leader of the Opposition, Dalton McGuinty, went on ad infinitum and said, “There’s a deficit. There’s a deficit of about \$5 billion and we can prove that.” But now he gets elected, and all of a sudden it’s just a big surprise.

This act is just a smokescreen to cover up for the fact that this government doesn’t know how it’s going to handle the fiscal responsibility that they have as the government. So they’re trying to bring in all kinds of pieces of legislation to try to dump more on the previous government. But 2003 was an unprecedented year in the history of the province with regard to unusual occurrences. So now this new government wants to hammer the old for everything that was unpredictable. Six months before SARS happened, not a member on that other side

had ever heard if it; wouldn't have known what it was. So it's a totally unbelievable situation that happened in 2003.

Now they're capitalizing on it, but during that campaign, in spite of the fact that he said there was a deficit, he signed the Taxpayer Protection Act and said, "I will not run a deficit." We know what he's planning to do. He wants to repeal the act. Shame on him.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for London-Fanshawe has two minutes to reply.

Mr Ramal: After I listened to all this talk and debate, the response from both sides of the House, I was surprised. The member from the opposition right now is questioning us. Did we know about the budget deficit? No, we didn't know. That's why we need an auditor, to make sure that all the information released by the past government will be correct for the next government in order to build our strategy, to build our vision for this province.

I want to tell my colleague here on my left side, the member from Niagara Centre, when he said, "Why do we need an auditor? Why would I give him responsibility? We have our ministers; we have our ministries. We have a government that should be responsible for those," that's correct. We had it in the past, for the last eight years. But that ministry was sleeping, that government was sleeping, blind, their eyes on their friends who have taken and stolen the money from this province. All the taxpayers are upset about it. They were spending money left and right, giving millions to their friends.

Also, my colleague from Kitchener Centre never mentioned extra taxes. What he said was that the people of this province don't mind paying taxes, but they want to know where their tax money is going—not to friends of the government, not to special institutions, to pump up the Premier or the ministers etc. They want to see it go in the right direction: to health care, to education, to social programs, to infrastructure, roads, hospitals. That is what the people of this province want from us and asked us to do.

That's why we are asking for more authority for the Auditor General to be above everyone, above every governmental position, in order to restore democracy and freedom, in order to restore justice and honesty to every level of this government. It's not about just being in power.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Hudak: I'm pleased to rise in debate on Bill 18.

There are a number of areas that I'd like to address in my remarks, but just to reflect back a little bit, the member for Niagara Centre does have some interesting points. As I think you've heard from the official opposition, we are generally satisfied with Bill 18. We do have some suggestions for changes and improvements to the bill that I will speak to and I know my other colleagues have spoken to already, but it's a fair point in terms of increased responsibility being given to officers of the assembly as opposed to ministers or the committees that we have in this Legislature. It will be interesting to see

what themes the McGuinty government pursues in this vein. There's certainly a lot of talk about eliminating what they would call the democratic deficit, improving the rights of individual members and such, which I think all of us in the assembly would agree is a good thing.

One wonders if there is an increased role, for example, for some of the committees made up of members to do a better job of ensuring there's accountability for government spending—as opposed to simply having members of the government side being apologists for a particular minister or department at that time, actually sharpening their nails and their teeth a little bit and doing a solid job of pursuing some of these items that the Auditor General, if this bill passes, will be pursuing.

It certainly seems to me, just as a very casual observation, that the role of the committees at the federal level seems to be much stronger than they are currently here in the province of Ontario. They are probably not strong enough. I think, Mr Speaker, you as well as other members of the assembly hear that they wish individual members had more authority in the Legislature, a greater latitude to investigate concerns and could feel, if they were very aggressive on a committee—an accounts committee, for example—they wouldn't in any way fall into disfavour with the Premier's office or the minister's office for being too dogged in their questions, that they wouldn't have any fear of falling into disfavour, thereby limiting their chances for advancement.

I would suspect, and I'm certainly no expert on this, that there's probably a greater role for committees in the British parliamentary system.

I know the Attorney General, for example, is bringing forward some reforms. Maybe we'll hear more about that.

Interjection.

Mr Hudak: I'm not trying to be partisan in the initial part of my comments. I am interested in hearing what the Attorney General brings forward. I know our own veteran member of the assembly—or one of the two, Norm Sterling from Lanark-Carleton—is, as well, doing his research in this area to try to find ways of strengthening the role of individual members, strengthening the committee process, as opposed to increasingly giving power to the minister's office or the Premier's office and to third parties, officers of the assembly. So I think it is a fair debate that the member for Niagara Centre brings forward, and we'll see how the two themes mesh: increasing the role of the Auditor General through Bill 18 vis-à-vis increasing the role of individual members.

On that topic, I do have a concern about the democratic reform, that we may adopt some method of proportional representation where you have individuals who are not elected. Mr Speaker, you have to go back home to your riding every Friday through the weekends, when the House is not sitting, and be accountable.

Interjection.

Mr Hudak: The member goes back to Windsor-Walkerville to be accountable to his constituents. I worry about a parallel system of MPPs who would be here and

elected but not accountable to individual taxpayers; they would be accountable simply to the party apparatus or the Premier's office. I hope the Attorney General's recommendations will stay wide and clear of those types of changes that would bring in two types of MPPs—one accountable to the communities, and one quite the opposite—and that instead we'll see some strengthening of committees and strengthening of individual rights of members.

1650

That having been said as a general overview of themes, I think there's a lot of good in Bill 18 in terms of expanding the role to Auditor General, as renamed if this bill passes, from simply Provincial Auditor, as it stands today. A lot of this is reminiscent of Mr Bart Maves, a colleague of mine, a good personal friend whom members who were elected before 2003 remember quite fondly. He was a hard-working member for the Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake areas. In 1996 Mr Maves, PC member for Niagara Falls, brought forward Bill 89, the Accountability Improvement Act. It had its first reading on November 5, 1996. That act, Bill 89, would improve accountability of hospitals, school boards, universities and colleges, municipalities and other organizations which receive payments from the government, much like what Bill 18 says in its preamble and what we hear in debate here in the Legislature.

Mr Maves, as far back as 1996, had brought forward amendments that I think, at least by the themes, are largely the same. He pointed out that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario funds, through ministries, over 7,000 governing bodies for many different types of organizations; 48% of government funds separately governed recipients—\$28 million. Bart had some excellent points that were far-reaching in 1996. I do recall that under Finance Minister Eves, and then Premier Eves, we made some steps forward in this regard—probably not far enough at the end of the day. Sometimes you do run out of time, but I want to give proper credit to Mr Maves, who brought this idea forward some eight years ago. I think Bart had the same sort of frustration I did, particularly in the mid-1990s, when you were guaranteed an increase in your property tax rates pretty well every year. There was tremendous frustration from average taxpayers and parents whose education property taxes would increase, guaranteed, year after year, almost always by double-digit increases.

I know that some of the colleagues across the way who were municipal politicians found it extremely frustrating, because they ended up taking the blame for these tax hikes, more so than the trustees. People would see the property tax bill increase and they'd go after their local politicians, but not only local politicians. Parents and taxpayers were very frustrated with what they saw as significant and constant increases in property tax rates without seeing the quality reflected in the classroom. I think we had some important points then. The precise stats now slip my mind, but we saw a vast growth in spending at the school boards and the administration, to

the detriment of classroom funding. That's why, if Mr Maves's act had passed at that particular time—if this act passes today, there will be another layer of accountability to ensure that those tax dollars are actually going into the classroom.

I think there were tremendous advances in this area. Coming from Niagara, being a member of the Catholic school board system, having attended Notre Dame College School in Welland in the days when Catholic education was not fully funded, we have seen tremendous advances, I would say, in the quality in the classroom and in the financing going to both boards in the Niagara Peninsula, particularly the Catholic boards. It resulted in new schools like St Mark in Beamsville and St George in Crystal Beach, to name but two, for some old buildings, or to reflect growth in those areas. Certainly the quality of supply and support in the classroom is substantially different from what I remember it being as a student in that system some time ago.

I think some advances have been made in that respect. Certainly the funding formula, while never perfect, did make improvements in the classroom, particularly to the boards in the Niagara Peninsula, where I would have the closest encounters. Nonetheless, as has been said here in the Legislature, this bill would apply to some 80% of the spending that I believe goes to what they call the MUSH sector: municipalities, universities, school boards and hospitals. I spoke a bit about school boards and the value that the Auditor General could bring to bear. Strides have been made, improvements have been made, but you could always do better. The Auditor General could, for example, ensure that if there is a school textbook fund that is brought forward, as it was a couple of times by the Mike Harris and Ernie Eves governments, to buy new textbooks for students, the dollars actually go to textbooks in the classrooms. That would be one example of the role the Auditor General could play in making sure there is full accountability for tax dollars. So I certainly see a value in that.

I would highly recommend that we maintain that change as well brought about in the mid- to late 1990s that took away the power of school boards to levy local taxes. I'd spoken about that earlier. I think that the way we do things now is much more appropriate. I think it's a more accountable system, the funding formula is an improvement, and you're away from that year-after-year tax increase that hits particularly seniors and working families the hardest.

I know that the Liberal Party had a couple of different positions on this, initially saying that they would allow, I think, up to a 5% raise in local property taxes for education, and then backing away from that initial promise. I hope they stay the course and do not give back local property taxing to school boards.

Hospitals as well are significant recipients of grants from the province of Ontario. In fact we had brought, under Tony Clement as Minister of Health, a new system into place where the hospitals came forward and demonstrated to us—somebody who plays a similar role to the

Auditor General; it was a similar theme—how they were spending taxpayers' dollars and the results that they were receiving, and increasingly trying to tie funding to results, for example, staffing of emergency rooms 24 hours a day—very important to Douglas Memorial Hospital in Fort Erie, Port Colborne General Hospital in Port Colborne, Haldimand War Memorial Hospital in Dunnville, and of course West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby, to name four in the Niagara area that benefited from that particular funding envelope.

Secondly, particular projects so nurses could be hired in small rural hospitals, funding to ensure that doctors could staff for hospitals in underserved areas—solid programs that did have reporting mechanisms back to the Ministry of Health, but if Bill 18 were to pass, it would be an opportunity for the Auditor General to be a second check to ensure that those funds are going to the purposes that were proposed.

Bill 8, currently before the justice committee, takes it even a step further than this, where it creates a sort of hybrid reporting process where the CEO of a hospital would have to report back both to his or her board—the tradition of local governance in Ontario—and also to the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Health. I think this sort of half-choice, this hybrid model, will ultimately be unsuccessful because you're tearing this administrator in both directions. You either have him or her report to the board, and then you could ensure that the board does fund the projects that have received funding and are properly assigned, or they become employees of the Ministry of Health, which I think has happened in other jurisdictions. You would choose one or the other.

I think this hybrid model, though, is doomed to failure. This, of course, would allow the newly named Auditor General to look at the hospital books one by one across the province of Ontario. It's that second valve, that safety valve to ensure that funding is going to appropriate places. But I'm not clear: If they have Bill 18 before the Legislature, why continue down that path of Bill 8?

Another example of a concern I have in Bill 8 that perhaps could be remedied through Bill 18, as opposed to the new Bill 8 legislation, is limiting the flexibility that local hospitals have—Haldimand War Memorial Hospital in Dunnville brought this forward—to make agreements with doctors so they'll staff the emergency rooms, or they'll have general surgeons so they could provide local services. Hospitals now have an ability to be flexible and to bring those doctors, badly needed, to rural Ontario, like Dunnville or West Lincoln, to name but two.

The proposal under Bill 8 would if I understand correctly, as it stands today force all hospitals to go through the Ministry of Health approval process. You would have to deal with that leviathan, the big giant of the Ministry of Health, the largest ministry in funding in the entire province. I think you could probably have a snail on quaaludes walking up a ramp reach its destination faster than some poor request from Douglas Memorial Hospital on a funding agreement to bring a doctor to the area. So I don't like that approach. Instead,

they could use the powers of Bill 18 to ensure that hospital funds are recruiting doctors fairly and not breaking any rules, as opposed to this real top-down process where each hospital would have to work up the ladder, from desk to desk, eventually up to the deputy minister's office simply to recruit a doctor for their community. By the time it gets through all of the paperwork and the approval process, that doctor may very well have gone to the States or another province. Bill 18 would give an avenue to do that, I think, much better than the current Bill 8.

1700

Colleges and universities are also impacted by Bill 18. Currently, the Auditor General or, like I keep saying, the Provincial Auditor, would only be able to go into colleges and universities under what they call a "special audit." This would allow greater authority to investigate the books at colleges and universities.

On that topic, I think they're going to be relatively hard pressed at this point in time. While the McGuinty government has become notorious for breaking promises, some 20, I think—

Mr Yakabuski: At least.

Mr Hudak: —at least, to date, major campaign promises broken, they have moved ahead with the tuition freeze for college and university students. Initially, there was a cabinet document, I remember, that had leaked out that caused considerable debate in the Legislature and some embarrassing press for Premier McGuinty. They had talked about limiting the tuition freeze to a certain number of programs and a number of other areas where tuition could have gone up considerably, which would have been a clear promise break. Having had their hand caught and slapped by the press on this issue, they backed down and went ahead with the tuition freeze. Fair enough. The challenge will be, if you freeze that avenue of funding for colleges and universities, will there be make-up funding? Will the resultant funding from the treasury address that issue significantly or will we see quality or accessibility suffer as a result?

Secondly, is there an effort out there to ensure that the fees students pay, in addition to their tuition, are being frozen or will we see some backdoor funding increases going through, higher associated fees, let alone tuition paid by students at colleges or universities? Again, the Auditor General, I would expect, if this bill passes, would have the opportunity to look into that particular issue to ensure that college and university funding from the province would be going to improving the quality of education as opposed to simply meeting a campaign commitment, that the funding support would be there to support the quality agenda in addition.

One good point, as I was reading through some of the Hansard debate, that has been made is that while you're giving a great breadth to the Auditor General, if this bill passes, is there a funding increase that goes along with this bill? Will he or she be working within the same funding envelope? I think it's important for this legislation to say whether they'll just be choosing different

projects or whether they will be improving or increasing the quantity of projects at the same time. I hope during this debate, before third reading on this bill, we'll have that answer come forward, so that we can have a better expectation and understanding of how active the Auditor General is going to be or if this bill is simply a sheep in wolf's clothing, where it sounds like it's going to be quite tough and strong on the accountability agenda, but in reality because its funding has been limited will be nothing more than a sheep in that respect.

The other interesting point that there has been debate about—and I think we're still awaiting an answer—is that this legislation, if passed, would allow the auditor to only look at grants that take place after April 1, 2005—so the beginning of the next fiscal year. In effect, because the auditor, I expect, would look at funding envelopes of a particular program and he or she would probably look back over several years and determine whether it was an effective program, whether there was waste in that program, and offer options for improvement of that particular program, if the Auditor General can only begin on April 1, 2005, there's no back data to check. I would expect that it probably will be some time before that Auditor General can actually start poring through the books because there's going to be no data available.

Let's say on April 2 the Auditor General says, "You know what I'm concerned about? Some of the transfers that are taking place to the school boards. I want to make sure that this textbook program is going into the classroom and purchasing textbooks effectively." The Auditor General would not be able to look at past data or the past couple of years, but would only be able to look incrementally at what happens after April 1, 2005. I would expect that what we will be bringing forward as a proposed vote amendment, in that respect, is to allow the auditor to act much more immediately than a time after April 1, 2005.

Lastly, an interesting point too is that the term would be 10 years and non-renewable. I guess the goal there would be to ensure the Auditor General has no fear to try to cater a strong relationship with the government of the day, to be accountable and not worry about being reappointed or currying favour. On the other hand, the downside to the 10-year time period is, what if the Auditor General is not the best Auditor General? You're going to have a spectrum of strong Auditors General that are accountable and drive certain themes, and at the other end of the spectrum you may have some that are not as effective. So a 10-year term, if you're locked into an Auditor General who may not be as effective as members of the assembly deem appropriate, would be a limited option. It is a long time. They say two weeks is a lifetime in politics; 10 years is a millennium, I guess, if you extrapolate from there.

I'm pleased to speak to Bill 18. Again, I want to commend Bart Maves, who brought this initiative forward. I commend the members of the assembly who brought forward important advice on this bill. I look forward to some of my questions being answered as members of the

government side, or perhaps the minister, have time to reply. I look forward to the comments of my colleagues.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I was listening to the member for Erie-Lincoln, and it's quite a rare treat to see a member from the opposition actually stick to a bill before us. I commend him for talking to the bill. The interesting thing he mentioned is that the former member from Niagara, Bart Maves, had introduced the bill, but he fails to mention that the real crusader for this bill was John Gerretsen, the member from Kingston and the Islands, who was the chairman of the standing committee on public accounts, and who repeatedly stood up on his feet in this House and demanded that the previous government introduce his bill, which called for wider powers for the Provincial Auditor. So when you talk about credit, I don't mind giving credit to Bart Maves—he was a good member—but I think you've got to give credit to John Gerretsen, the member for Kingston and the Islands—Wolfe Island, Amherst Island, all those great islands there—that he championed this bill.

It's here before us and it's something we said we would introduce if we formed the government. And Premier McGuinty and the Minister of Finance have seen fit to introduce this bill, Bill 18, which is really a no-brainer. How could anyone in this House vote against this bill? I don't mind people talking about amendments—any bill can be made stronger. But each one of us stands for more accountability for the Provincial Auditor, and this gives the taxpayers, the people who pay billions of dollars in taxes, the assurance that someone is looking into all these other related parts of government, whether it be the hospitals or hydro, all these affiliated bodies. For once, they're also going to come under the scrutiny of the Provincial Auditor. I think that's an amazing, positive step forward. I would really like to see a reason why anybody would try to stop the Provincial Auditor from going in and looking at their books. I'd really—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr O'Toole: I was drawn into the discussion listening to the member for Erie-Lincoln. He did in fact bring in a few extremely important observations. I would like to follow up on that theme of paying close attention to Bill 18. One of the sections that I have some problem with—I'm just going to mention it here—is where it talks about the Deputy Auditor General. It looks to me like they're expanding the civil service there, clearly. The other thing I don't see in here, actually, is any money, like for the increased functionality of the new Auditor General—there's no money. We'll probably see it on the 18th; there'll be money for everyone on the 18th.

The other part, in section 4(2)—the people at home should listen to this—is, "The Auditor General continues to hold office after the expiry of his or her term of office until a successor is found." And if they're friendly, it could be 15 years. If you look at the next one, 4(3), "The Auditor General may be removed from office for cause...." No one's defined cause. So it's sort of like a push-me, pull-me here. There's room to move. It's vacillating, which is the Liberals' moniker.

1710

Section 9.1 is quite interesting as well. “On or after April 1, 2005, the Auditor General may conduct a special audit of a grant recipient with respect to a reviewable grant”—the whole idea here of reviewable grants, that they have established a need and now they’re going to have a special audit.

Then in 9.2 it says, “The Auditor General may examine accounting records relating to a reviewable grant received directly or indirectly by a municipality.” Municipalities go into partnerships with a local distribution company or other opportunities. This is Big Brother invading our lives, your life—and has less accountability, so they’re exempting any control they have to the Auditor General.

Mr Kormos: Once again the issue is the adequacy of funding for the auditor. What was one of the biggest sources of business, if you will, for the auditor over the last eight or nine years? It was the privatization and private sector involvement of Andersen Consulting. Andersen Consulting’s reputation was so thoroughly trashed that they’ve got to walk around now like they’re in the witness protection program or something.

Mr Colle: They had to change their name to Accenture.

Mr Kormos: Accenture, yes.

Interjection.

Mr Kormos: I’m getting there. You see, here you go. Go back to SkyDome, a private-public partnership. Who got ripped off? Who got their pocket picked? Taxpayers. All three governments have dabbled in this sordid little business. None of them has worked out. I mean, they worked out fine for the private sector player. The private sector player—Andersen Consulting, Accenture—these guys, are like bandits. The Brink’s truck was literally backing up to the Ministry of Finance, loading the cheese from the Ministry of Finance on to the back of the Brink’s truck.

What I say to the government is, if you really want to do the auditor a favour, keep your promise to restore the public sector. Keep your promise to restore our public service. Keep your promise to restore health care to public ownership. Keep your promise—well, here I am, pleading with Liberals to keep their promises. Oh, please, how naive I am. Stupid me. Liberals keep promises? Please. That’s a waste of breath and a waste of effort and energy. They’ve broken every promise. The Liberals promised anything they had to, anything they could, to get elected and then, post-election, have broken every promise they ever made. We can’t count on Liberals to keep their promise. They are promise breakers, not promise keepers.

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): I just want to rise and speak in favour of the bill, which is a bill to amend the Audit Act and to give the Auditor General, as he or she will then be known, greater powers.

It’s very important for the taxpayers to have the assurance that someone is looking over shoulders. These are dollars they have given through their taxes to our

province to use in a way that they feel will benefit them. They need to be sure that is exactly what is happening.

No one should be afraid of an audit. An audit is a way of ensuring that what is said is going to happen with the dollars is actually being done. I’ve talked to many people about the issue of audits and none of them has ever expressed a concern about being audited if they feel they are doing exactly as they said they would. I think the taxpayers in this province have a right to have that assurance, to make sure that someone is looking to where the dollars are being spent. It needs to be done.

The member for Durham mentioned Big Brother. I don’t think this is Big Brother at all; I think this is the taxpayer having someone who represents their need to be sure about where the dollars are going.

Also, the member from Niagara Centre mentioned getting the pockets picked. That’s exactly what people are afraid of. They want to be sure that everyone is accounting for the dollars they spend. These are public dollars and they have the right to know that their dollars are being spent properly.

This afternoon I actually had this very discussion with another person, and they were remembering the times when the dollars were spent on things such as big dinners and other amenities that really were not there to serve the public.

Those are the kinds of things on which we need assurance, and an auditor will certainly make sure that the dollars are spent properly.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Erie-Lincoln has two minutes to reply.

Mr Hudak: I appreciate the members’ comments on my remarks. The member for Eglinton-Lawrence talked about the member for Kingston and the Islands. I didn’t mean to denigrate his role in this. I wanted to give a salute to the member for Niagara Falls from 1995 to 2003, Mr Maves, who brought forward that bill—was it Bill 189? Mr Maves’s comments in those days I think are rather informative. In 1992, the member for Nickel Belt, then the province’s finance minister, wrote to the Chair of the public accounts committee and said that he supported “any amendments which would allow the Provincial Auditor’s office to continue their important role in ensuring that value for money continues to be received for all government expenditures.” That was Floyd Laughren in 1992. In November 1995, the Liberal member for Lawrence, who I think was Mr Colle at that time, urged the government to make the amendments necessary to the Audit Act so the auditor could go in and audit some of those transfer payment recipients. So there’s certainly a long history before Bill 18.

We’ll see if the old adage that the money is put where the mouth is—to see the kind of resources that will be placed before the auditor, which would impact the quantity of his reports. Or, if the auditor is restricted in his funding, he will probably expend a lot of time and energy choosing which area to look into. But I think it will be interesting to look into the MUSH sector in more detail to see what the auditor brings forward.

The last point I was making is that this is not the only solution. The more we can do to empower the committees—the audit committee, by way of example—to give members greater freedom from fear of the Premier's office or from a particular minister's office, to actually doggedly pursue spending initiatives, I think would be an improvement and parallel to this bill. Lastly, I look for an answer on why this could only begin after April 1, 2005.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor, this afternoon.

I think we should first salute our colleague John Gerretsen, who, as the Chair of the public accounts committee in the last Parliament, introduced a similar bill at least twice during the sessions. Mr Gerretsen at that point believed in accountability, in open government, in transparent government, and he believed that the Parliament needed to address those situations. I'll tell you why.

People sometimes forget that this is a big operation. The province of Ontario spends roughly \$70 billion a year. I think it would be the fourth-largest government on the North American continent in terms of spending, after the US government, the state of California, the state of New York—

Mr Colle: The federal government.

Mr Brown: —or the Canadian federal government, and then us. It is an amazingly large responsibility we all have for the taxpayers' money: \$70 billion.

If you do the math—I was fooling with my pencil a minute ago, and I discovered that that means each and every one of us here would have to be looking after \$700 million ourselves. That's a little bit more than most of us are used to. We need all the professional help we can get to do that. Of that \$70 billion, 80% of that is not spent by the Parliament itself. It is spent by agencies of the crown: transfer partners, other institutions, hospitals, universities, school boards, municipalities, by a host of other organizations. This bill permits the Provincial Auditor to have a look at our transfer partners to see that they're spending the public's money in accordance with value and to bring transparency across all of those institutions. When you consider that that is 80% of \$70 billion, this bill is long overdue.

1720

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): We should have passed Bart Maves' bill.

Mr Brown: That's true; we should have passed Bart Maves' bill. He also put a bill before us during the last Parliament. I'm amused when that comes from the opposition guys, who were government then and who could have passed their colleague's bill if they had chosen to do so. Nevertheless, Bart should be commended for his efforts to bring some transparency.

As the member for Algoma-Manitoulin, we all have some little pet peeves about agencies that operate for the provincial government. We sometimes wonder whether the public is getting their money's worth. I was at the Manitoulin Trade Fair on the weekend. My colleague

David Ramsay, the Minister of Natural Resources, and I were there at the opening. It's a great event. Probably 10,000 people or more went through there this weekend. The organizer, one Frank Reynolds, who does a terrific job every couple of years when they have this trade fair, presented me with an invoice. This invoice came from the Electrical Safety Authority.

Mr Colle: What's that?

Mr Brown: It was a downloaded agency. I think it used to be part of the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations, but now it was downloaded—that particular agency was actually part of Hydro back then. Nevertheless, it stands alone.

Frank was quite incensed about this. This is a not-for-profit organization that puts on the trade fair. The bill is for \$1,073.21. The inspector was there all of an hour, to sign off on this bill for \$1,073 to a non-profit organization for having a look at their electrical system for the trade fair—a thousand dollars. Frank said that two years ago it was \$84. When he first started, back in 1989, I believe, there was no charge. The price has gone up. What value have we received for going from \$84 to \$1,000 over the space of merely two years? I think we need to have a look at that.

I think of the Technical Standards and Safety Authority, which is similar. We had an elevator that was put in—actually not a true elevator; a lift—at a community hall in Sowerby, just on the north shore of Lake Huron, a small little town in the township of Huron Shores. There apparently was a bolt that wasn't in the correct spot. It had been inspected once and it was found to be fine. On the second inspection it was found to be wanting. They were charged over \$600 for just a few minutes saying, "That bolt's in the wrong place. You're going to have to move it."

Someone is going to have to have a look at some of these agencies to determine whether the people of Ontario are actually getting value for money. That also occurs in many of the other agencies of the crown across all of Ontario. There's \$70 billion, and 100 members of the Legislature to look after it—a huge amount of money. People who have no direct accountability are making decisions that we here in the Legislature need to know are important to the future of Ontario, are important to getting value for money, and obviously, then, to the future.

We have not done a remarkably good job. I look, for example, at the famous Family Responsibility Office, which has caseloads that are absolutely incredible for each of our workers, which my constituents will tell you are almost impossible to contact, who are unable—

Interjection.

Mr Brown: We are owed, as a province—or the people who receive the payments—I think well over \$1 billion. I believe \$1.3 billion is owed to parents in this province who are raising children, because we have not made the decisions around the Family Responsibility Office that seem to give us value for money. In many cases, when the support payment doesn't arrive, it is the

taxpayer who pays. The taxpayer is the one who then has to support the children through community and social services. That is a huge cost, and it is a cost that is both unfair to the children and the supporting parent. It's also unfair to the taxpayer in general, and that's because FRO does not work quite as it should. I think the Provincial Auditor should have a look at that. I think the Provincial Auditor needs to have more powers, and that is what this particular piece of legislation does.

It is important that we continue to work very hard to make sure that the money we collect from taxpayers in their taxes is applied to services and that we all get value. We know that the Ministry of Economic Development, for example, spent \$4 billion on a strategic plan that no one has ever seen. We know that the strategic skills initiative spent 75% of its money on construction equipment instead of training people for skills. We know that we have various—and we'll all remember this—untendered contracts and expensive trips by ministers. I think I remember a Minister of Energy who made some of those very expensive trips to Europe and was reimbursed by the people of Ontario.

I want to point out that many of our partners look forward to having this kind of value-for-money accounting done so that they are sure they can be accountable to the people of Ontario.

Mr Speaker, at this point I want to indicate to you that I'll be sharing the remainder of my time with the member for Guelph-Wellington.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): Thank you to my colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin for his remarks.

I'm pleased to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill 18, the Audit Statute Law Amendment Act. This bill, if passed, does a couple of things. The first sounds very technical, but it's actually quite significant. It says that the Provincial Auditor, who is going to be renamed the Auditor General, can have one 10-year appointment and cannot be reappointed. That's quite significant. What it means is that there's nothing to be gained by the Provincial Auditor in trying to curry favour with the members of the current government, because there is a fixed 10-year appointment and that's it. That means that the auditor can be totally independent of the Legislature. The auditor can look at issues and say, "This is what is wrong," and say very clearly to the public, "These are the straight goods about what's really going on with this program. This is where the government has failed and this is where the government needs to fix it," without any need to worry about his or her future career. So that's the first change.

The other is the larger change, which is expanding the powers of the Provincial Auditor. It's interesting that if you look at the spending of the provincial government and you take away the payment on the provincial debt, what you've got left, the money that's actually spent on programs in Ontario, 80% of that money is not spent directly by the government of Ontario. It's spent in the broader public sector by assorted transfer agencies,

hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and a host of little transfer agencies, and by crown agencies.

At the moment, the Auditor General cannot do what's called a value-for-money audit, but we're going to change that. The Provincial Auditor, if this bill is passed, will be able to go into the entire broader public sector and do value-for-money audits.

I think the member from Simcoe North mentioned earlier that places like school boards and hospitals already have detailed internal and external audits, so why do we need the Provincial Auditor going in there on top of that? It's important to understand the difference.

1730

As a former school board trustee, when I had an internal or external audit done, it was for the purpose of verifying the books, to make sure the numbers added up and none of the money had disappeared, and that's good. We need to keep doing that.

But the Provincial Auditor's audit is a value-for-money audit. The Provincial Auditor asks questions like, "Was that money spent with due regard for economy and efficiency?" In other words, did the money get spent wisely? Second, "Were there procedures in place to determine if the money was spent effectively?" In other words, when the province handed over the money, did the province get what it was paying for? Was the money that the provincial government was paying this agency, board or crown corporation, whatever it was, the money that was given to that member of the broader public sector, actually spent in a way that delivered the program the province wanted to have delivered? That's very important.

It's been interesting because I have been sitting as a new member on the public accounts committee, and the public accounts committee examines the Provincial Auditor's report. We have been having hearings going through the Provincial Auditor's report reporting on last year, on the last year of the previous Conservative government. There's actually quite an interesting contrast between the sections of the report that are audits of the government itself and those audits which sort of veer into broader public sector issues.

For example, the auditor looked at the Family Responsibility Office, which we not too affectionately call FRO. FRO is something that directly belongs to the Ministry of Community and Social Services. It's a direct function of the Ontario government. The Provincial Auditor was able to go in and say that deadbeat parents—because what this office does is collect money on behalf of parents who have court orders which say that one parent is supposed to pay money to the other parent, the ex-spouse, for the purpose of supporting the children. The Provincial Auditor was able to go in and say that there was \$1.3 billion in the province of Ontario uncollected on behalf of families, and that 90% of the phone calls to FRO from outside the GTA get a busy signal. Furthermore, the way this office is set up, it's not really set up properly. The people who work in the office don't have any way, because of the way the computer system works, to know

if something goes wrong. They don't know if Mr Smith misses a payment to his ex-wife. The only way they know that something's gone wrong is if the former Mrs Smith calls up to complain. Think about what I just said: 90% of the time the former Mrs Smith can't actually get through, so she has no way to lodge a complaint. In this case, the Provincial Auditor was able to go in and tell us very clearly, "This is what is wrong and this is what you need to do to fix the problem."

Contrast that to what we found when we looked at some of our other agencies; for example, when we looked at the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and looked at a program called the innovation trust, which is supposed to be funding research into innovative programs where we can build up new technologies, innovative new technology transfers—a marvelous idea. There has been almost \$1 billion spent on this program, but the \$1 billion went to a transfer agency. It wasn't directly spent by the ministry. The auditor had no way of knowing whether, in fact, the money was spent appropriately on the research that somebody had contracted to spend it on, no idea what the results of the research were, no idea whether that money was well spent. It may have been well spent, but because the Provincial Auditor had no way to go into those transfer agencies, he actually had no way of finding out if that \$1 billion was effectively spent, wisely spent. This legislation, if passed, will change that.

Another example: The auditor looked at children's mental health services, and children's mental health services in this province are not done directly. At that time it was the family, community, social services ministry. It's now been transferred over to our new Ministry of Children and Youth Services. But children's mental health services are not provided directly by the Ontario government. Children's mental health services are provided by dozens and dozens of agencies in communities throughout the province. Lots of them—most of them, I would venture—do a good job. But we spend hundreds of millions of dollars, and other than that it goes out—and somebody may give back an audited statement to show that the books balance—we don't really have a very good idea what happens to that money. We don't know whether the programs that are delivered are effective for the children. We don't know whether the children who are the neediest are the ones who are actually getting the service, because the assessment practices are quite inconsistent as you move from one agency to another. We know there are a lot of kids on waiting lists, but we don't know whether those overlap, so do we have the same kids on lots of different agency waiting lists? In the case of the program for autistic children, we do know that the previous government, in fact, did significantly increase the funding, but we also know that with the significant increase in the funding, we really didn't get many more children being served, and the Provincial Auditor can't tell us why because right now the Provincial Auditor does not have the power to do a value-for-money audit on those transfer agencies. That

will change in the future, and that is why I am supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Kormos: I am glad the speaker mentioned kids with autism, because I remember the promise that was made by Liberals that they would end the discrimination that had been practised by the Conservatives that cut kids off from their treatment upon reaching the age of six. I saw it in writing. I remember the promise that Dalton McGuinty and so many of his candidates, including people who are now ministers in his cabinet—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Just one moment. I heard a word that I really don't like to hear in here, no matter how it's directed or where it's directed or how indirect it's directed. I wish the member—

Interjection: And he's not in his seat, either.

The Deputy Speaker: Absolutely. I'd appreciate it if the member would withdraw.

Mr Baird: I withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Sir?

Mr Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. Thanks for leaving me a minute.

Dalton McGuinty promised that he would extend treatment for kids with autism beyond the age of six. Dalton McGuinty broke that promise. We observed the other day that if you lie with dogs, you get fleas.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): You said the word "lie" again.

Mr Kormos: We made that observation and, in fact, the source for that if you want to do the footnote—is biblical. So Dalton McGuinty finds himself lying with dogs, and he ends up getting—

Interjections.

Mr Kormos: Look, please. If Dalton McGuinty's going to lie with dogs, then he'll get fleas. The Premier found himself promising to extend treatment for autistic kids beyond the age of six, he said it was discriminatory, and he was eager to engage in the attack on the Tories. Clearly the Liberals said anything they had to to get elected, anything they wanted to get elected, not intending to keep any of those promises they made once they got themselves elected.

1740

Mr Arthurs: I'm pleased to be able to take a moment or so to follow up on some of the comments that have been made, particularly at this particular hour, since, although comments were made earlier in regard to the term of office for the Auditor General, it probably bears repeating to some extent in light of the fact that we probably have a whole new audience by 5:30, different from what we had at 4 o'clock.

The term of office, being a 10-year term, provides a degree of independence from a government, independence from the influence that might come from a government, potentially, so that the Auditor General can act in the fashion needed in the interests of the people of the province of Ontario. They can function unencumbered.

They know that, save and except as referenced in subsection 4(3), where they can be removed for cause, in the absence of that—and one would not expect that to happen—there's some longevity to the position of Auditor General. There's even the provision for a single reappointment, acknowledging that if that were to occur, in effect the Auditor General could have a term of 10, and if they were to be reappointed, a further 10 years. So a high degree of stability is provided if the Auditor General is doing the job that this assembly feels is appropriate.

In that long time frame there is the opportunity for that person to be familiar with the history that goes with the function, not just doing the job day-to-day, but having that built-in memory that comes with knowing what transpired before, aware of the pitfalls that might be there, with the prior audits and reviews of financial data, with the value-for-money audits. They bring with them, then, over an extended period that knowledge base, not only of the audit function but of how the province of Ontario works, how the audit functions work, how the agencies that may be reviewed function, all of which would be in the interests of the province of Ontario.

Mr Baird: I want to congratulate my friends from Algoma-Manitoulin and Guelph-Wellington on excellent speeches. People may have wondered, "Where was John Baird today during question period?" I wanted to tell them where I was because I know these two members were wondering and didn't raise that in their speech. I was in Hamilton, talking about broken promises with the Liberals. I'll tell you, people in Hamilton East are angry. They're mad and they're going to bring out that frustration on Thursday. They aren't going to get to see this budget, but they know how bad it's going to be. It's going to be most interesting, I'll tell you.

I also was with Stephen Harper, our next Prime Minister—

Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): Prime Minister-in-waiting.

Mr Baird: —introducing our candidates in the greater Toronto area, good candidates. Prime Minister-in-waiting indeed, as the member for Mississauga South says. We introduced a bunch of great candidates who are running as part of the Harper team. It was very exciting, and we're thrilled about it.

I did listen to the speech of the member for Guelph-Wellington and the response by my friend Peter Kormos, the member for Niagara Centre, about autistic children, and I learned something today. Not only can you not call someone a—it rhymes with "pants are on fire"—but you can't say that the Premier isn't "pants are on fire," the unparliamentary word. The Speaker has now ruled—and I respect the Speaker's judgment and would not challenge him and his opinion, but you can't say the Premier isn't a—rhymes with "pants on fire." I thought that was rather interesting, because Dalton McGuinty promised little autistic children and their families that he would extend IBI therapy, and he didn't keep his word. If you can think of anything—

Mr Kormos: Didn't even intend to.

Mr Baird: "Didn't even intend to," the member for Niagara Centre said. If you can think of anything that's lower than not to be straightforward and to keep your promise to an autistic child or family, you tell me.

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

Questions or comments? The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke was up first.

Mr Yakabuski: I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 18 again. I can certainly tell the member from Nepean-Carleton that I'm going to have the pleasure first-hand of experiencing what he did today, because I'll be in Hamilton tomorrow. We'll be driving down there tomorrow and we're going to be working with our fine candidate to see that this Hamilton East—

Mr Hudak: What's her name?

Mr Yakabuski: Tara. Tara will be joining us in caucus, and we're looking forward to that. So it is going to be a great opportunity for me tomorrow to see just what's happening in Hamilton East.

I see members from other Hamilton ridings here today. They probably experienced it down there themselves working for their candidates that, boy, the Liberals are in big trouble because they're not keeping their promises. They're going to have to have an auditor just for the Liberals' promises. You're going to need a team of 10 or 20 just to keep track of how they break those promises. I'm going to find out about that tomorrow in Hamilton. I'm looking forward to that because it is important—

Mr Colle: John, I think you'd better take the train.

Mr Yakabuski: I am definitely driving down, Mike, because they tell me the QEW is just wonderful early in the morning. I'm looking toward to that, going through Burlington and over that skyway. I'm going to have a really good day.

While I'm there, I'm going to be asking the people in Hamilton: Do you feel that what has happened in the last couple of weeks gives a whole new meaning to the term "buy"-election? Because we have certainly seen a tremendous amount of buying votes going on in Hamilton in the last couple weeks. It's amazing—

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

The member for Guelph-Wellington has two minutes to reply.

Mrs Sandals: I'm pleased to respond. Thank you to my colleagues for Niagara Centre, Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, Nepean-Carleton and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke for their comments.

Mr Baird: I said something nice about you.

Mrs Sandals: Yes, you did; thank you. I'd like to particularly talk about the comments of the member for Niagara Centre, who somehow managed to collect autism and fleas.

Anyway, that aside, I would like to talk a little bit about the autism program, because, in fact, one of the things that the Provincial Auditor is very interested in is

why it is that you can go to one agency and have it cost \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year to provide a program for a child and when you go to another agency, at times it has been over \$100,000 to provide the same IBI program for a child. It makes no sense, which is why we need the Provincial Auditor looking at this, and it's also why we're working to reformat the autism program in this province.

In fact, we are going to extend IBI services to pre-schoolers. We are going to improve the training of people who provide treatment for autistic children, because the current program only provides a two-week training course. We're going to have a real community college training course for people who provide autistic treatment. We're going to provide a whole range of programs for autistic treatment because both parents and researchers tell us that not every child needs IBI, that many autistic children need other forms of treatment. That was neglected by the previous government, and we are going to make sure that autistic children get the programming they need.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Yakabuski: It's certainly my pleasure today to speak to Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor. I have some disagreement with some of the points that have been made today that really don't have a lot to do with the bill, but in general terms I think we support the strengthening of the legislation surrounding the powers of the Provincial Auditor.

I see the name is going to be changed to Auditor General. However, to reflect reality, they're going to make the title Provincial Auditor General in order to escape confusion with the federal office.

The federal office is an interesting thing. Sheila Fraser is, of course, the federal Auditor General. Boy, she has had quite a time of it lately. I wonder if this new provincial government is bringing in this bill to try to deflect some criticism that may be in the offing that is due upon the federal government, which is going through quit a crisis. I think the actual majority-government mandate that Paul Martin cherished so much is in big jeopardy because of the Auditor General's report, because of her delving into the corruption and the scandal that we've been beset with within the federal government and their agents with regard to the sponsorship scandal in Quebec and the money that's unaccounted for. That is a big threat to the federal government and a shame for the Canadian people to have to be put through that, to look at their government in Ottawa and say, "My God, can we not trust any of them? Can we not trust a single one of them with what they're doing in Ottawa?"

1750

I think there's a certain amount of that, that they brought in part of this legislation because they knew what was going on in Ottawa and they wanted to make sure they got the jump ahead. "Hey, we're bringing in strong legislation. We want a strong Provincial Auditor here because we want everything to be just right. We're not going to be embroiled in any of these kinds of scandals

because this Liberal government in the province is above all that."

Again, as I say, I'm in general agreement with the terms of the bill, because there are a lot of positive things. It's good for the taxpayer to have a strong, powerful Auditor General. It is important that the taxpayer have confidence in the fact that even if there are some shenanigans going on on the part of the government, the Auditor General is going to catch them with their hand in the cookie jar, if they're doing things they are not supposed to be doing, and that they will pay the price. They'll pay the price at the polls when that stuff is exposed. I think they may be paying the price at the polls next Monday.

Mr Hudak: Thursday.

Mr Yakabuski: I'm sorry, the by-election next Thursday in Hamilton East.

Mr Hudak: They wish it was Monday.

Mr Yakabuski: Yeah, they wish it was Monday. They can't get it over with soon enough. Have you ever seen a by-election scheduled that soon? I've never seen anything like that in my life. But they're going to have that next Thursday and they might pay a little price at the polls there in Hamilton East, because already people are starting to wonder just what this government is up to.

They brought in this smokescreen Auditor General bill to try to deflect away from the fact that they haven't really brought in a meaningful piece of legislation since they were elected almost—what is it?—seven months ago.

Mr Hudak: About seven months now.

Mr Yakabuski: They haven't brought in a meaningful piece of legislation to this date.

This is one that nobody can really have a whole lot of disagreement with, because we all share the concern that anything that is going to strengthen the office of the Auditor General and give the taxpayer more confidence is a good thing. But there are some issues we have with the bill as well, and there are always ways that you can improve a bill.

One thing we have a problem with, for example, is that there's a piling-on effect here. You've got Bill 8, which basically tells the hospital administrators, "You have your job and you report to the hospital board, but we're going to circumvent that board now. As the Minister of Health, I'm going to be in charge. I want to walk into that hospital and do my thing. I'm going to be in charge and the board really doesn't have anything to say." If we have that power given in Bill 8, what are we doing having the Auditor General do that as well?

They have the power now, I see in the bill, to audit school boards. The new definitions for grant recipients and reviewable grants are wide enough to include school boards, universities, colleges and hospitals. The province at present has the authority to order special audits of these institutions, but now the Auditor General will be able to carry out these audits without a formal request. So they'll simply be able to say, "We're going into your hospital and we're going to audit it." Again, I think it's a

piling-on effect of Bill 8. We already have that. The minister has already usurped that power of the board to operate their own hospital in Bill 8, and now they want to add this on top of it.

One of the concerns I have with Bill 8—and maybe that should be audited. It's a very big bill. It talks about accountability in the health care system, but it doesn't address some of the real, significant problems we have in the health care system, such as the wait times for cardiac surgery and joint replacement. In eastern Ontario, where I come from, in my riding, you'd have to go to Ottawa to get a joint replacement. They are the longest wait times in the entire province. We're waiting 12 months to get a knee done. I have people calling me every day, saying, "John, I am in such pain I can't take it." I call the hospital, I call the doctors involved, and I ask them, "What is going on? Is this wait time necessary?" They tell me, "Well, we can look at the priority list and we can reassess this patient to see if it really is a priority situation." But the fact of the matter is that the government isn't doing enough to ensure that these joint replacements are done in a more timely fashion, to alleviate that pain more quickly for those patients who are suffering so greatly.

Another thing I find interesting about Bill 18 is that under section 12, the new section 9.1 limits the power of the Auditor General under this bill to begin work under the bill to after April 1, 2005. However, the Auditor General cannot go back further than grants received after this bill comes into effect.

What I find remarkable is that this is the retroactive government. Every piece of legislation they bring in, everything they want to do, whether it's tax credits for parents of students educated in a parochial or private school or whether it's the seniors' property tax credit, they want to do retroactively: "We're not bringing in this legislation today. No, we want to go back and take money out of your pockets that you've already spent." How draconian is that? "We want to take money out of your pockets that you've already spent. You don't even have the money. But we're going down there and we're

going to burrow if we have to, but we're going to get it out of you." They're the retroactive government, but when it comes to this bill with respect to the Auditor General, there is no retroactivity. They have a double standard. On one thing they want to be retroactive, and on another they don't believe in retroactivity.

As I say, there are some good things in this, but what's the government doing about some issues that are really affecting us? I had the opportunity to ask a question of the Minister of the Environment again today, and I've asked her questions before, about environmental issues with regard to stakeholders in my riding. I've made repeated requests to the Minister of the Environment for meetings. I have not even received a response. My first letter to her went out in November. I have not even received a response to a single one of my requests to meet with her. I find that reprehensible, when a minister of the crown does not even respond to a request for a meeting. It is important, I think, if we're really going to have democratic renewal, that ministers respect the members opposite and at least reply to their letters. Whether they're going to schedule them a meeting is one thing, but they could at least reply to their letters.

I received my first letter from the minister on Friday. It was to do with another issue, but not replying to a direct request of mine for a meeting. So maybe they should be auditing the response of ministers to members opposite; maybe they should be auditing communications on the part of ministers with members opposite. I would think it is simply good courtesy to reply to a written request for a meeting with the minister. I hope that practice changes. I know she's been very busy and she's getting pretty antsy over there. She's probably getting worried about her own riding, because she has a rural riding, and some of the things she's doing to rural Ontario, I'm sure, are not going over very well in her own riding.

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. It being 6 of the clock, I must interrupt the speaker. This House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1800.

Continued from overleaf

TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Lundi 10 mai 2004

PREMIÈRE LECTURE

**Loi Kevin de 2004 modifiant des lois
en ce qui concerne les services
à l'enfance et à la famille,
projet de loi 78, *M. Jackson*
Adoptée..... 2102**

**Loi de 2004 sur le monument
commémoratif des travailleurs
de l'Ontario, projet de loi 79,
M. Ramal
Adoptée..... 2102**

DEUXIÈME LECTURE

**Loi de 2003 modifiant des lois
en ce qui concerne la vérification
des comptes publics,
projet de loi 18, *M. Sorbara*
Débat présumé ajourné..... 2138**

CONTENTS

Monday 10 May 2004

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bob Baltin	
Mr Dunlop	2099
Mayor's youth advisory committee	
Mr Fonseca	2099
Sarah Jane Williams Heritage Centre	
Mr O'Toole.....	2099
World Asthma Day	
Mr Qaadri	2100
Municipal restructuring	
Mr Prue	2100
International Child and Youth Care Workers' Month	
Mr McMeekin.....	2100
Highway 7	
Mr Sterling.....	2100
World Lupus Day	
Mr Craitor.....	2101
By-election	
Mr Hudak.....	2101

FIRST READINGS

Kevin's Law (Child and Family Services Statute Law Amendment), 2004, Bill 78, Mr Jackson	
Agreed to	2102
Ontario Workers' Memorial Act, 2004, Bill 79, Mr Ramal	
Agreed to	2102
Mr Ramal.....	2102

MOTIONS

Committee sittings	
Mr Duncan	2102
Agreed to	2102

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

Public transportation	
Mr Takhar	2102
Mr Klees	2103
Mr Sterling.....	2103
Mr Prue	2103

ORAL QUESTIONS

Taxation	
Mr Hudak.....	2104
Mr McGuinty.....	2104, 2105
Mr Klees	2105
Mr Prue	2109
Mr Sorbara.....	2109

Health care funding

Mrs Witmer	2105
Mr McGuinty	2105

Gasoline prices

Mr Hampton.....	2106
Mr McGuinty	2106
Mr Duncan	2106
Mr Miller.....	2113
Mr Bartolucci	2113

Child care

Mr Hampton.....	2106
Mrs Bountrogianni	2107

Cancer treatment

Mr Jackson	2107
Mr McGuinty	2107

GO Transit

Mr McMeekin	2108
Mr Takhar	2108
Mr Kular	2108

Birth certificates

Mr Tascona	2108
Mr Kennedy	2108
Mr Watson.....	2108

Energy issues

Mrs Mitchell.....	2108
Mr Duncan	2109

Water quality

Mr Yakabuski.....	2109
Mrs Dombrowsky.....	2109, 2111
Ms Churley.....	2111

Tourism

Mr Ramal	2110
Mr Bradley	2110

Road safety

Mr Dunlop.....	2110
Mr Takhar	2110

Environment awards

Mr Berardinetti.....	2111
Mrs Dombrowsky.....	2111

Red Hill Creek Expressway

Mr Klees.....	2112
Mr Takhar	2112

School safety

Mrs Sandals.....	2112
Mr Kennedy	2112

Accessibility for the disabled

Mr Parsons	2113
Mrs Bountrogianni	2113

Pension plans

Mr Kormos	2114
-----------------	------

Primary care

Mr Leal	2114
---------------	------

Ontario drug benefit program

Mr Hudak.....	2114
---------------	------

Senior citizens

Mr McMeekin.....	2114
------------------	------

Long-term care

Mr O'Toole.....	2115
-----------------	------

Ontario budget

Mr Berardinetti	2115
Mr Qaadri	2116
Mr Leal	2117

Water quality

Mr Yakabuski	2115
--------------------	------

Alexander Graham Bell Parkway

Mr Craitor.....	2115
-----------------	------

Gasoline prices

Mr Martiniuk	2115
--------------------	------

Driver examinations for seniors

Mr Kormos	2116
-----------------	------

Property taxation

Mr O'Toole.....	2116
-----------------	------

SECOND READINGS

Audit Statute Law Amendment Act,

2003, Bill 18, Mr Sorbara

Mr Dunlop	2117, 2119
Mr Kormos	2118, 2119, 2123, 2127, 2132, 2135
Mr Arthurs	2118, 2135
Mr O'Toole.....	2118, 2126, 2131
Mr Levac.....	2119, 2123
Mr Hoy	2122
Mr Tascona	2122
Mr Ramal.....	2123, 2124, 2128
Mr Milloy	2125
Mr Flynn.....	2127
Mr Yakabuski	2127, 2136, 2137
Mr Hudak.....	2128, 2132
Mr Colle.....	2131
Mrs Van Bommel	2132
Mr Brown	2133
Mrs Sandals	2134, 2136
Mr Baird	2136
Debate deemed adjourned.....	2138

PETITIONS

Tillsonburg District Memorial

Hospital

Mr Hardeman	2113
-------------------	------

Continued overleaf