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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 12 May 2004

Mercredi 12 mai 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 12 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 12 mai 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

RAIL SERVICE

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to welcome representatives from the rail industry in Ontario to the House today. Thanks to the previous government, major improvements in the rail net are now underway in this province. Soon we'll see GO service to Barrie. We'll see grade separations increase commuter capacity on north-south spokes from the GTA without affecting freight capacity.

In opposition, the Liberals spoke very freely about making wild promises that didn't work with the competing demands of freight and commuter rail, so I'm pleased to see they're adopting our vision of rail service in the province of Ontario.

The Canadian rail industry has worked hard to become more efficient over the last number of years. Productivity per employee has doubled over the last decade within that industry, and rail's embrace of intermodal business models has been an important factor in the overall competitiveness of Ontario's economy.

All that this industry is looking for now is a level playing field in the area of taxation and a number of other areas that affect public policy. Given the benefits rail can bring to reducing gridlock in our communities across the province and in fighting pollution, I believe that that respect is the very least we can do to support this industry through our public policy. I trust this government will see the wisdom of doing exactly that.

COMMUNITY LIVING
CAMPBELLFORD-BRIGHTON

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It's with great pleasure today that I rise in this House to congratulate and welcome the people from Community Living Campbellford-Brighton in my riding. They're here in the gallery.

For the second consecutive time and the first time ever in Canada, this association celebrated a three-year accreditation with distinction. The association is the first ever to receive a consecutive three-year accreditation with distinction. In 2000, they were Canada's first recipient, and continue to maintain their high level of achieve-

ment, to once again be nominated and awarded such a distinction.

Accreditation is based on results of interviews with people who receive support and service from the agency, together with findings of each individual's satisfaction with the association, as well as a review of quality management and planning efforts.

Community Living Campbellford-Brighton's honours do not stop there. They were also the recipients of the Donner Canadian Foundation Award for excellence in the delivery of social services for overall performance. This \$20,000 overall award is presented to the organization that exhibits the highest level of achievement among the category award recipients. The agency won \$5,000 last year for achieving the highest honours in the services for people with disabilities category. Recipients of this award are chosen based on an objective performance evaluation that is unique to the non-profit sector.

I want to congratulate these folks and thank them for being here today.

COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT FUND

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Since the Liberal government took power, Premier McGuinty has tried to convince everyone that his government will not raise taxes. Unfortunately, this government is discovering new ways to covertly increase taxation in a way that greatly affects all taxpayers.

Residents of Elizabethtown-Kitley township in my riding are now experiencing the tax increases the Liberal government claims do not exist. Under the funding formula approved by the previous government, community reinvestment funding was designed to cover policing costs in rural areas that exceeded \$90 per resident. That means that in 2003 the government should have picked up \$499,000 of the policing costs, but instead the final CRF allocation was only \$354,000, for a shortfall of \$145,000.

In December, the finance ministry informed municipalities that the government would not guarantee that CRF funding would be increased over 2003 levels. The OPP has increased policing costs in this township by over 31%, which will leave the township with a \$370,000 shortfall. This is money that will have to be picked up by local taxpayers or other programs will have to be cut.

Is that not a tax increase? The Ontario government should either be honest and admit it is raising taxes or make a commitment now that it will provide the funding set out in the local policing funding formula.

HIKE FOR HOSPICE

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): Just a week and a half ago, on a Sunday morning, the skies over the Golden Horseshoe of Ontario were leaden grey, and a bone-chilling rain was steadily falling. The place to be, decidedly, was curled up under the blankets, with a good book and a hot cup of tea. But throughout the area and across the country people left their cocoons and ventured into the forbidding climate.

At 10 o'clock that morning in my riding of Stoney Creek, some 50 people from the very tall to the very small bent their heads against the wind coming in from Lake Ontario and began a 10-kilometre hike along the shoreline. They sustained themselves with the reason they were out on that Sunday morning in the cold and rain. They thought about hospice. In my riding they thought about the Dr Bob Kemp Hospice.

The annual Hike for Hospice on May 2 raised much-needed funding for a much-needed service in our world. Hospice in Ontario takes many forms: volunteers who go into homes to provide care and support for those who are facing their last days; day programs in centres; and, in some cases, a place, a homelike and humane setting where one can go on that final leg of life's journey.

In Stoney Creek, a residential hospice is the long-held dream and goal of Dr Bob Kemp, his wife Mildred, their family, many volunteers, staff and the community. Those who braved the elements that Sunday morning helped to move that dream closer to reality by raising \$9,000. Many thanks and congratulations to all those who took part.

1340

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Down where I come from in Niagara Centre, just like across Ontario, chiropractors play a vital role in the delivery of health care and are an important part of our health care and medicare system.

Chiropractors, however, are reading the signals very clearly. Just like optometrists, just like physiotherapists, they see themselves as very much under attack by this government. Chiropractors are telling folks that this budget on May 18 is going to find people across this province, seniors and other folks who need chiropractic care, sorely wishing that the change they voted for was in fact happening, because what we see, and the writing's increasingly clear on the wall, is that chiropractors are going to suffer delisting of services and reduced payments, along with their colleagues in the practice of optometry and physiotherapy.

It's not only stupid, it's short-sighted on the part of the government, and it's contrary to what Canadians believe in about public health care. Chiropractors are an integral, effective part of our complete health care system. They are strong, important health professionals in the delivery of treatment to people across this province.

I say to you that New Democrats are going to resist with all our energy any effort to delist chiropractic services. Indeed we are going to resist any effort on the part of the Liberals here at Queen's Park to marginalize chiropractic services, to in effect privatize them and to impose new and increased user fees on patients of chiropractic practitioners.

CARASSAUGA

Mr Vic Dhillon (Brampton West-Mississauga): It's a great pleasure to have the opportunity to speak today about one of our greatest multicultural assets. This year Carassauga is celebrating its 19th anniversary, and on behalf of the city of Mississauga I'd like to extend invitations to this city's largest community festival, running May 28 to 30.

Carassauga is a celebration of cultures, a meeting place where we can all discover the intricate traditions and histories of one another. Everyone has the opportunity to travel the world over the three-day course of this festival. A mosaic of entertainment and traditional delicacies is celebrated across 12 locations throughout Mississauga. Visitors are presented with a passport for unlimited access all weekend to experience different countries, including China, Greece, the Caribbean, the Philippines, Egypt, Latin America and more.

This festival debuted in 1985 with 10 pavilions and has grown to this anniversary to include 18 pavilions. Mayor Hazel McCallion is credited for the onset and continuous success of this festival. Citizens of the city are proud of its growth and what it represents. The levels of excitement and participation from visitors are evident during this time with the sights of parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren.

Carassauga has extended itself not only into the facet of our cultures, but it has also become a timeless tradition.

NURSES

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): On this day in 1820 Florence Nightingale was born. She is perhaps history's most renowned nurse. As a nurse during the Crimean War, she was fundamental in caring for those in combat. She wrote home on behalf of them, sent their wages back to their families and introduced reading rooms into the hospital. For all this, she has not been forgotten, and her legacy of dedicated and compassionate care lives on to this very day.

However, the legacy of Florence Nightingale lives on not only in the tomes of history, but it continues to live on every day in the hospitals, nursing stations and health care centres all over this province. In my riding, nurses like Norma Bustard give their lives to caring for those in need, and it is with pleasure that I stand today in celebration of Nurse Recognition Week.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to attend the 30th anniversary celebration of the Britt Nursing Station in my

beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka. I was reminded of just how vital nurses are to our communities. The people of Britt spoke their praise of Ann Palamar, their nurse practitioner, sharing story upon story of how she had cared for them and impacted their lives.

Last year I was fortunate enough to attend the opening of the Rosseau Area Nursing Station, and next month in Dunchurch, the Whitestone and Area Nursing Station will open. These are projects of which I am very proud. I lobbied a great deal to have their applications approved, and to see them open and to know that the residents of Rosseau and Dunchurch, like those of Britt, will be cared for by hard-working, compassionate nurse practitioners is a great joy.

We have each been touched by the work of a nurse. I would like to conclude by thanking nurses for all they have done and all they continue to do throughout this great province.

RAIL SERVICE

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): This country and our province were forged by ribbons of steel. My hometown of Stratford was the hub of the historic Grand Trunk Railroad in the 19th century and the massive CNR repair yards in the 20th century. That is why I am pleased to rise today to acknowledge the exceptional role that the railway industry plays in our communities.

The Railway Association of Canada is the industry association of some 60 freight and passenger railways that operate throughout Canada. In Ontario, there are 22 railway lines, including class 1, short lines, commuter and tourist railways. These railway lines span all across the province and touch all our lives, whether it's commuting to work, taking a vacation or transporting goods to market.

Maximizing the use of railways helps to relieve pressure on congested highways, improves air quality and provides a link to both the NAFTA and global markets for Ontario and its goods.

This morning I had the pleasure, along with other members, of attending a reception hosted by the Railway Association of Canada. I enjoyed the discussions on the railway industry, its future and how it contributes to our economy.

Today is Rail Day at Queen's Park. On behalf of all members of the Legislature, I would like to congratulate the Railway Association of Canada and ask my fellow members to join me in welcoming representatives of the Railway Association of Canada in the members' and public galleries.

BY-ELECTION IN HAMILTON EAST

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I rise today on behalf of the people of Hamilton East. The question on their lips today no doubt is, "It's the day before the by-election, and do we know where the Premier is?"

Since it's now hours before the polls open, we can confirm it. The fact is, the Premier is a mile from the

riding. He is in fact a mile above the riding. He is en route to Washington, DC. Will Mr McGuinty—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): You did a statement before, the first statement.

Mr Klees: Yes.

The Speaker: You're only allowed one statement.

Members' statements? The member from Burlington.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I'm as surprised as everybody in the House as to where the Premier is.

I rise today on behalf of the people of Hamilton East and the member for Oak Ridges. The question on their lips is this: "It's the day before the by-election, and do we know where our Premier is?"

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: My understanding of the rules of the Legislature is that we're not supposed to talk about members not being here. That's number one. Number two, the clock had run down to 40 seconds and had been restored to the full minute and 30 seconds because of their misstep in having a member violate the rules. How does that happen?

The Speaker: I'm going to ask the members' indulgence on this one, because, as a matter of fact, when it started, I thought the member had his first statement, and I was trying to recollect myself. By the time I did that, the clock was rolling. I'm going to ask the House's indulgence for you to just continue and finish.

On the second point that you made, that the clock was rolling, let me be neutral in this and say that you have half of that time in which to do it. Do it as quickly as possible.

Mr Jackson: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

Will Mr McGuinty find time to wave at voters as he flies by? Will Mr Agostino's campaign workers be asked to pause and glance skyward in preparation for the Premier's ceremonial flypast?

Yes, the Premier has not spent a single day in Hamilton East since the by-election began. Our superb candidate, Tara Crugnale, is disappointed. After all, she was counting on the Premier's presence to boost her support, but voters will be even more disappointed to know that he has chosen to hide from their concerns.

He chose to be Dalton McGuinty's candidate—thank you.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'd like to draw your attention to the Speaker's gallery. We have with us today a federal minister from the kingdom of Morocco, responsible for the Moroccan community abroad, Mrs Nouzha Chekroni. Accompanying her is the deputy ambassador of the kingdom of Morocco to Canada, Mr Ahmed Saber. Please join me in welcoming them today.

We also have in the Speaker's gallery today Mr Jesse Flis, the former member of Parliament for the federal riding of Parkdale-High Park. He was first elected in 1979 and served four terms in Ottawa, until his retirement in 1997. Please join me in welcoming Jesse Flis.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGULATIONS AND PRIVATE BILLS

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on regulations and private bills and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill without amendment:

Bill Pr3, An Act respecting the Association of Registered Graphic Designers of Ontario.

Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

Bill Pr2, An Act respecting the Malton Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR L'ACCÈS À L'INFORMATION ET LA PROTECTION DE LA VIE PRIVÉE

Mr Marchese moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act to amend the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act with respect to universities / Projet de loi 81, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'accès à l'information et la protection de la vie privée en ce qui concerne les universités.

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

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): The bill would have the effect of making all universities subject to the freedom of information act. The public has a right to information held by public institutions, and we think the bill is in the spirit of the Premier's pledge to make all government agencies subject to FOI.

MOTIONS

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): I move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 to 9:30 pm on Wednesday, May 12, 2004, for the purpose of considering government business.

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

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1354 to 1359.

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

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve
Barrett, Toby	Gerretsen, John	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Pupatello, Sandra
Bentley, Christopher	Hardeman, Ernie	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Ramsay, David
Bountrogiani, Marie	Jackson, Cameron	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Jeffrey, Linda	Runciman, Robert W.
Brotten, Laurel C.	Kennedy, Gerard	Ruprecht, Tony
Brown, Michael A.	Klees, Frank	Sandals, Liz
Bryant, Michael	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Scott, Laurie
Cansfield, Donna H.	Levac, Dave	Sergio, Mario
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Martiniuk, Gerry	Smitherman, George
Cordiano, Joseph	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Craiton, Kim	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	Miller, Norm	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Mitchell, Carol	Wilson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Dombrowsky, Leona	O'Toole, John	Wong, Tony C.
Duguid, Brad	Ouellette, Jerry J.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie	Yakubuski, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Patten, Richard	

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

Nays

Churley, Marilyn	Marchese, Rosario	Prue, Michael
Kormos, Peter	Martel, Shelley	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 68; the nays are 5.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

VISITORS

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I'd like to welcome today the grade 7 students from the French immersion program at St Michael's Choir School who are here with their teacher. They are here with their colleague Joseph, who is one of our pages, from Scarborough East.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I'd like to welcome to the gallery Toronto school trustee Rick Telfer who is with us today.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Two members rose on points of order which are not points of order.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr Speaker, I have a point of order which is not a point of order. I would like to point out my daughter Renée, who is here.

The Speaker: This is a tough one to rule on.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Mr Speaker, on a point of order: We have the school trustee for the Toronto-Danforth riding in the chamber today, and that is Mr Rick Telfer, who is sitting in the gallery.

The Speaker: That is a legitimate recognition, but I would much prefer that the Speaker identify and recognize the person.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

NURSES

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Today is International Nursing Day and this date, May 12, also marks the birth of Florence Nightingale, in 1820. Nightingale is remembered as a pioneer of nursing and today reminds us of the importance of the nursing profession, around the world and across the centuries.

Today, I ask you to join me in paying tribute to nursing in Ontario by marking Nursing Week and in expressing our appreciation for the extraordinary contribution that nurses make to the health and quality of life of our people and our communities every single day.

Not many professions are as diverse as nursing. Not many professions have such a rich heritage and such promise for the future. As Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, I have the opportunity to visit communities and meet the talented, dedicated and compassionate people who deliver care. This experience is a constant reminder of what health care is all about: people caring for people—the ultimate public service.

Our government has embarked on a plan to make significant system-wide changes to health care, changes that will make health care more responsive, more patient-focused and more accountable today so that we can sustain Medicare for future generations.

And nurses are central to our plan for positive change. Our government believes that nurses are the heart and soul of health care. That's why we need to make Ontario the best place to work for our nurses. That's why job one for our government is rebuilding the foundations of nursing. That's why we're working hard with the nursing community and hospitals and other health care providers to rebuild these foundations.

First, we're going to the heart of the matter by creating positive, healthy work environments where nurses want to practise. One way to accomplish this is to improve workplace health and safety. We need to do more to protect nurses from on-the-job injury. We know that a basic investment in job safety will deliver returns for thousands of nurses in the form of reduced injury, quality of life and more safety and comfort for their patients.

Workplace health and safety for nurses and other front-line health professionals is a government-wide

priority, and we're making significant progress in this area.

My colleague the Minister of Labour recently created a Minister's Health and Safety Action Group to reduce on-the-job injury in the health sector. Doris Grinspun, the executive director of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, and Ontario Nurses' Association president, Linda Haslam-Stroud, represent nurses in this group.

Then in February, our government invested \$25 million to improve working conditions for nurses by supporting education, professional development, and mentoring, and to purchase new safety equipment, including ceiling-mounted patient lifts, patient lifters, electric beds and electric stretchers.

As we speak about health and safety for nurses, we're reminded of what the Campbell report described as the heroic work of nurses during the SARS crisis last year. We must remember that nurses put their lives on the line every day on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Another concern is the number of nurses working on a casual basis, with too few being given the opportunity of full-time employment. I've challenged hospitals to cash in the overtime dollars and dedicate those resources instead to stability in the lives of nurses, and the hospitals are responding. Hamilton Health Sciences, one of the largest hospitals in our province, has eliminated the use of agency workers, who have typically been paid triple time. Recently I had the opportunity to visit at my local hospital, St Michael's, which has introduced the same policies and has dramatically expanded the opportunities for full-time nursing.

But that's not all. We've invested \$50 million in hospitals to create new full-time nursing positions. This means full-time opportunities for new nursing graduates so that we can keep them here in Ontario. And this means opportunities for nurses who are now working part-time and casual; 800 new jobs have been created.

Health providers must be accountable for using precious health care dollars to deliver quality patient care. Simply put, if hospitals fail to use targeted funding to create full-time nursing positions, they will lose this money and it will instead be invested in hospitals that can.

Accountability means giving staff nurses a voice in decisions about nursing resources. Nurses must have a direct say in decisions that affect their health, well-being and the quality of their work life. That's why front-line nurses and nursing councils will be involved in the process for deciding how targeted nursing investments are used.

And one more point on accountability: From now on, all hospitals will be required to have their local Ontario Nurses' Association representative sign off on funds that are intended exclusively to create full-time nursing positions. The sign-off is intended to ensure that these funds were used to create the full-time nursing positions that were intended.

I'm constantly amazed by the diversity of roles that nurses play in our health care system. Nurses assist the

most vulnerable and marginalized people in times of need. They provide comfort and dignity to people who are facing death. Nurses bring babies into the world and help new mothers give their children the very best start in life possible. Nurses heal wounds and manage care. They help people to conquer addictions and cope with mental illness. They promote good health and they prevent disease. Nurses teach, they research, they mentor and, above all else, they lead.

There are many more new opportunities in store for nurses in Ontario. One such opportunity is elder care. During National Nursing Week, the RNO and Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario are jointly launching a public-awareness campaign about elder health and elder care in our communities, something that I'm working very closely on with my colleague the minister responsible for seniors.

That's thrilling to see, because there's a tremendous need to attract more nurses to careers in elder care. We're taking action here too. Yesterday we announced a far-reaching strategy to ensure the safety and dignity of our seniors living in long-term-care homes. As part of this plan, we will create at least 600 new full-time positions for registered nurses and registered practical nurses. That's because we believe nurses play a vital role in building strong long-term-care and home care services in Ontario.

Our government is also moving aggressively to modernize primary health care by bringing nurses and nurse practitioners together with physicians and other health care providers to provide integrated comprehensive care, the best kind of care that's closest to home. We will expand and enhance home care so that more people have the option of receiving care outside of institutions.

Nursing isn't just a job, it's a calling. Every moment of every day nurses make a difference in the lives of individual patients, families and communities. They're involved in the daily delivery of miracles. I know I speak for all of us when I say thank you to Ontario's nurses for the extraordinary contributions they're making to the quality of our health care system in Ontario.

1410

WATER QUALITY

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): The people of Ontario waited patiently for years for a comprehensive strategy to protect Ontario's water. They wanted the reassurance that their government was taking all the necessary measures to protect water at the source and at every step on its way to the tap. The McGuinty government is going to do just that for the people of Ontario.

We have taken action. We have hired more water inspectors. We have gone to the people of Ontario to consult on source water protection. We have invested in cleaning up the Great Lakes.

Today I am pleased to announce a new initiative to ensure that Ontario's standards serve as the best possible

safeguards for our water. We are establishing an Advisory Council on Drinking Water Quality and Testing Standards. It is very good news.

The advisory council will review all drinking water regulations in the province, including regulation 170. The council will provide advice related to the provincial drinking water standards. It will help ensure that Ontario's standards for drinking water quality and testing are consistent with the most up-to-date information and practices.

The advisory council will be chaired by Jim Merritt, a former assistant deputy minister at the Ministry of the Environment who led the establishment of the Ontario Clean Water Agency.

The advisory council will look at a number of ways to protect water quality and improve standards. It will be asked to give advice on replacing the existing total coliform test with an E coli test, as Justice O'Connor recommended.

Today's announcement of an Advisory Council on Drinking Water Quality and Testing Standards means the McGuinty government has met another six recommendations made by Justice O'Connor. This government promised to take action on the O'Connor report, and we have delivered on our promise.

I want to tell the members about another action we are taking today, relating to the ability of some smaller systems to meet the requirements of the drinking water systems regulation. We have heard from many rural municipalities and owners of small, privately run systems. We have heard that they are having great difficulty meeting the requirements of the regulation.

I have instructed my ministry and the advisory council to undertake a review of regulation 170, the drinking water systems regulation. The review will examine different ways for smaller systems to meet the drinking water standards in an affordable fashion, be it different treatment options or testing regimes. We will not revise the drinking water standards themselves. These are health based and will not be changed.

During the review we will extend the deadline for some systems, such as churches, trailer parks and campgrounds served by surface water, to install treatment equipment for six months. We've extended it to December 31, 2004. However, we will not extend the compliance deadlines for those systems serving vulnerable populations, such as facilities specifically designated to serve the elderly and children. During the review we will work with public health officials, the Ontario Medical Association, municipalities and private operators.

The previous government did not take the time to consider the effects of regulation 170 on rural and northern Ontario. It did not leave any flexibility for water system owners and operators to find workable solutions. The McGuinty government has listened, and we are acting to address the needs of rural Ontario. We have been meeting, and will continue to meet over the next few months, with small systems owners and operators to come up with safe solutions for rural drinking water

systems. We know these operators want to protect water to safeguard the health and well-being of their communities. We will help them do so. We will find solutions that make the regulation workable for rural drinking water systems, while protecting public health.

The actions I have outlined bring us closer to our goal of a comprehensive source-to-tap system. They will protect our drinking water and the high quality of life we enjoy in Ontario.

TOURISM

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): I would like to give members a brief report on the state of our tourism industry post-SARS. Last March, Ontario was struck by an outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome. The outbreak greatly damaged our \$20-billion-a-year tourism trade, particularly between April and August. Hotel beds and restaurant tables remained empty. The 150,000 businesses in Ontario's tourism industry saw their revenues plummet by \$2 billion. My ministry estimates that 28,000 workers were laid off. We saw losses not just in Toronto, Ottawa and Niagara, but across the province.

That adversity, however, gave birth to a new sense that we are all in this together. I commend the competing businesses that found common ground in an attempt to win back lost trade for everyone. The level of collaboration between the industry and the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation reached a new level. Among the partnerships and tourism-reviving initiatives that grew from this new spirit of co-operation was the widely watched Conan O'Brien television broadcast from Toronto. Another was the placement in a number of upscale US magazines of nine million 16-page inserts extolling the pleasures and treasures of Toronto and Niagara.

We are beginning to see early indications of what I hope will be a permanent upturn in Ontario's tourism business. Starting last month, we began to see improvements in the year-over-year hotel occupancy levels in the GTA. In downtown Toronto, hotel occupancy was up 55%, 113% and 180% in the final three weeks of the month. Weekly reports elsewhere in the GTA also show accelerating gains of nearly 50% and more compared to the same weeks in SARS-struck 2003.

Despite this encouraging news, we are not out of the woods yet. There are still many soft spots in Ontario's tourism market. Hotel occupancy in Ottawa and Niagara Falls has not rebounded strongly or consistently. Many resorts and motels in the north and outside our large cities are getting favourable signs from visitor inquiry levels and summer bookings, but they remain concerned about the future and are cautiously optimistic at best.

It is my intention to meet with tourism stakeholders once again in the near future to discuss how we can work together to build on the progress we have made. A few good weeks do not a full recovery make, but I am hopeful that we have seen the worst. Our government

will continue to work with the industry as we all look forward to further positive change. We will continue to assist communities across the province that are depending on a tourism rebound to help them grow and be better able to provide their residents with a high quality of life.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm wondering why the government would choose not to follow the practice that has been in place in recent years and ask for unanimous consent for each party to speak for five minutes in honour of Nursing Week. Why would three statements be done and we only be allowed five minutes to respond to all three statements?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): If the members asked for it and the House leader wanted to do it, that's fine. But it was not asked for. I don't think it's a point of order.

Responses?

1420

NURSES

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): It's regrettable that the government is shortchanging nurses this week.

It is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize and pay tribute, on behalf of our party, to nurses in Ontario. This year's theme, "Honouring Nurses: A Team of Dedicated Professionals," is most fitting.

I want to begin by expressing our heartfelt appreciation to the nurses in the province. Many activities are planned this week, and I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to visit Mount Sinai Hospital earlier this week with Doris Grinspun to see first-hand the contributions that our nurses are making as they deliver care to patients. I could see first-hand their professionalism, their caring, their dedication and their commitment.

There is much to celebrate this week and throughout the entire year when we take a look at the role of nurses. They are valued and trusted by the public, and they work selflessly and tirelessly each day to care for those in their care. I've had many opportunities to work and see the contributions of our nurses.

I trust that the government will build on the strong foundation that we have put in place by responding to the nursing task force, investing almost \$400 million, introducing nurse practitioners and creating about 12,000 new nursing positions. I can assure the government that we will hold them to their promise to hire 8,000 more nurses and increase the number working full-time. It is my sincere hope that this government will move forward to build on the foundation we put in place to ensure that our nurses have a safe, healthy and satisfying work environment.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): It's another day and another announcement of a moratorium

from this Liberal government: in this case, the deadline extension on small, privately run water systems. How much weight do these moratoriums carry? We recently became aware of the moratorium on school closures, and again, we know that's not going to stop boards from closing rural schools.

The question is, will today's announcement address the real problem? The real problem is the cost of this regulation, the cost of compliance for Ontario's small, privately run water systems. I guess that raises the question: Will we see some funding for the small water works in the budget next week? If I had more time, I would expound on that further.

TOURISM

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):

I'm pleased to respond to the statement by the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. We're very pleased on this side of the House, too, to hear of recovery in the tourism business, which had begun under the SARS recovery program instituted by the previous government.

When you talk about revenue and job losses in the tourism industry, and they're talking about 28,000 workers laid off, that reverberates throughout the entire economy and has a very damaging effect in an industry that has a half million people employed both directly and indirectly.

I have some concerns about the tax policies of this government and what we might expect to see in the upcoming budget, how that might undo all the positive things that have happened to the tourism industry and how that might affect us down the road. So I do ask the minister to make sure that he is getting his points across to the finance minister, that the tourism industry cannot see increases in taxes, because we'll lose the gains that we're trying to make. It's a struggling industry, and we have to make sure that we do everything we can to help it recover, and not only in the GTA, as we have indicated, but across Ontario where certain sectors of the tourism industry have not had the support that is necessary. I would like to see some increase in that regard as well.

We are looking forward to working with the ministry and the minister, and also with the stakeholder groups across Ontario, to revitalize this industry and to make it an important cog in the economic wheel—it is an important cog, but to regain that tremendous prominence that it should have in the economy of Ontario, because we will all benefit because of that.

NURSES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): It's a pleasure for me, on behalf of New Democrats, to salute Ontario nurses during Nursing Week, because we know that Ontario nurses work in a variety of settings across the province. They are working in wards in ER departments, in cardiac care and in neonatal care. They're working in homes to provide home care to the ill and the elderly.

They're working in public health units and community health centres as part of a team to deliver health promotion and illness prevention. They're working in long-term-care facilities, supporting some of Ontario's most frail and vulnerable clients. Ontario's nurses are an integral part of the health care system, and we rely on their compassion, their dedication, and their training every day. So it's in that context that I want to review the Ontario Liberal election platform with respect to nurses.

First of all, the promise to hire 8,000 new nurses: I don't know whether or not the minister's announcement yesterday to hire 600 more new nurses in long-term-care facilities is part of that 8,000. More importantly, I don't know how he's going to deliver on that promise.

The former government made an announcement of \$100 million for long-term-care facilities in July 2002, promised 2,400 new nurses and personal support workers, and a year later, after the ministry did a survey of where that money went, we discovered that only 1,700 new people were actually hired. So the minister's got to have a very concrete plan of where that money goes and to ensure it's not going into WSIB and long-term disability benefits and everything else.

Also, we are waiting for the response of the 600 announced yesterday as part of the 8,000 commitment. Where is the balance of the funding to support the 7,400 other nursing positions that were promised by this government?

Secondly, let me look at the promise about 70% of RNs working full time. The initial announcement only targeted \$25 million, and that was for large hospitals with budgets of over \$100 million. Now I know the minister got lobbied by a number of small hospitals—they represent the majority of hospitals in the province—for their share of funding too.

I just want to read this: "Needless to say, I was extremely disappointed to hear that the \$50 million went to hospitals with budgets in excess of \$100 million—32 out of 159 hospitals. There was some suggestion that the rationale around the decision was based on the assumption that only hospitals of that size could manage to hire the nurses into positions before the end of the fiscal year. I had already made it clear that we have 28 nurses graduating from our local nursing program, 75% of whom are looking for full-time work..." That was sent to the minister by Lesley Brown of Lake of the Woods District Hospital in Kenora. I think it was as a result of those kinds of letters that the ministry finally moved to provide money to the smaller hospitals.

A couple more commitments: The ministry said they were going to hire more nurse practitioners. There's been no announcement about that. The ministry was going to invest in long-term care. There's been no announcement of funding for home care. The government announced that they were going to fund 150 new family health centres. There's been no announcement for the expansion of or new community health centres. What the government did do was cancel the free tuition plan for nurses—

something that could have worked to attract and retain some of those new graduates who are coming out.

1430

WATER QUALITY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): To the Minister of the Environment: Your announcement today to undertake a review of regulation 170 will be welcomed by all those who have been unable to comply, but let me say to you that what you should have been doing today is announcing the resources they needed to comply.

In part II of the Walkerton inquiry, page 476, recommendation 84, Justice O'Connor makes it clear that those types of water works need provincial resources. He says, "Situations requiring subsidies should be dealt with as the need arises, rather than cause a departure from the high standards of drinking water safety." No matter what you do with this regulation, they are going to need some resources.

But what I'm really alarmed about today is that you're announcing the review of this regulation when I and others have raised in the media a concern about regulation 903. That is the regulation that oversees our wells across this province. It's been described as deficient and virtually unenforceable as drafted. I've asked you a question in the House to see if you consulted with your own expert on this, and you didn't answer the question. This is a flawed and very dangerous regulation that desperately needs to be reviewed. You turned down the Canadian Environmental Law Association's request to have a review. The reasons did not make any sense whatsoever. So I'm demanding that that regulation be reviewed as well.

TOURISM

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): If you're really serious about tourism, I say to this government, you're going to do something about the skyrocketing gasoline prices, because if those skyrocketing gasoline prices aren't brought under control by this government utilizing its jurisdiction to regulate those prices, the only thing noteworthy about this tourist season is going to be the number of small business bankruptcies in the tourism sector. So I say to the minister, he is senior member of his cabinet. Come next Wednesday morning, go into that cabinet room, knock some heads if need be, tell your government to pass Gilles Bisson's Bill 74, which will roll back, freeze gasoline prices. You'll do more for tourism by doing that than any number of meetings and consultations that you say you're going to conduct.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent for each of the three parties to speak for up to five minutes on Community Living Day.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent as requested by the government House leader for each of the parties to speak for five minutes? Agreed.

COMMUNITY LIVING DAY

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I rise in the House today to speak in recognition of Community Living Day in the Legislature. I am very proud to welcome member organizations of Community Living Ontario who are here in the galleries and in the chamber today. I want to say that there are guests who have travelled from far and wide to be with us, and we welcome you.

For over 50 years, the community living movement has made huge differences for us in our own communities. You've been a source of tremendous support for tens of thousands of individuals with a developmental disability. The developmental services sector and the people it helps have come a very long way because of your vision, your spirit and your caring nature. You have played a major role in helping to change the public's attitude toward people with a developmental disability, and you are to be applauded for that. Because of your efforts, Ontarians recognize and value the gifts and contributions that people with a developmental disability can bring to us.

You've done a tremendous job of supporting inclusion at the community level with projects such as the Appetite for Awareness campaign, in which I was proud to participate last week, where Jane Brickmore brought me a Subway sandwich, I'm happy to report to the Minister of Health—a very healthy lunch as well—and in that way could bring to communities the notion that every one of us should be living together in harmony.

Your work is important and the government recognizes that. To quote the Premier, "For us to realize our full potential as a province, we need to ensure that all Ontarians can reach their full potential as individuals."

We've come a long way in the last 50 years. We need a comprehensive plan to move forward in our future, not just another five-year plan, but let's look forward another 25 years.

Much like the document Challenges and Opportunities gave us the blueprint that pushed us forward and was used from the mid-1980s until today, we need that kind of vision to move us into the future; long-term solutions for sustainable services that don't need to rely on politics to make it happen so that when we look back, we can say, "We've moved mountains yet again."

An old Chinese proverb says, "The longest journey starts with one step," and in this first month we've taken some good first steps. We've expanded the range of supports and services available to adults with a developmental disability. We've launched two video-conferencing pilot projects, one in southwestern Ontario and one in northwestern Ontario, to bring specialized clinical services to remote and rural Ontario. We're creating much-needed housing to help adults with a developmental disability lead more independent lives. And we recently

signed a new federal agreement so we can have more resources from the federal government in the area of employment support. We are pleased with that new agreement that brings more services to us in Ontario.

That's a good start, but the time has come for us to take another leap forward to more inclusivity. To do this, our government and our communities have to make important and strategic investments to get the results we want. We have to look at examples from the communities that work with people with disabilities. Sometimes they do have the answers for us, and I will be encouraged to be working with people in our communities to develop those answers.

I would like to reference connectability today. Community Living Toronto have put together an interactive Web site. It's actually a virtual community of services available for people with disabilities so they can access services better, more easily, with everything that you can imagine, to be more useful to individuals with a disability, and I congratulate them on that kind of innovation.

Our plan has to be guided by principles of fairness and equity and, on that, we also need to have shared responsibility and long-term sustainability. We know we're going to have challenges; we know a huge deficit is one of them. I believe that we can move forward. I believe that while we'll live within our means as a government, we will provide sustainable services. Together, we're going to figure out how to do that.

It must be done, because we insist that by making our communities stronger and more inclusive, we can give all Ontarians a quality of life that is second to none. May I say also that I would like to ask Jane Brickmore for her autograph on this photo that we took together during Appetite for Awareness.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I'm very pleased, on behalf of our caucus and all members of the House, to comment briefly on the 50th anniversary of Community Living Ontario.

My earliest image of persons with intellectual disabilities was one shared with me by my mother—I was told this story when I was very young. She grew up in the north end of Winnipeg, Manitoba, in one of the poorest districts of that community. There was a young boy who was intellectually handicapped; in fact, his younger brother was Terry Sawchuk, the famous goalie. This boy had been chained to a tree in the backyard. That was the level of care he was receiving.

I never really overcame that image, and I'm sure many members of this House have similar stories and images that remain with them for their entire life. So I'm pleased today to commend the association for its compassion and enlightenment over the last 50 years in understanding that there is misunderstanding and ignorance that still exist in a society that fails to recognize that all citizens have equal rights and opportunities.

For me personally, it's a fundamental part of my volunteer life as a private citizen in this province. For 31

and a half years I have been an active, card-carrying, dues-paying member of the Burlington Association for the Intellectually Handicapped and worked with them as they went through three different name changes until they settled on Community Living. I support that, because it really is the principle we must aspire to for these people.

All governments have made attempts in the last few years to improve the quality of life for our citizens who are intellectually handicapped. But, frankly, we know there is so much more to be done. In the last election, all three political parties campaigned on the principle that they were committed to increasing funding for disabled individuals through the Ontario disability support program. I'm sure all members of the House are hopeful that there will be some good news for these individuals in the budget next week.

There is more that can be done in terms of working with the federal government, not just on employment opportunities but also on income support, housing and a whole range of other supports that are required on the agenda for change and for improving quality of life. We know that we still have three schedule 1 institutions in this province: the southwest regional centre, the Rideau and Huronia. We know that every government has made a commitment to deinstitutionalization, and yet we find out now that new admissions are occurring in these residences. We need to know there is a commitment on the part of this government. Maybe it's too early, but we would like an early signal. I know I speak for the association: They would like some assurances.

The association, on behalf of the people they care about, is looking for a new policy framework for citizenship, to take it from the old social welfare program and move it more toward a citizenship and empowering model. After all, those who have become accustomed to working with persons with intellectual disabilities have soon learned that these people are not really disabled; they are just differently able. Society should recognize that, and our laws should reflect it. We should be demanding, as a province, and provide the leadership to demand that we have a national framework and a federal charter of support for a national disability act. Ontario is one of the few provinces that has one, and I acknowledge that the government is currently reviewing our act, but we still need to press upon the federal government.

1440

It goes without saying that there are tremendous pioneers who have supported this movement, and I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge Patrick Worth and Peter Park, whom many of the veteran members of this House would remember, who started People First. We are joined in the House today by Keith Powell, the executive director, by Garry Cooke, the current president, and by Claude Sauvé, who is a client advocate. We acknowledge their extraordinary efforts.

Finally, I would like to commend the association, the devoted staff, the volunteers, the enlightened employers and the caring families for their devotion to a single

profound principle that we should all be supporting, and that is full inclusion for people who are identified as having an intellectual disability. That should be in all aspects of living in the province of Ontario.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is indeed a pleasure and an honour for me to rise on behalf of the New Democratic Party to talk about Community Living Day.

It is within all of our collective lifetimes, and we probably all in this room remember, when people with disabilities ended up in institutions. It is only in the last 25 or 30 years or so that we have recognized what a waste of people's lives that was, a waste where they spent their lives away from their families, where they never realized their true potential, where they never had families or loved ones of their own, where they were literally kept in an institution and never saw the outside of that institution for their entire lives. Those who were lucky enough not to be institutionalized, of course, lived with their families. They lived at home, but they too had their problems, particularly when the mothers and fathers, the parents, and the siblings as well, grew older and were unable to care for them. We had nothing, really, as a society and we should have had so much more.

Thankfully, we now live in more enlightened times. Since 1987, we have seen a number of institutions, 15 out of the 18, shut down. We have seen people deinstitutionalized; we have seen them brought into our community. We know there are still three institutions, and other speakers have spoken to that. They need to be shut down and they need to be closed now.

To close them now, though, this government must do a couple of important things. Number one is that we need to build supportive housing. We need that supportive housing in a desperate way. None has been built for years, absolutely none. I will tell you that this government has promised to build 6,000 units of affordable housing over the next four years and none has been built yet. I'm waiting and I think the entire community is waiting for these to be built. This is the single greatest determinant of health for people with intellectual disability. If they can get supportive housing, they can make it in our community.

I think of some of the people in my own community of Beaches-East York and what they have done so brilliantly. I think about the Pegasus Project, which provides opportunities for those who are challenged, entertainment opportunities mostly, in the Beaches community. I think about the "three guys" initiative at O'Connor and St Clair, where three young men live together in a sort of co-op, in one apartment, and are able to look after themselves. I think about a wonderful group called Lemon and Allspice, which is providing jobs in the catering industry for those with intellectual challenges. I think about a group called the Dream Team, who provide jobs for those who go out and deliver messages and pamphlets, and who do just a tremendous job advocating on behalf of those people. And particularly, I think about an individual by the name of Martin

Levine, who tells a harrowing story of being institutionalized throughout most of his life, only to be released from the institution. He today has a job and a wife and an apartment and looks after himself. It is proof that Community Living can deliver the goods. I think about the Salvation Army home for older adults that exists in East York, on Broadview Avenue, and the wonderful job they have done. They have given back lives and independence and jobs and marriage and a sense of community.

What this government needs to do most of all, though, apart from the houses, is to raise the rates of ODSP payments. They have been viciously, and I would put that word very strongly, frozen since 1993. It is now at a maximum of \$930. For those who live in the greater Toronto area, the average apartment is \$890, leaving them a scant \$40 a month to buy food, transportation and clothes. It cannot be done.

We know that \$930 has not matched the cost of living and in fact has fallen 18% over the past 10 years. We know they have got absolutely nothing. Every single person on ODSP payments in this province lives below the poverty level, no matter where they live. We know their earnings are simply not keeping up, and we know that even when they're able to get small jobs outside, that is clawed back. That is disgraceful.

Interjection: Real jobs.

Mr Prue: Yes, real jobs. We know that those who work in the service have not been kept up with their money.

Next Tuesday is budget day, and we need to know five things from this government: Will you raise the rates, will you build new housing, will you stop starving the social service agencies, will you close the remaining institutions, and will you allow these people to be inclusive in our province? If you do, you can look—

The Speaker: Thank you.

COMMUNITY LIVING BADGE

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would ask for unanimous consent that members be allowed to wear the Living Life, Living Proof community living badge today.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): This question is to the acting Premier for the day. Today, when many are remembering Holly Jones, I'd like to ask how your government can justify not proceeding with the necessary funding—some \$700,000 of expenditure—to assist Toronto Police Services in tracking sexual

predators, when you have \$500,000 to invest in pre-budget focus groups?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): To the Attorney General.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I say to the leader of the official opposition, you're operating with some bad information. Part of this is a victims' justice fund issue, which is within my ministry, and it goes without saying that that particular local project, as the minister said today, is part of a more comprehensive project. As to the part that affects that community and comes out of the victims' justice fund, of course the government will be providing that funding. Of course we will.

I want to permit the minister to talk further about what the sex offender registry is doing, but I guess my question is: Who said that we weren't?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Chief Julian Fantino says you weren't doing it—he's quoted in the Toronto Sun today—and is hoping that you will do it. After almost seven months in office, you haven't flowed that money. The promises made, not just to the Jones family but to all the neighbourhoods of Toronto, to track serial predators when they're on the Ontario registry—the only sexual offender registry in Canada, I might add; we've been counting on your federal cousins to do it for 12 years and they haven't done a damned thing. It's still not up and running.

Why have you not committed that money? After seven months in office, why is that money not flowing? Why is that project not up and running?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Could we please temper our language a bit?

The Attorney General.

Hon Mr Bryant: The Minister for Community Safety.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I'd like to take this opportunity to set the record straight. When the former minister announced that he was going to provide \$700,000 to provide compliance with the Ontario sex registry act, he could not get that funding from his own colleagues. The money was never given. He tried to get it out of the—

Mr Eves: Talk about getting your facts wrong.

1450

Hon Mr Kwinter: Well, let me tell you: He tried to get it out of the victims' justice fund and couldn't get it. They were going to get the money; they couldn't get it. But I should tell you, and this is important to know, that at the present time the Ontario—

Mr Eves: That's not true. August 6, 2003.

Hon Mr Kwinter: It has never, ever been flowed. Never. And I want to tell you this: The sex registry offenders act is complied with in Toronto at 96%—96% compliance. So to suggest that this money is not doing the job, I will tell you this: We will make a commitment

to make sure that we get as close to 100% as we can. But for you to suggest that we are remiss when you did nothing—you did absolutely nothing. All you did is what you always do: You make an announcement and forget about it. That's all that has ever happened.

Mr Runciman: That minister should be embarrassed and ashamed. He should actually stand up and resign from office. No government did more in terms of approving law and order in Ontario than the Harris-Eves government. We set up Canada's first sex offender registry. The money for this fund was approved in cabinet on August 6. The money was approved. Every police officer in Toronto, from Fantino down to the cop on the beat, knows that if the Conservatives were in government today, that program would be up and running and Toronto communities would be much safer than they are today. You're not doing this. Are you saying the program isn't justifiable? You've been in office seven months. When are you going to do something?

Hon Mr Kwinter: I'll have you know that I just left Chief Fantino. He confirmed to me that he did not make any comments that objected to what was happening. You should also know that you had up until the time that this government changed hands to flow that money. You never did. You didn't do it. So what was the whole problem?

Interjections.

Hon Mr Kwinter: This was your commitment and you didn't follow through on it. All you did was make announcements so you could show that you were trying to do something. You did nothing. You did nothing, which is your standard modus operandi—issue a press release but do nothing about it.

The Speaker: That was the end of the first lead—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. This should be a new question, and I'd ask that members direct their questions to the Chair.

PREMIER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): I have a new question, and I'd like to refer this question as well to the Acting Premier.

Yesterday, an official in the Premier's office was quoted as saying that an executive from one of the four major networks approached the Premier's office asking if they wanted free time for an historic announcement relating to budgetary matters. Interestingly enough, none of the four major networks can identify anybody in their employ or in their executive who actually made this request. Could you please enlighten us today as to exactly who, from what network, talked to exactly whom in the Premier's office in making this request, or will you stand up in your place and admit that this was actually a little thing started by the Premier's office?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): What I'm not going to do is stand in my place and get involved in a game of pointing fingers

and who said what, and I'm certainly not going to get into a game of uninformed speculation. It strikes me that what has occurred has been put on the public record.

The fact of the matter is that as a government we're focused on our budget on Tuesday. I would invite the honourable member to pay close attention on May 18 at 4 o'clock to see a government acting on its priorities, which is to repair the damage done by his record when he was in government and enhance the quality of public services in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary, the member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): They told us to show up here at 4 o'clock on the 18th, but what were they trying to do on the evening of the 17th? They got caught trying to grease the skids of public opinion. They got caught trying to manipulate the public into believing they were keeping their campaign promises. The reality is that the TV executives think your Premier has no credibility and wouldn't give him the free air time. They've given every Premier free air time over the years except for this one.

Mr Acting Premier, let's be honest. The truth is that you didn't need television to break the news on your budget. You needed television to break your campaign promises not to raise taxes. Will you now admit that there was no way you ever intended to keep the lid on taxes, that you intended to raise taxes right from the beginning on the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr Smitherman: It's fascinating to hear him use a phrase like "grease the skids" when he's from the political party that took the budget out of the Legislature of Ontario and put it on television in an automobile manufacturing plant.

With respect to the situation we encounter in this province, it's getting just a little bit thin to hear from that side, from the gang that squandered one of the greatest economic expansions around and left the books in crappy shape, lousy shape, shape that should embarrass us: a \$5.6-billion deficit and a further \$2.2 billion in unpaid bills like in hospitals. With all due respect, we are a government that's going to move forward on the commitments we took to the people of the province, to reaffirm our commitment to public medicare, to enhance the quality of our health care and to deliver on our promises to do what you didn't do, which is improve the quality of education in Ontario.

Mr Baird: The reality is that the Liberals got caught and the television executives wouldn't give them their free time. They wanted to announce their budget on prime time television with the Premier in some sort of fireside chat, but it's this Premier who got burned.

Let's look at some of the facts. This gang of wild spenders told the people of Ontario they could have it all: more money for health care, more money for education, more money for everyone and bringing in a balanced budget, all at the same time as holding the line on taxes. This Premier went on television on September 23 and looked every Ontario family in the eye and said, "We

won't raise your taxes by one single penny." That's the real outrage. That's the real disgrace. That's what's in the budget, not where the budget's being announced.

The Speaker: Question.

Mr Baird: Would the Acting Premier stand in his place and commit to the people of Ontario to a full and open referendum so that the people of Ontario can approve this wild tax hike that's on the verge of being inflicted on them?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I remember a certain province-wide referendum that occurred on October 2, and one of the issues that was at play in the middle of that referendum was the false claim by that political party while in government that they would balance the budget. The member from Nepean-Carleton uses the word "burned." You know who was burned? The people of Ontario were burned: burned by your squandering of economic expansion, burned by untrue information about a \$5.6-billion deficit, and certainly burned by the fact they left a further \$2.2 billion of unpaid bills in places like our hospitals. That's who got burned. Burned by them were the Ontario taxpayers, but we're going to reaffirm our commitment to restore the quality of public health care and public education in this province. Tuesday, 4 o'clock: Be there.

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GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Acting Premier. Across Ontario, consumers are being gouged at the gas pumps. Before the election, Liberals were everywhere advocating gas price controls. Suddenly, now that you're government, you've gone into hiding. You claim there's nothing you can do. You've forgotten your own history. In the summer of 1975 consumers were being gouged by soaring gas prices. The Premier then, Bill Davis, didn't run and hide. He came into this very Legislature and froze gas prices for 90 days. The question is, will you follow the lead of Bill Davis? Will you protect consumers?

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Hampton: Will you pass your own bill, the keep your promises at the pump bill? Will you do that, Minister?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Mr Speaker, to the Minister of Energy.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Earlier today, the price of gasoline was about 90.4 cents in the greater Toronto area, with similar price increases in Montreal, Vancouver, throughout the United States and around Western Europe. The gas price is a very serious issue. I've met with some representatives of the oil industry. We are concerned about the price and its impact on the overall economy.

A number of members on all sides of the House have introduced bills designed to reflect the opinions of their constituents. Their constituents are very angry about the

price of gas, as are we. This is a serious matter that is affecting the entire economy, and our view is that we share the concerns of the members opposite and those who have introduced bills. We want to be certain that any action this government or any other government takes moves the file forward and doesn't do more harm to the economy than is being done by the international price of oil.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'm going to ask the member for Nepean-Carleton to stop shouting across. I'm having difficulty hearing the question and the answer.

The member for Kenora-Rainy River.

Mr Hampton: If the Liberals would stop whining and wailing, you might be able to hear the question and the answer.

Minister, your refusal to protect consumers is just another broken Liberal promise. Before the election, Liberals were everywhere. Rick Bartolucci, Bill 32: roll back gas prices. Bill 16, Mr Bradley, now Minister of Tourism: gas prices. Bill 58, Mr Crozier: gas prices. Bill 44, Mr Colle: gas price watchdog. Bill 163: Crozier again. Bill 33, Mr Gravelle: gas price watchdog. Bill 60: another Liberal promise.

There is nothing stopping you from acting. When you were in opposition, you were listening to the consumers. Now you're listening to big oil. It was done in 1975. Will you finally keep your own promises? All we're asking you to do is pass your own bill.

Hon Mr Duncan: I had an opportunity to study the Davis price freeze of 1975, and that price freeze lasted 90 days. Subsequent to that, gas prices spiked again.

There's a very different climate today. The views of the experts I've consulted indicate to me that putting a freeze on today would in fact raise the price of gasoline, resultant from the provisions of NAFTA that would not allow us to prevent the export of our supplies. So taking that course of action would hamper our economy. It would, in fact, over the long term, and in the short term, raise gas prices again.

The solutions that the member opposite has put forward are inconsistent with what he did when he was in government, which shouldn't surprise anyone. The NDP energy ministers in 1991 and 1992, the Honourable Brian Charlton and the Honourable Jenny Carter, refused to do anything. I think the one thing we don't want to do—

The Speaker: Order. New question.

Mr Hampton: The difference is, New Democrats didn't go around the province before the election promising we'd reduce gas prices.

SALES TAX HARMONIZATION

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): Acting Premier, every time Ontarians turn around, they're being told by your government to pay more. You promised to freeze hydro rates. Now you say, "Pay more." You wanted to tax meals that cost less than \$4. Now you're talking about harmonizing the provincial

sales tax with the GST. What that means is that hard-working people would have to pay taxes on their electricity bill, provincial sales tax on gasoline, on natural gas, on children's clothing, on children's footwear. I want to ask you straight out, Minister: Will you rule out, here and now, that in this budget you will make any move toward harmonizing the PST with the GST and, in that, raising taxes on dozens of items?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): What I'm not going to do is get involved in the uninformed speculation that is the heart and soul of that member's work. We are, as a government, working toward our budget. We're very excited about this coming Tuesday at 4 o'clock. I recommend that the member pay full attention on that day.

I'll give you a glimpse into what you'll see, and it's not hard to figure out because it's consistent with what we've been doing as a government: delivering our commitments to enhance the quality of public services in Ontario with the kinds of announcements I had the honour of providing yesterday on behalf of our government, with a \$191-million reinvestment in our existing long-term-care facilities. Our budget is about re-establishing confidence in the public among those chief public services like health care and education.

Mr Hampton: They tell you that you should watch someone's body language, and what I saw from the Acting Premier was, "This is a problem." You're darn right it's a problem. If you're talking about delisting the health care services of optometrists and chiropractors, that's going to cost people money. If you make any move to harmonize the provincial sales tax with the GST, that is going to cost people all kinds of money.

Minister, the one thing I don't hear you floating is a trial balloon. We know that under the Conservatives, the wealthiest people in Ontario got a 35% tax reduction. I don't hear any Liberal saying that those people need to make a greater contribution now. Why is it that you sound so much like the Conservatives? People on low incomes have to pay more. People on middle incomes have to pay more. Health care services are going to be delisted. Tell us now you're not going to do another Harris-Eves tax attack on the lowest- and modest-income people.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I didn't know until today how much interest the member had in my body. So here's my body language back to you, and hear it clearly from me. Our government, on Tuesday at 4 o'clock, will bring forward a budget which begins to do the reversal of what they did, which begins to treat our most vulnerable with the respect and the support they require, and which begins to make those crucial, necessary reinforcements, reinvestments in quality public services like health care and education.

I just want to encourage the honourable member opposite, who seems to be suffering from a little amnesia about the role he played while in government, not to be in such a hurry to suggest that the things they did are the solutions that we will move forward with.

PROVINCIAL REFERENDUM

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Deputy Premier. I have it on fairly reliable sources that Elections Ontario officials have been asked to prepare for a referendum in the very near future. That being the case, that will either be a referendum for increased taxes so that you're not found to be offside with the Taxpayer Protection Act, or it has something to do with one other promise you made, and that has to do with electoral reform; namely, proportional representation, which may well be what you need to take some attention away from this budget that you'll be bringing in and all the tax increases there. Can you tell me and tell the House, first of all, have those instructions in fact been given to Elections Ontario? If so, why would you not have informed the House?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I know the honourable member likes to talk often about the quality of his inside sources. We heard from the weatherman last week who has been speaking to him about those year-round snowstorms. I want to say to the honourable member that we're not interested in getting involved in the game that he's involved in, which is fuelling with speculation stories that may appeal to him.

Here's where we're at. We're but a few days away from the delivery of our budget. Our government looks forward to the opportunity to take to the people of Ontario our plan to transform health care, education and the quality of life in our communities. At 4 o'clock on May 18, the honourable member will have an opportunity, as will all of us, to be involved, hearing it right here in this Legislature. All I can say to the honourable member is that I recommend that he be here.

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Mr Klees: I certainly will be here at 4 o'clock, and I predict that you and I and every Ontarian will witness again some more broken promises from this government. It's interesting that when they raise trial balloons, that is consultation; when they're challenged with the truth, that's speculation.

The fact of the matter is, Elections Ontario has been given instructions to prepare for a referendum. Why will you not come clean on this issue and simply admit to the people of Ontario that you have in mind to increase taxes, which will be a direct breaking of your promises to the people of Ontario? Why won't you just tell the people of Ontario what it is you have in mind for them?

Hon Mr Smitherman: In my earlier answer, I said that the honourable member was speculating. The fact of the matter is, I think he's just making stuff up.

He talked about broken promises. This from the party—I remember Mike Harris: "It is not our plan to close hospitals." Remember that one? How about the party, even at Magna, that stood up and said they were going to bring in a balanced budget, only to find upon evaluation that not only was it \$5.6 billion, but they'd stuffed another \$2.2 billion worth of pressure in the balance sheets of hospitals and of other community-based

agencies. That's his record. He wants to project it on to us.

All I can say in response is that on the 18th at 4 o'clock, in this very place, this government will put forward its plan for the transformation of public services in Ontario. We on this side and our loyal friends opposite in the middle there are pleased that that's coming, and we're going to demonstrate—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. New question.

TOURISM

Mr Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): My question is directed to the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. Your ministry has undertaken several initiatives to assist the beleaguered tourism industry and aid it in its recovery from last year. In my riding of Niagara Falls, my constituents are asking me whether the investments made by your ministry are starting to yield results. Minister, are we starting to turn the corner on the downturn seen last year in the tourism industry?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): A very good question and a very important industry. As the member will remember, last spring, unfortunately, SARS struck Toronto, and it was really difficult for the whole province when that happened. The worst months were April through August. Through no fault of anybody around here, it happened, and it made for difficult times. But starting in mid-April this year, we began to see some early positive signs which are encouraging to me at this time.

I mentioned earlier today that hotel occupancy rates in Toronto, for instance, in one of the weeks in the month of April, were up some 180%, and 50% in room rentals around the GTA. These are positive signs, but I don't see that it's a complete recovery at this time, because some motel and resort operators in the north and elsewhere will only say they're cautiously optimistic. But I'll tell you something: By all of us working together—private industry, the government and all the partners—we're starting to turn the corner in this industry.

Mr Craiton: Thank you, Minister. I'm pleased to hear that you're investing in relationships with the tourism industry. It's crucial that the government demonstrate its commitment to this vital industry, and I'm glad to hear that the positive effects of your ministry investments are being felt. Are you confident that the entire province is starting to feel a positive upswing in tourism trade?

Hon Mr Bradley: As I say, I see some sparkles of light now in what were some pretty dark days as a result of last year. Let me say that in Niagara Falls, for instance, we're not yet seeing what I would call a clear pattern of improvement or recovery, from the hotel occupancy statistics we have. To combat this issue, we recently announced \$2.3 million in funding for Niagara Falls tourism, for television ads and newspaper inserts, as well as a \$3.5-million investment in a Toronto-Niagara

insert into the upscale US magazines read by some 40 million potential visitors. Other investments we've made have been yielding results. The Royal Ontario Museum is up 37% over last April. Signs are improving at the Shaw Festival. We've had some increased reservations there.

But it's premature to consider the crisis to be entirely over at this time, and I'm planning to meet in the future with people from the industry to get us back on track.

SALES TAX HARMONIZATION

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Acting Premier. I'll admit off the top that it is speculation. The Liberal government doesn't do very well at keeping promises, but they do very well indeed at scaring people. I'm not talking about your body, Minister, but I am talking about the stories circulating about the plan to harmonize the PST and the GST.

I hope that you and your government recognize the implications for the housing industry in this province. We're talking about a significant increase in the cost of housing. The average home is \$300,000. If you go through with harmonization, that could mean an additional \$24,000 added to that cost. It's going to impact on young people hoping for first-time ownership. Will you assure the House and people across this province that this will not be a part of next Tuesday's budget?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): It strikes me that in the last 29 minutes and 35 seconds I've had a chance to give the same answer a whole bunch of times. I'm happy to give it one more time. We're not going to get involved in that kind of uninformed speculation, which the honourable member himself admits he's asking. He could have saved us all 50 seconds in question period.

What I will say is what I've said to other members. Come on Tuesday, 4 o'clock, and I promise you that our government is going to move forward with the things we committed on to the people of Ontario, namely, to enhance the quality of public services in this province, focusing on health care, education and the quality of life in our communities.

Mr Runciman: Unhelpful answers are the heart and soul of that minister's world. I want to make sure that the Acting Premier and his cabinet colleagues, let alone his backbench colleagues, understand the implications of what happens if indeed you move ahead with this initiative to harmonize the PST and the GST. We're talking about approximately 340,000 jobs in the province that are dependent on this industry. You're going to make this industry go from being the biggest, most productive sector of Ontario's economy to being the least productive overnight if you move ahead with this initiative.

We're talking about \$19 billion in wages through this industry, \$34 billion in provincial GDP, and 450,000 jobs—I correct my record, 450,000 jobs. Once again, I ask you and implore you to give assurance to the people of Ontario today that you will not move ahead with this ill-thought-out initiative.

Hon Mr Smitherman: It seems to me, in answer to the honourable member's question, that when we were in opposition we got together in the morning for a question period meeting. They get together for a speculation period meeting. I just don't know if it's a healthy thing for all of you. I'd say instead that we're charged with the responsibility, on behalf of the people of Ontario, to come forward with our plan, to deliver on the commitments we made, keeping in mind the circumstances that member and his party left behind.

Here's what I can say for sure. We recognize the extraordinary benefits that accrue to Ontario by having a healthy industry. This is a critical and essential point of the work the Minister of Finance is doing. I assure you that on Tuesday afternoon at 4 o'clock, because you've confirmed to me that you'll be here, you'll see from our party, in government, a plan to move forward to enhance the quality of essential public services.

ORGANIZED CRIME

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): My question's to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. I'm sure all members of the House are greatly concerned about safety in our streets. This morning we all heard media reports that Toronto, York and Durham police launched a number of raids across the GTA, early this morning, to target illegal guns and gang members. According to reports, a number of arrests were made. My question to the minister is, how did the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services assist the Toronto Police Service, the Durham Regional Police Service and the York Regional Police Service in this recent crackdown on guns and gangs?

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Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for the question. I think all members will want to know that at 1:30 this afternoon I attended a press conference at police headquarters where we announced the largest gang action crackdown in the history of the Toronto Police Service: 65 members of the Malvern crew, as it's known, were arrested. Many hundreds of charges were laid. Drugs were confiscated. Arms were confiscated. It was a joint effort made up of various police forces, including the OPP. The OPP, through their weapons enforcement unit and their organized crime section, played a key role in this particular operation. I think all of us should congratulate the people who were involved in that particular operation because it is a major dent in the situation that we are suffering.

Mr Duguid: While the previous government talked tough on crime and did nothing about it, this government has already taken action. I'm pleased to see that, and pleased to hear the minister's response. We all know that the rise in gun violence in Toronto's streets in the last two years is unacceptable and requires action. Last year, shootings were responsible for almost half of all violent deaths in Toronto. All but two of 31 gun-related murders

were believed to be gang-related. We have to keep the justice system one step ahead of organized crime. We have to have an organized justice system to battle organized crime. The Attorney General has announced that he and his crown prosecutors are working with the Toronto police in setting up a special anti-guns and gangs unit. Can the minister verify that this important initiative was part of this operation?

Hon Mr Kwinter: I refer this to the Attorney General.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): Yes, my officials have been working closely with the police on Project Impact. This is precisely the new approach that we are bringing to try to be more organized than organized crime and to try to tackle the guns-and-gangs crisis that we have here in the city of Toronto and across Ontario. We're having a dedicated prosecutor for this particular project. We had a dedicated prosecutor assigned to the project to assist police from the very beginning. They will also, of course, be taking the matter through the prosecution stage. In addition, we have these new crown/police task forces where the dedicated prosecutors, these experts, will be assigned and, from day one, will be working on this 24/7. It's a new approach and it's working.

HYDRO GENERATION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. Minister, today your Premier is in Washington to lecture the Americans about their coal-fired generating stations. While it is true that, no doubt about it, George Bush's plan to weaken pollution control should be vigorously opposed, the Premier would have much more credibility if the Liberal coal plan wasn't all smoke and mirrors.

I heard your own energy minister tell Bay Street that you won't be closing coal plants until you have replacements, but after six months in charge, your government has failed to get even one firm commitment to build new generation to replace the coal plants. Minister, your government is fiddling while coal burns. Why don't you level with Ontarians? Isn't your promise to close Ontario's coal plants becoming one more broken promise?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): The Minister of Energy would like to respond to this.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Premier McGuinty is in Washington today doing the right thing, telling the Americans, "Don't loosen the regulations." There are 96 coal plants at various stages of development in the United States. We are downwind from 54 of them. That's why our Premier and this party and this government committed to closing our coal plants. We will make that commitment. That party, to lecture this government about environmental policy and about energy policy, ought to be ashamed. When you were the government, you shut down all conservation programs in 1992 and 1993. In January, your

leader sitting next to you compared one coal plant to the other, and said that one is good and one is bad. You've been all over the board. This government's clear. It's consistent. The Bush administration's wrong in reducing the regulations on coal, number one. Number two, the Americans are wrong—

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

Ms Churley: You know, Minister, when the NDP was in government, we brought in more conservation and efficiency programs than any government before us, and when we left government, even with some stopped by Ontario Hydro, there were still more conservation programs in place than there are today. Check your facts before you say that again, Minister.

What I'm asking you is if you will still be keeping your commitment to close the coal plants by the year 2007. You are drastically short of real financial incentives to homeowners when it comes to conservation. You're relying too much on interval meters that you know will cost homeowners hundreds of dollars, and even though they contribute to a very small portion of what is needed, it doesn't even come close.

The Pembina Institute released a report yesterday saying conservation and efficiency are much cheaper than nuclear power. So I'm asking you today, will you invest \$18 billion between now and 2020 and go a long way toward solving Ontario's energy shortcomings, and will you commit again to close coal—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Mr Duncan: We have committed already a quarter of a billion dollars to conservation, the largest in the history of the province. We are bringing in interval meters as part of a comprehensive plan to encourage conservation, which will include time-of-use rates, something you never did. Between 1993 and 1995, Ontario Hydro phased out all demand-side programs.

What else did they do? They shut down the Conawapa project; they cut it off. What did their leader at that time say? He said it was a good thing to do. Well, he was wrong. He was wrong then and they're wrong now. Their record doesn't even begin to stack up to this government's record on conservation, and we've been here for six months. Premier McGuinty is leading the way, not only in this jurisdiction but across Canada and, I would submit, in the western world, on making conservation part of our culture, part of our lives. We will do what you failed to do: make our energy cleaner and greener.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, as you know, the month of May is Foot Health Awareness Month, and 80% of people in this province will experience a foot problem at some time in their lives. On average, over 60% of patients seen by podiatrists are seniors, and about half of those people suffer from diabetes. Many of the seniors are on fixed incomes, and

certainly, if they had to pay for this service, it would be quite difficult.

Minister, the question I have for you today is, will you commit that in the budget you will not eliminate OHIP funding for podiatry services?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Consistent with the theme of the day, I'm not going to get involved in speculating around whatever is brought up on that side. I would say, in reference to the very important program the member opposite asks about, that we recognize how much important and crucial essential support it is providing to people in the situations that she outlines, including diabetics, our seniors and the like. So while I'm not involved in the kind of speculation that seems rampant over there, I can confirm to the member that I agree with her analysis about the importance of this program.

Mrs Witmer: This is from a minister who has responsibility for podiatry. Surely he could give me a simple no. In fact, if I take a look here at his ministry briefing notes from May 6, "Other OHIP Practitioners," question 6 says, "Are you also considering delisting podiatry services?" The answer is, "No. Podiatrists provide essential foot care to seniors and diabetics. The province spends about \$4.6 million on podiatry."

He couldn't even answer the question that's in his own briefing book. I am disappointed to tell you that these same briefing notes, when the question is to be asked about chiropractic and schedule 5 physiotherapy services, I'm afraid the people in this province are not given the same reassurance that OHIP funding will continue for these services. Minister, can you commit today that you will not delist chiropractic or schedule 5 physiotherapy services?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm always interested to get a stern rebuke and lecture from the former minister, but on this point I'm pretty consistent. I haven't been involved for months and months now, to all the media questions that have come and those that in the last few weeks have come in this House, in speculation about what will be and what will not be in the budget. I very clearly sent a signal that our budget will be about restoring confidence and quality in our health care system, rebuilding what they have diminished over their eight years in office.

All I can say is that as Minister of Health and a member of this government I'm excited about this coming Tuesday. I intend to spend an awful lot of time and energy travelling around our province to indicate the extent to which our government is committed to quality health care in Ontario.

1530

HEALTHYONTARIO.COM

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, last week I had the pleasure of announcing to the House that your ministry's Web site, HealthyOntario.com, was one of five nominees for the eighth annual International

Webby Awards under the category of best government Web site in the world. Minister, do you have an update on the nomination? Did we win, and how well did we do?

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Wow, you won a Webby.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think the member for Nepean-Carleton would be well served to spend just a minute or two surfing HealthyOntario.com. There he would find what 4.5 million people every month are finding, some of the best-quality and accessible information about health care known to the world.

The member opposite laughs about winning a Webby. But if you're in the business of marketing and providing information by Web sites, then you would know that this is like winning the Oscar. What I'm pleased to say, Mr Speaker, is that the Ontario government's health Web site, HealthyOntario.com has been voted the best government Web site in the whole wide world.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Colle: All I can say is, I have no supplementary. Just log on to HealthyOntario.com.

REMAND CENTRE IN PEMBROKE

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): My question today is for the Minister of Community, Safety and Correctional Services. Back in late March, you'll recall that myself and officials from the city of Pembroke, Mayor Jacyno and Councillor Shirley White, met with you to discuss the possible building of a remand centre in the city of Pembroke. At that time, you indicated to us there would be an announcement that the jail in the city would close. A couple of weeks later, in fact, that jail did close, and I've met with you personally since then. I've also communicated to you by mail. When can we get an answer with regard to the possibility of having a remand centre as per the proposal by the city of Pembroke, established in the city of Pembroke?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member should know that the Pembroke jail is 136 years old and in 1998 the previous government decided to close it down. They did nothing about it. Five years went by without any closure of an announcement they had made in 1998.

During that period of time, the officials in the city of Pembroke submitted several proposals to the previous government as to what they wanted to do. They were all turned down. They didn't agree to any of them.

About five weeks ago, that member, with his mayor, came to see me with a proposal, and I said I would look at it. To assume that I would make a decision in five weeks when that government didn't make a decision in five years is silly. We are looking at it, and we will get back to you on that.

Mr Yakabuski: At that time, Mr Minister, you did indicate to us that we should expect an answer in about six weeks, so you've got a week.

However, with respect to that closure, the jail was closed under your watch. I want to tell you about something I read in the Ottawa Citizen this morning, where a judge in Ottawa granted credit for jail time, served at a three-for-one rate, to a man convicted of spousal abuse because of overcrowding and poor conditions at the Innes Road jail. One of the reasons we've got overcrowding at the Innes Road jail is because the Pembroke jail was shut down last month, so those prisoners are now being held in the Innes Road jail. We have a situation where it's coming back now; the chickens are coming home to roost. We indicated that there were going to be problems because of this closure, and there was no contingency plan in place. Now we're having problems. The legal—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you, Minister?

Hon Mr Kwinter: Mr Speaker, the member should know that, on average, there is ample accommodation in our correctional facilities in eastern Ontario. But because we have no control as to the number of people who are sent there—that is not our job; our job is to receive them, not to determine who goes there—from time to time there is an imbalance and there is some crowding. When that happens, we try to accommodate them; we try to shift people around. That's just good management. So to suggest that the prisoners who came out of Pembroke are creating a problem in the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre just isn't the case. What is really happening is that we are doing what we should be doing, and that is managing our facilities to the point where they're operating efficiently and economically and safely for the people who are in them.

SERVICES FOR THE DISABLED

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. On April 26, I had the opportunity to meet some of the most amazing people in my community of Etobicoke-Lakeshore when I had an opportunity to sit down and spend the morning with Community Living Toronto. I listened to them and, most importantly, I learned from them. I learned from the challenges that they face in their lives. I learned from the experiences that they lived. I learned from their families. And I learned the hopes and dreams that they have for their future.

Minister, it's very important to me and to my community to know what our government is going to do to help these people and their families.

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I can tell you that all of us in this House, I believe, members of all political parties, want to move forward with positive change for individuals who live with disabilities in our communities. Let me say that over many decades we have moved mountains to have inclusion in our communities for everyone, and I think

each government of the past needs to be applauded, frankly, for that.

We haven't gone far enough; that is true. Our government intends to move mountains still, and we're going to need help from our various communities to do that. I can tell you that in the time that we've been government, we have moved forward. We are building new places to live in communities so individuals can live with dignity in their communities. We have a long way to go, and we want to move this forward.

Ms Broten: Thank you, Minister. One of the most poignant moments I had during the meeting was when they talked about their future: What would happen when their parents aged? What would happen, parents worried for their children, when they aged? How would they live with dignity, and how would they live independently in our communities? So it's very important, I think, that we look at how we can help them as their families are growing older, and how we as a society can look after these people and their future and try to make those futures less uncertain. I look forward to hearing what we might do to help these families with this most difficult circumstance.

Hon Ms Pupatello: I think it's important to note that we are engaging everyone who works with our friends with disabilities. I want to tell you that we intend to engage in some major discussions around serious issues about how we go forward in the future. There are major questions to be asked.

Some of the things that I remember the most in my stint here as an MPP was meeting aging parents of individuals with disabilities, whose questions are the same as those of the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore: "What happens when I die? Who's going take care of my children?" There is nothing more heart-rending for any of us in the House who have had to watch an individual ask those questions. We have to be part of a government that helps with the answer.

We also have to help get our supports together so we make it easier for parents to access services, easier for individuals and families to have assessments made about what their true needs are, and we have to find a fair and equitable way to deliver those services.

1540

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): My question is to the Chair of Management Board. I believe the public has a right to know what goes on behind closed doors at public institutions like universities. People shouldn't have to jump through hoops to find out from university administrators how public money is being spent. But that's exactly what is happening, because currently universities are not subject to the freedom of information act.

Minister, I suspect that's an oversight and that, as we speak, you're working to include Ontario universities under the freedom of information act. Is that correct?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): At the time the provincial freedom

of information legislation was enacted, it was the expectation by the government of the day that universities would prepare their own freedom of information bylaws or regulations that would ensure that the public had a right to information in universities. We expected that to happen. We have asked universities to review that, and they are doing that right now.

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and myself are also reviewing whether it is time that the province may have to amend its freedom of information legislation to include universities.

So we're doing both of those things. We are asking universities to review whether they have done what they said they would do at the time and whether it's satisfactory, but the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and I are also reviewing legislation that we may do provincially.

Mr Marchese: The problem is that nothing has happened in 17 years, and you're still hoping they might. The point is that we've got to do something. In December, your government opened the files of Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation, and I'm telling you the benefits of that are obvious. Universities receive about \$2 billion a year in public grants. That's a lot of money being spent with no public scrutiny whatsoever. Universities should be subject to the same scrutiny as government agencies and departments.

My question is, will you lift the veil of secrecy and bring universities under the freedom of information act, and do it now?

Hon Mr Phillips: Of course we'll lift whatever veil of secrecy that may still remain. You may very well be right: Perhaps the universities haven't acted appropriately, as you would like, for the last 15 years. The challenge is that we haven't been in power in the last 15 years.

We are acting. We have asked the universities now to review their policies, and I also repeat what I said earlier, that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and I are reviewing it to determine whether we need to move forward provincially.

I would just remind us all that one of the very first things we did was amend the freedom of information act to ensure that colleges and universities are required to work with the Provincial Auditor for the first time. The Provincial Auditor will now have a chance to do value-for-money studies in our colleges and universities. That was one of the very first things we did. We're now moving on to the next step, which is to review our freedom of information act. We will do something that hadn't been done for 15 years: make sure there is freedom of information in our universities.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety, and it concerns double-hat firefighters: professional firefighters in Ontario who deserve the right to serve as volunteer

firefighters in their free time. As the minister is well aware, the firefighters' union has been forcing double-hatters to resign as volunteers. This has the effect of weakening volunteer fire departments across the province.

Six weeks ago today, the minister informed the House that he favoured the establishment of another mediation process to solve this issue. He has since repeated his statement that a structured mediation will be forthcoming. He has said this on a number of occasions in this House.

My Bill 52 provides an answer to this problem. When will the minister take concrete steps to protect double-hatter firefighters in the interests of community safety in Ontario?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member for the question. It's a question he's raised on several occasions in this House and in a previous House.

I find it interesting that he is still promoting his particular private member's bill. When he was on the government side, he couldn't even get his government to support his bill. So you have to understand that if it were an easy solution, it would be done.

In the meantime, I should tell you that just the other day I visited the annual meeting of the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs. We discussed this issue. My concern and the concern of the chief fire marshal of Ontario is that community safety is the primary goal of what we're trying to do. We're trying to get to the point where no one is put at risk because of fire. That means we have to deal with this issue, and we are dealing with it. It is not simple, or it would have been resolved long ago, but I give you that commitment.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): For me and for many of the members on this side of the House, this issue boils down to a simple concept, and that's the concept of freedom. We here in a parliamentary democracy take an oath to protect and preserve that. The union, the Professional Fire Fighters Association, is taking away, through intimidation, the right of these volunteers to serve in their local fire brigades.

Minister, at the time that Mr Arnott brought forward his bill, there was a free vote in the House. You seem to have your history a little wrong—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'd like to hear the member for Simcoe-Grey. I'm hearing a lot of heckling coming from this side. Could the member for Simcoe-Grey state his question?

Mr Wilson: The overwhelming majority of people on the honourable member's side at that time voted in favour of that bill. Rather than criticizing him today, why don't you bring forward his bill? We'll have another free vote in the House, and let's do something to help preserve and protect freedom in this province rather than just talking about it. The union has now ended the moratorium. The intimidation is going to continue, and

you have a responsibility to do something. Call the bill forward and let's have a free vote.

Hon Mr Kwinter: We have in place in Ontario the fire marshal. He is monitoring the situation very, very carefully. If he determines that any citizen of Ontario is at risk because of what is happening with this particular issue, he will advise me as to what to do.

But just to clarify the situation, notwithstanding that this was a private member's bill, if you're the government and you want to get a bill passed, you have the ability to do it, notwithstanding what happens in the private members' hour. Obviously the government that you represented did not have an interest in getting that bill passed.

MINISTERS' STATEMENTS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker, and I would refer you to standing order 35, particularly section (a), which reads, "A minister of the crown may make a short factual statement relating to government policy, ministry action or other similar matters of which the House should be informed." There's something about time allotments, and then (c) reads, "Two copies of each ministerial statement shall be delivered to the leaders of recognized opposition parties, or their representatives, at or before the time the statement is made in the House."

I rise on what I consider to be a very serious point of order. Today the Minister of the Environment delivered in advance a statement, which is most appropriate and which under the standing orders has to happen. I read it carefully and didn't perhaps hear the minister when she read something completely different. After reading the statement that was delivered to me, I made an assessment of that statement and then gave my opinion and remarks based on the statement that I had read from the minister. When I was making my statement, in fact, I was hearing howls of protest from the government members, saying, "Read the statement. What you're saying isn't correct. The minister said in her statement that she was doing" such and such a thing. In fact, I got a curt note from the minister suggesting that if I had read the statement, I wouldn't have said what I did.

1550

Well, I've now checked Hansard, and the statement that the minister read has an entirely different policy announcement in it, that is absolutely significant. I would not have given the same remarks that I did, had I known the true facts. The difference is quite significant, which is why I'm pointing it out.

In the minister's statement, through Instant Hansard, it says, "The advisory council will review all drinking water regulations in the province." The copy that I received said this: "The advisory council will look at a number of ways to protect water quality and improve standards. They will be asked to give advice on replacing the existing total coliform tests" etc. Further, it says, "The advisory council will provide advice related to

provincial drinking water standards." It goes on and on like that.

Nowhere in the statement that was delivered to me today was there any indication that this new advisory council would be asked to review all water standards, which had an impact on the way I responded to that minister's statement today. I demanded that the government also review 190, which it appears they're going to do. I would have made completely different remarks, a completely different response, had I had the true minister's statement in front of me.

Mr Speaker, I'd like your ruling on this. I have heard from some of my colleagues over the past few days, including the member for Nickel Belt, that they have a statement from the Minister of Health with different numbers in it, as I understand, that she didn't have access to. I believe this is very serious. I believe the spirit, in fact not just the spirit, but the rule of the law here under our standing orders is that we be given the exact statement that the minister is going to make.

Today was particularly serious, because I read that statement and responded in such a way as was indicated by the statement that I received. If the minister is correct in her statement, which is the right one? We have to clear up some confusion here. Is, in fact, this new advisory body going to review every water regulation in the province or isn't it?

Mr Speaker, I'd appreciate a ruling on this.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): On the same point of order, Mr Speaker: I won't speak for very long, only to indicate the official opposition's concern for the point raised by the member for Toronto-Danforth. Obviously, if we're to make a substantive response to what is a serious and important issue to the people of Ontario, we've got to depend on the accuracy of documents provided by the government.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I too have reviewed the statement and the Instant Hansard. There is a change in one sentence, as I understand it. I appreciate the member raising the point.

On all ministerial statements we indicate on the front, and the member opposite did her work, "Check against delivery." That's present on this document, as I understand it. I would say there's no violation of the standing orders; in fact, what the minister said in the House stands. That was a very clear statement about protecting the environment of this province and the quality of our drinking water.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): On the same point of order, Mr Speaker: Yesterday and today, statements were made by the Minister of Health. Yesterday, there were some numbers that were used in his statement, with respect to funding for long-term care, that he announced as he read it, which as far as I can recall did not occur in the written statement that we received.

Now, I had been at the announcement and I knew what the numbers were already, so I didn't worry about it. But again today—and I haven't checked the Instant

Hansard, so I say that at the outset—I believe that the minister, when talking about nurses, gave the total number of nurses who were to be hired as a result of the investment made to hospitals, from part-time to full-time. The document that we had did not have that number.

I just say to the government House leader: It may seem like a small matter, but those numbers were quite significant in terms of the government's commitments and my response. So I would just ask that if we are going to get copies of statements, it would be helpful if they were the same—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I was just dealing with this point of order here, but allow me to confer with the Clerk for a minute.

I would say that the member for Toronto-Danforth made some important points. Give me some time to review it, because of course it will be of concern if it's inconsistent. Let me get back to you very shortly on this matter.

VISITORS

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: With your indulgence, I didn't want to tie up the proceedings of the day. I did want to take time to introduce the members of Central 7: Robins Kew, Tim Crust, Jean Harsell, Tammy Abbott, Brian Keen, Karen McKeown—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you. It's now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over 1.2 million people use chiropractic services every year in the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas those who use chiropractic services consider this an important part of their health care and rely on these services along with the OHIP funding in order to function; and

“Whereas the elimination or reduction of chiropractic services would be viewed as breaking the promise not to reduce universal access to health care; and

“Whereas by eliminating or reducing OHIP coverage of chiropractic services, where the patient pays part of the cost, will end up costing the government far more in additional physician, emergency department and hospital visits;

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

“That the Parliament of Ontario does not delist chiropractic services from the Ontario health insurance

plan, and that assurance is given that funding for chiropractic services not be reduced or eliminated.”

I'm pleased to add my signature to this petition.

OPTOMETRISTS

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate this opportunity to speak on behalf of the voices in my riding.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I affix my signature to this petition and give it to Jen, our page.

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): Again I had the privilege of having the member for Oak Ridges read one of my petitions. This one is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas over 1.2 million people use chiropractic services every year in the province of Ontario; and

“Whereas those who use chiropractic services consider this an important part of their health care and rely on these services along with the OHIP funding in order to function; and

“Whereas the elimination or reduction of chiropractic services would be viewed as breaking the promise not to reduce universal access to health care; and

“Whereas by eliminating or reducing OHIP coverage of chiropractic services, where the patient pays part of the cost, will end up costing the government far more in additional physician, emergency department and hospital visits;

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

“That the Parliament of Ontario does not delist chiropractic services from the Ontario health insurance plan, and that assurance is given that funding for chiropractic services not be reduced or eliminated.”

I sign my name in agreement with this petition.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

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

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

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

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

This petition is signed by over 3,000 residents of Ontario. I agree with the petitioners and I sign my name to it as well.

1600

OPPOSITION DAY

LONG-TERM-CARE FUNDING

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I move that the Legislative Assembly call upon the government to recognize that, as of April 1, 2004, nursing homes in Ontario were to have received their annual “case mix increase” adjustment of 1.4% of their base funding allocations to cover increased labour costs and to keep up with the increasing needs of residents;

To recognize that the McGuinty government is clawing back property tax reimbursements to specific long-term-care facilities, thereby placing additional funding pressures on our nursing homes;

To recognize that the system has been expanded by 20,000 beds and the last of those beds are now being opened, and that new money is needed to fund these beds; and

To recognize that Premier McGuinty made a specific campaign promise to “invest in better nursing home care, providing an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident”;

That Premier McGuinty live up to his campaign promises and immediately increase long-term-care funding and stop the clawback of property tax reimbursements.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mrs Witmer has moved opposition day number 2.

Mrs Witmer: I’m very pleased to speak today to the opposition day motion which we have introduced.

We believe it is absolutely necessary for this government to build on the strong foundation that we put in place for the long-term-care sector and that the Premier and this government continue to live up to their campaign promises. That campaign promise was to “invest in better nursing home care, and to provide an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident.”

We also would hope that they would stop the clawback of the property tax reimbursement and that they would immediately provide, as promised, the April 1 adjustment of 1.4% in the annual case mix increase in base funding allocation to long-term-care facilities.

Regrettably, the promise the Premier made to the people of Ontario is one that he had broken. However, the combined advocacy efforts of residents, families and long-term-care providers has resulted in the motion that we brought forward last week and, as a result of bringing forward that motion last week in response to the needs of the health care sector in the long-term-care area, the Premier and government have finally taken a small first step in the direction of providing badly needed funding for our seniors and others in our long-term-care facilities. I say “long-overdue first step” because this sector has been attempting to meet with this government for the past seven months. They were unresponsive to the requests, whether it be from providers, from family members or from residents. Not only did they not respond, they simply ignored the concerns that were brought to their attention.

We are here today at a point where this government needs to recognize that they must listen to the voices of the people in the province. If they are going to talk about providing better care for seniors and others in long-term-care facilities, it is absolutely essential that they live up to their funding commitment, not claw back the property tax rebates, and provide the funding they promised for April 1.

I think it’s extremely important to provide some background information at this point as to how and why our government committed to providing 20,000 new beds in long-term-care facilities and redeveloping 16,000 other beds—new and redeveloped beds, by the way, which were all designed to meet new high provincial standards.

These long-term-care facilities support people who are not able to live independently in their own homes and who require 24-hour supervision and health care support. We have almost 600 long-term-care facilities in the province today, providing a home for over 77,000 people. I have to tell you that before we made our announcement on April 28, 1998, to build 20,000 new beds, no new long-term-care beds had been built in this province since 1987. The Liberal government had simply stopped building beds in 1987, and if you take a look at their election platform in 1990 and 1995, they had no policy plan whatsoever for long-term care. The NDP also did not add one new bed between 1990 and 1995, and did not have a strategy for dealing with the anticipated increase

in demand for long-term-care beds, according to the 2002 Provincial Auditor's report. This meant that people in this province who needed this level of care could not access it, and if they did, they were often forced to move to communities far away from family and friends, or they were forced to occupy acute care beds in hospitals.

However, our government developed a strategy for dealing with the demand for long-term-care beds. We worked with residents, families and people in the long-term-care sector. We knew it was important to build a health system that was sustainable, that would provide a continuum of care to people in the province. Our vision was to provide the most appropriate level of care as close to home as possible. So in April 1998, we announced a \$1.2-billion investment for the construction of 20,000 new long-term-care beds and the redevelopment of 16,000 beds in existing facilities. This expansion of the long-term-care sector was the largest-ever expansion of health care services in Ontario's history. Thereafter, we continued to invest annually to enhance care and hire more nurses.

In July 2002, there was a funding investment of \$100 million for more nurses and better care. In our 2003 budget there was a funding investment of \$100 million annually to enhance the care in our LTC centres. The first \$100 million was the largest single cash infusion to the sector. The total \$200 million within a year was unprecedented in the history of Ontario. Our government wanted to provide appropriate care to these residents, as close to home as possible.

I'm also proud to say that in 2002 we committed \$4.3 million to an elder abuse strategy to address and prevent abuse of seniors. This included hiring new, specially trained staff.

We also introduced a provincial strategy for Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, the first of its kind in Canada, and we committed \$68 million to implement that strategy. This involved training staff from each of the LTC facilities on how to best serve residents with Alzheimer's.

Our plan to build these new beds and redevelop the others was in response to the needs of the residents who had heavy care needs and cognitive impairments. We also provided increased training and support for care providers in order that they could provide compassionate care. This announcement also removed pressure from hospitals by opening up more beds and easing the pressure on emergency rooms.

What happened after the Liberal government took office last October? I can tell you that for seven months those in the long-term-care sector asked for the additional funding that was required, and there was no response. They asked for meetings with this government and this minister, and there was no response. Indeed, this government even failed to acknowledge that the last of the 20,000 beds had opened, and they had not provided any new operational funding on an annualized basis for these beds. On top of this, the government had recently announced to the long-term-care sector that they were

going to claw back the property tax reimbursements for 2003 and 2004.

1610

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): They did it in secret, too.

Mrs Witmer: They did it in a secret and stealthful manner. This meant that these facilities were going to have to lay off staff. It meant that obviously there was going to be pressure on their financial bottom line. So not only did this government not increase funding, they were actually decreasing the level of funding. At a time when this minister was talking about providing dignity for seniors, they were secretly clawing back funding and decreasing the level of care for these vulnerable individuals.

Furthermore, the homes did not receive the case mix increase adjustment of 1.4% in their base funding allocation on April 1, as happens every year. Again, this was a promise made and a promise broken. This was an increase that the owners were counting on to support the residents. This is an increase that is used to cover increased labour costs and to keep up with the increasing needs of our residents. Indeed, as we all know, we have increasing hydro and utility costs as well.

I can tell you, these actions of this government contributed to anxiety in the long-term-care sector and tremendous destabilization in the last seven months. Thus, in response to the concerns of those in the long-term-care sector—the residents, the family members and the providers—we introduced our motion last week. Well, guess what? Finally, on Sunday, Mother's Day, there was a hastily convened, last-minute meeting with the minister to begin a dialogue on providing funding. I can tell you, more money is needed. These residents are frail. The level of acuity is increasing. More than half of them suffer from dementia and other mental illness.

Let's take a look at the pressure that was put on this government that finally forced them to take at least one small step forward. However, there are so many questions that remain. The reality is, an announcement has been made, but when will the money flow? When will the \$340 million, the annualized funding to operate the new beds, flow to the facilities? When will the \$191 million flow? Furthermore, does this include the clawback for property tax rebates? Does it include the normally automatic CMM adjustment to April 1? We simply don't know.

Let's take a look at the pressure that this government was under that helped to move them forward one small step. There were petitions from family members of residents—petitions and letters that read like this to the minister, the government: "Reverse the action to reduce taxes. This retroactive reduction has serious implications on the care for seniors that have not been examined." They were also asking for extra dollars to flow on April 1 to meet the increased needs of nursing in the LTC facilities. They go on to say, "As Mr Smitherman indicated last fall, long-term care needs to be examined." They go on to ask for proper funding to ensure that areas

such as dietary, housekeeping, maintenance and all the other increased expenses are provided for.

So we heard from them, and then, of course, we heard the repeated calls for more funding from the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors. Again, Donna Rubin says, "We expect the government to keep its promises in the upcoming budget. They need to do what is right." She goes on to say, "The infusion of \$420 million a year would bring us into line with the average in other jurisdictions." So again there was tremendous pressure on the government from the Ontario Association of Nonprofit Homes and Services for Seniors.

Donna Rubin says, "To say that money is not the answer is to deny the reality. We could be doing so much more for the people in our homes, but it will require a financial commitment." That was important, and that certainly helped in the pressure that was building on the government.

Then, of course, those in the Ontario Long Term Care Association were also concerned that funding was not flowing. They decided to do a survey of their member residents and families. They conducted a survey to determine what the top five priorities were for long-term care in 2004. The clear and emphatic message that came from residents and family members and health care providers in the homes of the Ontario Long Term Care Association to the government was that they needed to provide the increased resources required to deliver the care and services the residents need.

In fact, of the five priorities that were identified, number one was to provide more staff to reduce the time to respond to resident needs—more than 18,000 votes. The second priority was for more funding for care and services—more than 17,000 votes. Tougher penalties for homes not meeting standards was in sixth position, and of course this is a measure the OLTC fully supports as part of an enhanced accountability framework for the sector.

I think this is important because they also went on to say, "We now hope the government will respond to the voice of Ontarians most knowledgeable about long-term care and, in so doing, they will also address the existing issues with respect to increasing the annual acuity funding, the clawback of the property tax costs and increasing occupancy pressures that threaten the stability of an already fragile but increasingly critical component of our health care delivery system."

It was those letters, those e-mails, those petitions, those faxes from residents and their families, certainly the message for more funding that we heard from the Ontario Association of Nonprofit Homes and Services for Seniors and the message we received from the Ontario Long Term Care Association that prompted us last week to introduce the motion we have before us today, a motion calling upon this Premier to live up to his campaign promise to "invest in better nursing home care, providing an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident" and to stop the clawback of property tax reimbursements.

As it is today, not only have they broken their promise of \$6,000, but they have still not put in writing anything referring to how they plan to deal with this property tax clawback. The sector is still not quite sure whether the reduced level of funding will mean they're going to have to reduce their staffing and their services to residents. They've also not flowed the CMM funding, which amounts to about \$30 million.

1620

I hope this government, as it moves forward, will continue to reflect on the commitment we made in 1998 to the residents of this province to provide them with 20,000 new beds and 16,000 redeveloped long-term-care beds, which we built to very high standards. I hope they will remember our investment of \$1.2 billion to provide for the care and the support of these residents in order that they can live in dignity.

I hope that as we move forward, we won't see another seven months go by whereby the government is unresponsive to the concerns of those in the long-term-care sector and refuses to meet with them.

I hope that we will see this government now move forward and commit to the additional funding which this Premier promised he would make available to our vulnerable residents in his campaign pledge in 2003.

I call upon this government to live up to the promise they made and recognize that if we're really going to meet the needs of these vulnerable citizens, we're going to have to provide the necessary funding investment.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I'm very pleased today to speak to this motion on behalf of our government.

Applause.

Ms Smith: Thank you.

As you know, I was asked by the Minister of Health, George Smitherman, to undertake a review of long-term care back in December. In December, a series of disturbing articles appeared in the Toronto Star which outlined some of the problems in our long-term-care facilities in the province. The minister asked me to undertake a top-to-bottom review of the long-term-care system and to report back on ways to improve that system.

Mr Speaker, I'm very pleased to inform you and the House, as the minister did yesterday, that yesterday I did release my report, *Commitment to Care: A Plan for Long-Term Care in Ontario*. I'd like to thank my colleagues for their support in my review and in the release of this report. It's available to the public on our Web site, www.HealthyOntario.com.

I was ably assisted in reviewing the long-term-care system and in writing this report by three of my colleagues: Louise Edmonds, who did yeoman service and worked day and night with me on this report; Adrienne Guthrie, who works in my office and who did a fabulous job keeping things going in the office and supporting us; as well as Janine Hopkins in the minister's office, who gave us a great deal of assistance on the communications side. I wanted to thank all three of those before I went any further.

Yesterday we were at the Ukrainian Canadian Care Centre in Etobicoke. We were hosted by my colleague Donna Cansfield at a wonderful facility, which is run by Sandy Lomaszewycz and her staff. We had residents there. It was a wonderful moment in Etobicoke. The minister and I were joined by Minister Gerretsen and his parliamentary assistant, Mr McMeekin, as well as Mrs Witmer and Ms Martel. At that time, we were able to not only release the report but also make some important announcements with respect to long-term care in our province.

I do want to spend some time speaking a bit about my report. It involved a lot of work. We visited 24 long-term-care facilities around the province.

Mr Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): You did a great job.

Ms Smith: Thank you.

We went to large facilities and small facilities; urban, rural, municipal, for-profit, not-for-profit, charitable and culturally specific. We saw a wide variety of care in those facilities. We saw homes that were providing tremendous care, a real home environment; places where we would be proud and pleased to have our family members live. But we also visited places that were falling behind the standards. They were sad places. They were places where the residents were bored, were left unkempt, were left for hours without any distractions and activities, and without enough care, quite frankly. We were concerned; that concerned us deeply.

We also met with a number of stakeholders. We met with residents while we were visiting these homes, and with front-line workers. At our very first home, we spent 20 minutes speaking to one of the cleaning staff who had been working in that facility for 22 years and had a great deal of history and knowledge to share with us. We met with dietary staff, cleaning staff, family members, activities coordinators and administrators.

We also met with family members while we were in homes and we met with family council members in separate meetings. We met with residents' councils, caregivers, health professionals, operators, seniors' advocacy groups, union representatives, academics, gerontologists and others active in long-term-care facilities. There are so many people across this province who are very concerned about how our long-term-care facilities are managed. I think it's really important, and a tribute to them, that they spent their time with me and provided me with so much information that allowed me to prepare this report.

One of the first things we highlight in our report is the need to improve the quality of life. Part of that is to look at these places as homes. We should not be referring to them as facilities or institutions. These are homes. These are the places that these people are living in. We have to recognize that and we have to encourage them to make it their home. We have to encourage the administrators to ensure that they are homes. To that end, we recommend more involvement by families, volunteers and the community.

We saw some great examples of community involvement, examples where the early childhood centre across the way would come and bring all the children over on a Tuesday morning in February in Deep River. The kids would come in and play with seniors, have a sing-song, have snacks and then head back to the early childhood centre. We saw examples of intergenerational programs where young people would come in from their school and would have reading buddies, would read to seniors and would be assisted in reading by seniors—great interaction. We have examples of homes that welcomed a step dancing class to their facility, and on a Wednesday night they would have step dancing practice. We'd have the young people in there, the music playing, and the seniors could come and watch and enjoy the young people and their enthusiasm.

During my review I also had the opportunity to spend an eight-hour shift in a long-term-care facility in my riding of North Bay. The generous folks at Cassellholme welcomed me in. I spent an eight-hour shift in "A" wing with an RPN, two personal care workers and 40 residents. We had a delightful evening. I got to see first-hand just how busy it is, just how involved the tasks are and how much work it is to ensure that those residents were having an active life, got their meals on time and were prepared for bed in the way that they liked and wanted. It was really important for me to spend that time to see how busy it was and how it really was all hands on deck for the entire shift. I appreciated Nancy, the RPN I shadowed. She was very helpful. She introduced me to the residents. And I, of course, not actually working, had the opportunity to sit down and talk to the residents and really get to know the history of some of the folks in my riding. I appreciated that as well.

In my report we also talk about ensuring public accountability. In that, we've already instituted an action line, a 1-800 number for people who have concerns about long-term care across the province. They can call in and report that. We've also instituted surprise inspections, which are so very important because they reflect how a home is run on any given day at any given time, and it's important for our inspectors to be able to see that. We're also going to be introducing a public Web site which will provide information for the public in determining which home they would like their relative to live in, as well as to just give some public accountability to the residents of Ontario. They can now be informed on how well homes are doing across the province.

We're also going to be introducing a seniors' advocate for long-term care, a third party to whom people can bring their complaints and concerns, and they will be addressed in a timely manner. They will be investigated. We're also looking at enforcing tougher standards. So we're going to be toughening up standards. We're going to be making them incredibly specific and we're going to ensure that we have tougher inspection. To that end, we are taking the compliance model that is presently in place and separating it out to create a compliance, inspection and enforceability model that will provide much more

enforceability and make sure that our residents are getting the care they need in these homes.

We're also looking at the role of our staff: What kind of staff do we need in these homes and what kind of training do they require? We're going to be implementing more training and making sure that staff have training that is appropriate for long-term-care homes: training in dementia care, geriatrics and making sure we know how to deal appropriately with the needs of these residents.

Lastly, I have recommended that we look at the legislation and do an overhaul to ensure that we can put in place the necessary requirements for protecting our residents, and for allowing our caregivers to protect our residents by giving them whistle-blower protection. We'll be looking at elder abuse and toughening up our standards around elder abuse. We'll also be giving the staff some protection through whistle-blower protection.

1630

In my last few minutes, I'd just like to address some of the things that Ms Witmer raised in her initial discussion on her motion. She indicated that there had been requests for a meeting that had gone without response. Well, I can assure you that I have met with almost every stakeholder group in the long-term-care sector over the last three months. I have met a couple of times with some of the larger groups that have a great stake in the reforms that we are introducing. I know for a fact that the minister has met, on numerous occasions, with the operator groups and the advocacy groups. So I don't quite believe what the member was saying on the request going unanswered.

With respect to the \$10.3 million in property taxes, we have worked with the sector on that particular question. We have provided them with the \$10.3 million to—

Interjections.

Ms Smith: Exactly. To provide them with 90% of their property tax bill for 2003-04. We're continuing to work with the stakeholders to come up with a strategy for municipal taxes moving forward.

The member indicated that she believed the sector was destabilized for the last seven months. I can tell you, I have spent a great deal of time with the sector in the last seven months, and they were anything but destabilized. In fact, they were quite energized, and excited about the review that I was undertaking and the reforms that we were going to be presenting. Yesterday they were there in droves, out in Etobicoke, and they were quite excited by the announcement that we made yesterday.

The members talked of "hastily convened meetings," "clandestine meetings." I can tell you that the minister and I have both met a number of times with the stakeholders. We have brought them along through the drafting of my report. I don't think anyone was terribly surprised by the recommendations I made.

In fact, last night I appeared on TVOntario with Lois Dent, who's the president of Concerned Friends. She told me on air that she thought the report was terrific. She also explained to me that it was like the wish list that Concerned Friends had developed over the last 10 years, that we had incorporated all of that wish list in my report,

and more. What more could we ask for, with that kind of endorsement from an advocacy group that was out there speaking on behalf of residents for a very long time, and finally feels like they're being heard?

Finally, I would just like to point out that the Star today, in an editorial—the Star having been one of the organisms that really pushed this review forward and put it on the fast track—said: "Over the last 20 years, previous governments have promised reform. Little has happened. Now, it's clear Smitherman intends to get it right. He should be applauded for acting on behalf of the elderly and their families."

Let's applaud.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): It's a pleasure for me to participate in the debate. I want to tell you at the outset that I'm going to be using all the time for our party. I'm sure members are just thrilled to hear that.

Interjections.

Ms Martel: I know. The opposition day motion that appears before us says the following: "That Premier McGuinty live up to his campaign promises and immediately increase long-term-care funding and stop the clawback of property tax reimbursements." That leads so well into what I want to say this afternoon, because I want to pick up this afternoon where I left off yesterday, after the minister made his statement in the House.

I said yesterday, in responding to the minister, that I would have been happy if the government had only lived up to the election promises that it made to residents in long-term-care facilities and to their families. I would have been happy if the government had announced that yesterday. The government didn't.

I want to share with the House, again, three very clear examples of promises that have been made and promises that haven't been kept with respect to those very same residents and their families. Let me deal first with the very specific promise that the Liberals made during the campaign, that they were going to increase funding to each resident in each home by \$6,000. So \$6,000 is what they were going to add to the care of each resident in each facility across the province. That would be a total of about \$420 million.

Yesterday I heard the minister say that the government is committing \$191 million for residents in homes across the province. I listened very carefully to hear him say that that was \$191 million this year and then \$191 million next year, and then the balance to the \$420 million would come in year three, but he didn't say that. He didn't say that at all. He only talked about \$191 million. There was no commitment at all on the part of the minister, and on the part of the government, to fund the balance as the Liberals promised during the election campaign.

Yesterday the government promised about \$2,700 per resident, so they're about \$3,300 short per resident. Yesterday they committed to less than half the funding they promised during the election campaign. As I said, I was at the announcement and listened carefully there and I came to the Legislature and listened carefully here, and I didn't hear the minister, on behalf of the government,

tell residents and their families that this government was going to fund, like it promised, \$6,000 per resident per home across this province.

What we got yesterday was clearly a broken promise, because this government is about \$3,300 each short for 70,000 residents of homes right across this province. There's a big difference from what was promised during the election campaign to get votes and what the government delivered yesterday. I heard no commitment to fund the balance at either of the two opportunities the minister had when he was speaking about this, and I haven't heard him say since that the balance is going to be provided and when it will be.

That's a very significant shortfall of about \$3,300 per resident right across the province of Ontario, and there are 70,000 residents. I think that's a significant broken promise to a group of individuals who we know are very frail and elderly and, goodness knows, need financial support in terms of their hands-on care, in terms of the food they eat at some of the facilities and in terms of the recreation and other activities that should be provided so that these facilities really do become homes. So I wait to hear where the balance of the money is and when it's actually going to be provided as promised.

The second promise the Liberals made during the election was that they were going to cancel the 15% fee hike that had been announced by the Conservatives for residents of long-term-care facilities. You will remember that in July 2002, as a result of much opposition from many quarters, the government was forced to back off the 15% fee hike it was going to impose in a single year and instead decided to impose it over three years: a \$3.02 increase in 2002, a \$2 increase in the fall of 2003 and another \$2 per day increase in 2004. That was the schedule under the Conservatives.

Then, last spring, as the election was upon us, the Conservatives announced that in years two and three the increase would only be the rate of inflation; whatever that was would be the increase that would go into effect in years two and three. But the Conservatives said nothing about rolling back the very significant \$3.02-a-day increase, which I remind you was very much above the rent guideline in the private market at that time.

I waited yesterday to hear the minister say essentially two things: that he, himself, was committed in years two and three to only having increases that would be at the rate of inflation and, more importantly, that he would be rolling back the very significant fee increase that went into effect for these residents in September 2002. I heard nothing about that election promise yesterday morning at the facility in question, and I heard nothing about that very specific election campaign promise here in the Legislature yesterday afternoon.

I say to the government: another broken promise to residents of long-term-care facilities and their families, a very clear broken promise to people who really could use that money back in their own pockets to buy some of the amenities they need. We all know it's very expensive to live in a long-term-care facility. Most people's pensions

are entirely eaten up by the accommodation cost, and what little they might be able to get back from the fee increase is what they should get back, just like the Liberals promised during the election.

1640

So I wait to hear when the government is going to make good on that election promise to residents and their families, because for many of these seniors, getting that money back would make all the difference in the world. I would like to hear the government say they are going to give that money back and, secondly, that the increases for years two and three will only be at the rate of inflation, nothing more and nothing less. Frankly, that would actually comply with one of the recommendations made by Ms Smith in her report, where she said very clearly, "We suggest that the government limit any increase in the accommodation cost for residents in long-term-care homes to no more than the cost of living annually." I agree. I'm still waiting for the government to keep its promise in this regard.

The third promise the government made to residents in long-term-care facilities and their families before and during the election was that they are going to implement standards of care for residents in facilities, because we know the former Conservative government did away with standards in long-term-care facilities, did away with the standard that said you had to have a registered nurse on duty 24/7 in all facilities in the province of Ontario. The previous government did away with the bathing regulation. The previous government did away with the regulation that said each resident would receive 2.25 hours of hands-on nursing care in every facility across the province. The government did away with all those standards.

The result of that was very clear in the study that was commissioned by the ministry itself, which was done by PricewaterhouseCoopers and released in January 2001. In every category—hands-on nursing care, behavioural management, physiotherapy, etc—Ontario ranked dead last against the other jurisdictions it had been compared to, and there were at least four in the United States, three in Canada and two European jurisdictions. In fact, at the time Ontario had less than two hours of hands-on nursing care and Mississippi had four.

So I fully expected in the announcement yesterday that the minister was going to say very clearly, "We are going to cabinet immediately," or, "We are going to implement regulations regarding the number of baths per week, regarding having a nurse on 24/7, regarding hands-on care per resident, per day in every facility across the province." I didn't hear the minister say those regulations were coming soon. I didn't hear him saying anything about a regulation with respect to hands-on care for residents.

You know, Ontario right now has the dubious distinction of providing the least amount of hands-on care, less than Mississippi, for goodness' sake, that has four hours a day of hands-on care per resident. How come we in Ontario can't be at the top instead of at the bottom of the heap, as we now are?

If the minister wanted to do something about hands-on nursing care, bathing regulations or having a nurse in a facility 24 hours a day, seven days a week, he could have brought a regulation to cabinet this morning, or any other Wednesday morning when cabinet meets, and passed that regulation through an order in council, and that would become the standard that long-term-care facilities have to follow, because right now, there aren't any standards. Regrettably, in some facilities where there aren't any standards, some of those operators are going to operate at the lowest common denominator, and that's not going to mean quality care for residents in those facilities.

I say to the minister that there is absolutely no need to wait till the fall to bring in legislation. On a Wednesday morning—indeed, this morning—the minister could have brought forward regulations that could have passed to put in place again the standard that there will be a nurse on duty 24/7 in every facility, the standard that every resident will get a bath or two or three a week and the standard that there will be so many hours of hands-on nursing care provided to every resident in every facility. I say to the minister, don't wait till the fall. You don't need legislation to do this. You could do this by regulation before cabinet on a Wednesday morning, and it's about time it should be done.

I heard the minister, in his comments yesterday, talk about how the government was going to get tough on elder abuse and that the government was going to make reporting of abuse mandatory and was also going to put whistle-blower protection in place for those workers who come forward and provide allegations of suspected abuse. He said very clearly, "We will crack down on elder abuse by making it mandatory for staff to report suspected abuse, and in legislation we will offer whistle-blower protection to ensure that those workers have all of the freedom and support necessary to call in any claim of suspected abuse." This is what we all want, but what's also clear is that the minister is going to wait until the fall to do that.

I ask the question, how many more residents will become victims of abuse because there isn't legislation in place for mandatory reporting and there isn't whistle-blower protection? We don't need to wait till the fall. We shouldn't need to wait till the fall.

My leader, Howard Hampton, introduced Bill 47, An Act to protect persons in care from abuse, April 1, 2004. The bill very clearly provides a duty on service providers in long-term-care facilities to report any abuse promptly to the Minister of Health. They have a duty to do that in the same way teachers, child care workers and those who work in recreational programs have a duty to report suspected child abuse to the children's aid society immediately. That's what the bill calls for. The bill also says that they will be protected, that those who come forward will not suffer from reprisals. Section 10 says the following: "No action or other proceeding may be brought against a person for making a report of abuse under this act in good faith." Section 11: "No operator of a health facility shall take adverse employment action

against a service provider of the facility because that person made a report of abuse in good faith under this act."

Most importantly, and I didn't hear the minister say this yesterday, you need to protect residents who go forward with allegations of abuse. The bill also says the following: "No operator of a health facility or other person shall alter, interrupt or discontinue, or threaten to alter, interrupt or discontinue, service to a patient or to a person who has made a report of abuse under this act, or to a relative of either of them who receives services from the facility because a report of abuse has been made under this act in good faith."

If we want to do something about abuse right now, we don't need to wait till the fall. This bill meets all the requirements the minister talked about yesterday. In fact, it goes further than what the minister talked about yesterday. It provides a duty to report on everyone who works in a facility, a duty to report abuse to the minister, allows the minister to make an investigation, protects those people who come forward from any reprisal, and protects the residents and their families who are victims of said abuse, which goes further than what the minister talked about yesterday. I say to the minister, don't wait until the fall. Don't wait for more allegations of abuse. Do the right thing and pass this bill now if you're really interested in protecting seniors in facilities.

I want to make one final point. The minister talked about the money that's going to go into long-term-care facilities. I remind him that the Conservatives put \$100 million into long-term-care facilities in July 2002. They promised 2,400 new nurses and personal support workers. One year later, when the ministry studied where that money had gone, only 1,700 were hired, another 500 had their jobs saved because of that money, and a whole bunch more money went into disability benefits, WSIB benefits etc. If the minister is going to put this money into facilities, the minister had better be sure about where that money is going. He'd better make the rules really clear about how the money can be spent to hire new personnel. Otherwise, it's just not going to happen.

I say, in closing, that I went to the event yesterday. I listened to what the minister had to say in the House yesterday and would have been much happier if only the government had kept the promises it made during the election to residents who live in long-term-care facilities in Ontario and their families.

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): I'm glad to have the chance to speak in support of the motion brought forward this afternoon by the MPP for Kitchener-Waterloo, who also serves as our party's health critic. Members of the House should agree that the breadth of her experience as Ontario's health minister—one of finest ministers of health in our province's history—her experience and compassion have been demonstrated in a highly effective way in her capacity as the official opposition spokesperson for health.

This resolution speaks to the need to ensure that senior citizens who live in long-term-care facilities receive the

highest-quality, compassionate care that our society can provide, more commonly referred to as nursing homes. I think all members of the House will concur that the provincial government has an important responsibility in this regard. When assessing priorities, care for our senior citizens, our beloved parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, must rank among highest obligations entrusted to any level of government.

1650

In recent days, seniors who live in nursing homes, the caring staff who work in nursing homes, volunteers who provide support in nursing homes and the families of the residents have been unnecessarily alarmed because of the actions of this government.

Dozen of people have written to me from the Westmount in Kitchener, which is a brand new nursing home in Waterloo-Wellington. It was approved and constructed during our party's tenure in government. The Westmount's administrator, Linda Schertzberg, advised me about this government's outrageous retroactive clawback of the property tax rebate and how it put the Westmount nursing home in a severe financial bind, which would have eventually in some way impacted negatively on resident care.

By coincidence, I met Ms Schertzberg on the same day that the Minister of Health, the member for Toronto Centre-Rosedale, was visiting our area. I attended a forum on e-health that had been sponsored by our local CCAC and the minister was there to bring brief greetings. I actually had the chance to introduce Ms Schertzberg to the minister as he was leaving the event.

In any case, as we've heard from the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, the property tax rebate for nursing homes was a program that was maintained under our government, but apparently not so with this government. When faced with a budgetary challenge, the minister pursued a policy of arbitrary cuts instead of meeting with the long-term-care sector: the administrators, the staff, the seniors they care for and their families, all of whom were put through extreme distress over whether or not the funding would be there and would be adequate to provide the care that seniors deserve.

Why did this happen? We can point to fiscal mismanagement on the part of the government that has caused this distress in recent weeks. We can even call it another pre-budget trial balloon that was floated by this government, underlining their fundamental incompetence. Or, I will ask, is their policy motivated out of spite and vindictiveness because our government had an excellent working relationship with the long-term-care sector?

No matter what we conclude, I believe this much to be true: I believe that the government's recent decision, made just last Sunday—Mother's Day, an unusual day to conduct government business, to say least—was done because of the hard work and highly effective job done by our health critic. In raising awareness of this clawback, she forced the government to back off on the clawback, for 2003 at least. The government probably finally

realized the full consequences of having to defend themselves today as we debate this important resolution. Clearly, the government felt it could not withstand the strong arguments of the opposition today unless it took pre-emptive action.

During the 14 years I've had the privilege of serving as a member of provincial Parliament, I have made it a habit from time to time to visit seniors in nursing homes and to talk to them about the care they're receiving and what could be done to improve their daily lives.

To be fair, the government also announced new funding yesterday in response to the study undertaken by the minister's parliamentary assistant. According to the government, some \$191 million will be forthcoming to upgrade care in existing nursing homes by hiring 600 new nurses and 1,400 other staff, including personal support workers, dietitians, therapists and nurse practitioners. However, there are some questions that have arisen over whether this is new money and whether it will be forthcoming in future years. However, these numbers serve to underscore the importance of the personal support workers in terms of the overall care provided in nursing homes. Therefore, it's important to state again my support for the maintenance of OHIP coverage for chiropractic, podiatry, optometry and physiotherapy services, especially as they relate to the care of senior citizens.

In my responsibilities as a member of provincial Parliament, when asked to bring forward the ideas and concerns of my constituents, in the 14 years I've been privileged to be here it has never been a question as to how important the concerns of seniors are. They must be among our high priorities. How we treat our seniors reflects on who we are as individuals, who we are as a society, and is a basic measure of our compassion.

I think I can say that as result of the tabling of this resolution some days ago, the government has responded and recognized that long-term care is important to the people of this province, irrespective of how long it's taken them to correct their mistake in attempting to impose a clawback of the property tax rebate and announce some new funding, as they have just yesterday.

I want to say that I agree there may be a need for unannounced inspection visits in some nursing homes in the province. I've had the opportunity to visit nursing homes many times in my riding, as I said earlier. By and large, my visits have been unannounced and I have found the care being offered to residents in my riding to be very good to excellent. There may, however, be some homes in the province where they need to take remedial measures to improve care. Certainly we cannot in any way tolerate substandard care or, even worse, any physical abuse or neglect of our elderly. The government has an important role to ensure that appropriate standards are indeed maintained.

In closing, I want to reiterate my strong support for this motion. I realize a number of my colleagues wish to speak to this motion as well. In the interests of time, I will yield the floor to them.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to rise today to speak on the opposition motion by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo respecting long-term care.

I'd like to make reference to the excellent work done by my colleague Monique Smith, the parliamentary assistant to Minister Smitherman and the MPP for Nipissing. She released yesterday an excellent report, *Commitment to Care: A Plan for Long-Term Care in Ontario*. If anyone has the opportunity to read this report—I've read a lot of government reports in my time, and I must say this is the most readable report I've ever encountered. Anybody who is interested, have a read. It's easy to read. You can see coming through in the report the concern Monique is showing for the situation in which she found some of our residents in long-term care.

The member for Nipissing visited 24 long-term-care facilities, a whole variety of facilities. She asked her caucus colleagues for examples of both good and bad. I must say I had suggested to her that she visit St Joseph's Health Centre in my riding. I was pleased, a few weeks after I had made the suggestion, to find that she had been there. In fact, she has noted in her report that at St Joseph's home in Guelph, for example, 300-plus volunteers are assisting residents with a biography-writing project for residents. I would like to thank the volunteers in my riding who go into St Joseph's and other homes in my riding to help with the care of the elderly, help to make sure they have constructive activities, and play such a valuable role in contributing to the quality of life of our elderly relatives.

However, we need to think a little bit about why Monique had to actually do this report. It's much because of the record of the previous Conservative government that this was actually necessary. Let's think about it.

They removed the minimum standard of three baths per week. They removed the minimum standard for two and a quarter hours per week of nursing care. They removed the requirement—no standard at all. It wasn't that they lowered the standard; they just got rid of the standard. They removed the requirement that a registered nurse be on duty 24 hours a day. They removed the requirement to have a one-bedroom isolation unit in each home. After they'd done all this to decrease the quality of care, they tried to increase the fee to residents by 15% in one shot. The Liberal Party in opposition and the long-term-care advocates worked together and made the Conservative government retract that.

I must admit that they did in fact construct a number of new long-term-care beds. They did. I have a number of new beds and a number of rebuilt homes in my riding and we thank you for that. But where the previous government failed was in providing the operating funding for the new beds. So they failed in their Magna budget to actually provide the operating funding for new beds. They failed to provide in the Magna budget for the property tax reimbursement that homes have previously received for the new beds they were creating. While they did quite a good job on the capital construction side, they

didn't provide for the funding of that new capital infrastructure.

1700

In fact, in terms of their inspection services, the Provincial Auditor noted in his 2002 report that between 1997 and 1999, fewer than half of all nursing homes were inspected annually. He also found that at the time none—repeat, none—of the nursing homes operating in Ontario had a valid licence. Can you believe that? Some 15% of the licences had expired more than a year and a half before. One facility's licence had expired in 1994—remember, this was the 2002 report—another in 1997 and two in 1998. So the inspection service that was provided was clearly not working.

Another thing that happened with the inspection service under the previous government was that homes were given two or three weeks' notice before they were inspected. So of course if you've got substandard service, you're going to clean the place up. You've got all this heads-up notice to find out you'd better get your act in gear. That's just not good enough.

We have already responded to a number of the recommendations in Monique Smith's report. I am pleased to share with the people of Ontario that we will be mandating a minimum bath standard of two baths per week. We will be mandating 24-hour registered nursing coverage in homes.

In order to make sure that people can actually meet those standards, we are providing \$191 million to hire 2,000 new staff in the long-term-care facilities in the province. That will provide for 600 new registered nurses and registered practical nurses and also for a number of support workers, because it's the personal support workers who do so much of the care of people in the homes. We're also providing the \$340 million to actually operate the new beds. And we are providing the 2003 property tax reimbursement, contrary to what you have said today.

We will be mandating family councils and resident councils in every long-term-care home and we will be having unannounced inspections. The inspectors will just show up and inspect whatever they find.

Interjection: A surprise visit.

Mrs Sandals: A surprise visit. In fact, I must report to you that those have already started, and I've gotten very favourable feedback from the high-quality nursing homes in my riding saying, "Keep that up. The unannounced inspection is a great idea. We've got no concern. We're doing a good job." But it means that the inspectors are actually going to find the problems in the homes that aren't doing a good job.

The member from Nickel Belt spoke about whether or not we were keeping our promises. She said that we had made a commitment to increase nursing care funding by \$6,000 a year. That was a four-year commitment. Think of it; by her own admission we have gotten more than halfway there on a four-year commitment in the first six months of our mandate. I think that's extraordinary.

Ms Martel: Where did it say over four years?

Mrs Sandals: It was a four-year platform. Come on. Nobody thinks that when you lay out a four-year platform, it's all happening in the first six months. I think getting 50% of the way there in just six months is extraordinary. In the words of the *Toronto Star*, Minister Smitherman should be applauded for acting on behalf of the elderly and their families.

For that reason, I will be opposing the opposition day motion.

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm pleased to participate in this debate. It's interesting to listen to the government. You would know how frustrating it is, Speaker, because you yourself must be frustrated, having been on a campaign trail and having made many commitments which no doubt you yourself believed in and felt that they were—

The Deputy Speaker: To the member for Oak Ridges, when I'm in the chair, I am not a member of any party.

Mr Klees: My apologies to you, but you are a member of the Liberal Party. You may want to deny that, Speaker, and I don't blame you, in the same way that the Premier hasn't had the courage to take even one step into the Hamilton East riding for the entire time an election campaign has been going on. We have the election happening tomorrow, and Premier McGuinty has not taken one step into that riding. His picture doesn't appear in any of the literature. In fact, the time I was there, working with our candidate, I can tell you that I heard many times that if he did come into the riding, he would probably be run out, because the people of this province are absolutely tired of broken promises. They have realized that they were fed a bill of goods.

Why do I mention that, Speaker? Because we are speaking here about long-term-care facilities, which, while you deny it—you happen to be in the chair now, and I understand the concern you have that you don't want to be perceived as partisan, and we of course would never think you would be as Speaker. However, while you were on the campaign trail, I know that you too believed that the commitment your political party was making at that time, of infusing \$6,000 per patient into the long-term-care facilities across our province, would be true.

The fact of the matter is that this entire industry is not only disappointed; they are actually very concerned that they will not only not be able to improve, but actually maintain, service for residents of our long-term-care facilities in the province because of the cutbacks in funding that your government, the Liberal government, is imposing on this industry.

I want to say that our critic, Elizabeth Witmer, has done an outstanding job in advocating on behalf of the long-term-care facilities in this province, and in question period and other ways was able to raise the profile of this issue; for example, the clawback. The Minister of Health refers to himself as having hit the ground running. He sure did. He hit the ground running to draw essential funding out of this very important health care sector. As a

result of the work that our party, the official opposition, did in raising this profile, the government backed off that, and in a very quietly called meeting on Mother's Day agreed that they would reverse their position. But you know, Speaker, to have even gone there in the first place indicates a breaking of trust. So we are grateful that the minister chose to reverse his position.

What we are calling on him to do now is keep the promise that was made to the people of Ontario that they would infuse an additional \$6,000 per resident into the long-term-care facilities of our province. We will be watching, Speaker. I know you will be, not in a partisan way, but as someone who is concerned about the quality of care that seniors receive in our province. That's what we'll be looking for. We're going to continue to hold this minister's feet to the fire to simply do the right thing and support the residents in our long-term-care facilities across this province.

1710

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to talk on this particular motion and alert the people of Ontario what we're going to hear and what we have heard from the opposition regarding their own motion, and that is basically, in a nutshell, the rooster taking credit for the sun shining again.

What we have here is a group of people who have little, if any, right to stand up and start talking about the fearmongering, as the previous minister—she said that we were destabilizing our senior citizens and striking fear into their lives. Who was it that increased by 15% the copayments for residents in long-term care facilities on a Friday of a long weekend, unbeknownst to absolutely everybody? Does she still have those boxes and boxes of postcards that were sent to her saying, "You can't do this to us; there's no way"? The opposition stood up and said—I will tell you, this was one of the first times that I almost got kicked out of this place. I made a vow in my maiden speech that I wasn't going to heckle and I was going to try to behave myself, but that was absolutely ridiculous. I couldn't believe it, and I had to be told by the Speaker to calm down and settle down when this little trick was done. The member right after her said that how we treat our senior citizens is of the utmost importance. They did those things; what else did they do?

Let's talk about it. Under the Conservatives, wasn't it they who removed the standards of minimum care? The list is so long, and they have the nerve to stand up and put a motion in this? So let's figure out what the motion is all about.

I think I'd like to make a guess that it has something to do with politics. Wouldn't it? Wouldn't it have something to do with politics, the fact that the opposition is over there throwing the same stones that they actually threw at our senior citizens when they were in government? They're sitting there saying, "We've done all of this and that," and yet they turned around and said to themselves, "Well, maybe we can also cut funding and place arbitrary limits on everything and lower the

standards of home care, forcing many of our senior citizens to go into nursing homes in the first place.”

We’ve got a government now that has taken the steps to rid ourselves of senior abuse. It’s nice to know that the members on the other side haven’t stood up and said, “Let’s get rid of senior abuse.” What they’re talking about is whether or not we, as a government, are taking this seriously. We’ve had some serious situations happening in my riding, and I want to thank the parliamentary assistant from Nipissing and thank the Minister of Health for making this a priority in simply saying that we’re not going to tolerate senior abuse.

All I want to say is that time and time again, all we’ve heard from that side is the politics of this motion. Let’s stand up and ask the question: Have we done the right thing in long-term care? The editorials coming out have said, “Most definitely yes.” So let’s get on board, stop the politics of this motion stuff, and praise the minister for protecting our senior citizens.

Thank you; I appreciate the opportunity.

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I’m delighted to participate in this debate, and I think that now more than ever, it’s appropriate to be raising issues about the support that is due our long-term-care facilities in this province.

My association goes back some 20 years in this House, and it has already been put on the record about the concerns of past governments not supporting this sector—that’s been well documented—not only in terms of the construction of new beds, but also in terms of the increase in the co-pay. Just to put the record straight, and the preceding speaker from Brantford, I know he didn’t mean to misstate a fact, but there was not a 15% increase. The only time the government has increased the co-pay beyond a figure of 10% was once under Elinor Caplan’s watch, where she found \$180 million through co-pays. The second time it occurred was on Frances Lankin’s watch with the NDP.

So to be historically accurate, at no point—

Mr Levac: It never happened?

Mr Jackson: Well, I won’t argue that it was attempted, but it didn’t happen, and that is a fact. The largest increase ever was brought in by Elinor Caplan for the Liberal government of David Peterson.

Our government is very proud of the commitment we made to expanding the number of beds, to creating—and I had a small hand in this—Canada’s first comprehensive Alzheimer’s strategy, and seeding that with almost \$70 million.

That five-year commitment and program is over. We’re anxious to hear the government make its commitment in that area. Ours was the first government to bring in an elder abuse strategy, arguably the first of its kind anywhere in the world. We’re very proud of that work. We know the government has indicated it would like to build on that.

But today I’m extremely concerned that the first official act of this government was to claw back some \$20 million worth of support payments that were going to

some nursing homes in this province, based on their municipal property tax. For the past 12 years this system has been in place. What it does is it prevents two-tier health care delivery for seniors in long-term-care facilities in our province.

The only way we can do that is to ensure that when one home is taxed at one rate, another home isn’t taxed at an entirely different rate. That equalization, that fairness, that elimination of two-tier health delivery was eliminated under the cloak of darkness and silence by the Liberal government, at the very time when Minister Smitherman was expressing his concern and frustration about images he’s seeing about abuse or neglect going on in our nursing homes.

This has had a huge impact on the nursing homes in my riding of Burlington. They are seeing layoffs at the Brant Centre, at the Burloak facility, at other nursing homes in our community. When you add into the mix the concern that’s being expressed by seniors about the potential removal of physiotherapy services and the income testing of our drug plan, seniors have very serious concerns about the direction and the signals this government is giving about the relative value of our seniors in our society. This is a value that the Conservative government prized very highly. We can only appeal to this government that they must do more now.

Mr McMeekin: I want to say at the outset that I think everybody in the House cares about where we’re heading with seniors, particularly vulnerable seniors who for one reason or another end up in one of our long-term-care facilities, the majority of which are wonderfully well run, by the way. I just want to put that on the record.

I also want to put on the record that I don’t think anybody in this House should be talking about keeping this minister’s feet to the fire. Every cell in this minister’s body is ablaze with a passion to defend vulnerable seniors. I think that was admirably displayed the other day when the good minister and his wonderful assistant spoke, as they did, about their passion and their concern, which they laid out for the people of Ontario, and more importantly for the families of those seniors and others in long-term-care facilities, who I think worry every single day about what might happen.

I want to say too that the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care did an incredible job travelling the province listening to people. I know from chatting with some of our stakeholder groups that I relate to as the parliamentary assistant for seniors that she was very active, touching base with the major seniors groups. I think that’s clearly reflected in that wonderful report. She came in with the incredibly focused expectation and the recommendations that are shoring up the foundational work that’s been done by previous governments.

There were some cracks showing in the foundation, but clearly the cement is being laid and that foundation’s being shored up. It’s a direct result of the countless hours by her and her Ministry of Health colleagues, and a few of us on this side of House who visited long-term-care

facilities and other facilities and reported back to the parliamentary assistant about some of the things we were seeing. Those of us who have a concern in this area were eager to see the report and the connections that were being made.

I think it was Mario Cuomo who once said that politicians campaign in poetry but govern in prose. I was really proud yesterday to see that there was a connection between the poetry and the prose. I think that augurs well for us down the road.

1720

I just want to share a couple of things, because many of the technical issues have been handled. We all have a history here. I recall organizing a petition in my riding, as the member for Brant indicated, when the proposed increase in fees was to be inflicted on the most vulnerable. We had something like 30,000 signatures from my area, in response to a full-page ad urging the Premier to stop beating up on our seniors. The response was overwhelming, and it wasn't just from families described as being part of the sandwich generation. We had signatures from young people in public schools and elsewhere about that. It was good.

It's interesting, as I listen to the day-to-day cut and thrust about promise-keeping and promise-breaking and stuff about taxes, and the Catch-22: You promised you'd do this and do this and do this, but you're not going to fund it by raising additional revenues. Sometimes it's helpful to pause and reflect a bit about what the people we purport to be trying to protect think about all this.

In my capacity as parliamentary assistant to the wonderful Minister Gerretsen, who also has responsibility for seniors—he's a very easy minister to work for; it would be like working with Minister Watson, I suspect. He's very good. They're both very hard working ministers. Let's be honest; we're taught to be honest as kids. We should be honest and celebrate our successes.

Minister Gerretsen is there, and I have the privilege of relating, through the Seniors' Secretariat, to a number of seniors' groups. I just want to acknowledge some of them, because they signed a joint letter and sent it to the Premier recently, which I would like to read into the record. This letter is signed by Canada's Association for the Fifty-Plus, known as CARP; the Canadian Pensioners Concerned; the Council on Aging Network of Ontario; the federation of Francophones in Ontario; the Multicultural Alliance for Seniors and Aging; the Older Women's Network; the Ontario Coalition of Senior Citizens' Organizations; the Royal Canadian Legion Ontario Provincial Command; and the United Senior Citizens of Ontario. This is what they said to Mr McGuinty:

"As your government continues its deliberation about the upcoming provincial budget, we, the members of the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat liaison committee, want you to know where we stand on deficit reduction and the programs that the millions of seniors we represent value so much. We recognize that your government must deal with the financial difficulties that you have inherited and that a balance must be found between investing in the

programs that improve the quality of life of all Ontarians," the kinds of things that Monique Smith was talking about in her report yesterday, "including seniors, and reducing the deficit so Ontario's fiscal situation can be put in order.

"It is our official collective position"—these are all the official senior citizens' groups in Ontario—"that balancing the budget must not be at the expense of investments in critical areas that seniors have come to count and rely on so much, such as improved health care." I know the minister of seniors knows this.

They went on to write: "Seniors are more than prepared to pay their fair share in taxes to ensure that if, for example, they become ill, they can rely on the system to provide adequate care or appropriate care in long-term-care facilities."

They conclude by saying: "You, Mr Treasurer and Premier, should remember our goal as a society must be to maintain the social and health programs we have now, and to make the necessary investments where people are suffering because the services are not sufficient to meet their needs. We urge you to consider balancing the budget over a multi-year period and consider reasonable tax increases," imagine that, "to finance the real, positive change you promised the people of Ontario, and which we wish to see."

I can't speculate on what's going to be in the budget or what's going to happen, but we should be careful when we make assumptions, because here are groups that I cherish and have come to respect very much making some comments and offering a legion of very good advice to this government and our finance minister.

I want to take a minute to talk directly about some of the things that are happening. Since this government assumed office, we've attempted to build on some of the positive things that, to their credit, were initiated by the previous government. The elder abuse strategy continues to be well advanced. The Alzheimer's strategy is certainly something we're moving forward with—the round table that we'll be announcing on Alzheimer's and other related dementias, and a special standing committee related to seniors' housing needs.

This government has made it abundantly clear that our real priority is to acknowledge and respond to the legitimate needs of those not only in the onset of life but in the twilight of life, and also those in the shadows. I want to put that on the record.

I also want to thank some wonderful people who took time to share some information with us. I think of people like my good friend Hank Gelderman in my riding, who so lovingly dedicates so much of his time, along with his board colleagues, to run the Mount Nemo nursing home. Mount Nemo is a small, faith-based, at times pretty tired-looking place, but the quality of care there is next to none. There's nobody who produces better care. We want to stand with the caring and loving folk in places like the Mount Nemo nursing home who provide such a valuable service.

I also want to say just for the record, because we've had a number of calls about CMI and about the municipal

clawback of property taxes, that perhaps the member from Burlington wasn't listening when the parliamentary assistant stood and spoke and indicated that it was not the government's intention to proceed with that in 2003-04.

Clearly this whole area is a priority. We're going to invest more dollars in this area than have ever been invested before. We do it because we know that's what we in a decent society do. I am pleased to add my voice and support for the good efforts that the parliamentary assistant and the minister have been leading.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): It's my pleasure today to rise and speak in favour of the motion brought forward by my colleague Elizabeth Witmer, the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, and to thank her for all her dedication to the health care system that she has done in the past as a minister and as a member of this Legislature.

I've had the opportunity over the last several months, since being elected, to meet with a lot of long-term-care facility administrators, patients and families throughout the whole riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, which benefited greatly from the previous government's investment in long-term-care facilities.

The biggest concern of late was the clawback of the property assessment taxes, which is going to affect them. We have had some announcements lately that will give a bit of a reprieve, but they want some long-term stability in that. Whenever that happens, when there's a matter unresolved of such financial implications, lowering their funding, that affects their dietary, housekeeping, laundry, maintenance and repairs, capital improvements, education and training services.

I know that the operators of the long-term-care homes have been trying for months to convince the minister of the importance of this issue. I want to stress to the government that the reprieve they have given is short term. We need to work with the long-term-care facilities as much as we can to have a permanent resolution to this problem.

1730

Another item that was addressed in the announcement yesterday and has had an impact throughout my riding is the requirement that long-term-care facilities maintain a 97% occupancy level in order to qualify for all their funding. As I have said before, my riding has a large population of seniors. Many of them reside in long-term-care facilities. Over the next years I expect there will be an increased need for this level of care. However, right now, some of the facilities are having a difficult time maintaining the occupancy level, and this is not unique in homes just in my riding.

I wish the announcement had addressed this concern. We need to do more updating for the funding for long-term-care facilities and how the money is spent in ensuring that all the facilities receive sufficient funding for their residents.

One of the other things the long-term-care facilities mentioned to me is the importance of physiotherapy services to their residents. It worries me that the govern-

ment seems to be considering deregulating some of these services.

Another important component—and I'm going to speak quickly on different topics because of a shortage of time—is psychogeriatric care. I met recently with the Victoria County Psychogeriatric Network. For years now, that care network has fallen through the cracks between the long-term-care and mental health systems. This causes difficulties in terms of responding to individuals' needs in acute care, community care and the long-term-care settings.

Today, I'd like to focus on the difficulties facing long-term-care homes specifically. With the increase in long-term-care facilities in my riding, for example, the degree of bed-blocking has decreased in Ross Memorial Hospital in Lindsay. However, the new long-term-care facilities which have been opened are expected to accommodate residents with increasingly complex psychogeriatric care needs, who would otherwise have remained in hospital in the past. The facilities are presenting a significantly increased demand for clinical support from the Whitby Mental Health Centre.

There's also an enormous gap of service provisions for people with chronic, consistently unstable mental health conditions whose behavioural problems cannot be adequately managed in the long-term-care system.

The recent study undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care indicated that approximately 2.5% of adults living in such facilities have mental health care needs that are not being met. Since they are not being met with the long-term-care announcement, we can only hope there will be an announcement of mental health funding that will help cover these rising costs.

Long-term-care homes have shown a willingness to accommodate client needs that are changing. For example, anyone with minor infections who would have to go to the hospital could now be accommodated in long-term-care facilities, which leads to more complex care. They had hoped that there would be an announcement of a change of the funding formula to recognize these new realities that the long-term-care facilities are facing.

I want to again bring attention to the fact that, during the election, Premier McGuinty made a specific campaign promise to invest in better nursing-home care—and it's been brought up by my colleagues—by providing an additional \$6,000 in care for every resident. Certainly long-term-care administrators were looking for that. That's a promise they were given that they want kept, and we have not seen that that is being kept at this point. The government's recent announcement has partially fulfilled the promise he made, but people have the right to know if he intends to keep all of this promise. I hope he does live up to his campaign promise.

Also with the case mix increase, the adjustment of 1.4% that nursing homes in Ontario were expecting on April 1 of this year: We want a final decision to be made on that and on the clawback of the property tax reimbursements for the long-term-care homes.

Thank you, Mr Speaker, for my opportunity.

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I'm very pleased to join this debate on the opposition day motion. I always enjoy being in this House and debating various issues, and sometimes on this side of the House you don't get the same opportunity as you do in opposition.

Having said that, let me just say that I guess all of this starts from the point of view as to how an individual feels as to what the true role of government is, particularly a provincial government that is involved with health care and education services.

It has always been my belief that the primary role that government has is to look after the most vulnerable in our society and make sure that everyone has an equal chance of an education, for example, and also an equal opportunity to be looked after through the health care system in one way or another.

The 70,000 individuals—most of them women, most of them elderly, many of them in their late 80s or 90s—who live in our long-term-care homes throughout this province that are run by for-profit organizations, by charitable organizations and by municipal organizations deserve our help, probably more so than any other group in our society. Many of these individuals, Speaker, as you well know, no longer have family members to take care of them, a spouse. They are usually single at that point in time. They may have children who visit them from time to time, but they truly need help or else they wouldn't be in a nursing home in the first place. It has always been my belief that we should do whatever we can for those individuals.

Therefore, it was quite a shock to me, when I was in opposition—and I happened to be the long-term-care critic for our party for a year or so—to find out that there was a government study that the government itself had paid for, the Pricewaterhouse study, which looked at 10 different jurisdictions and came to the conclusion that in Ontario we were spending less money for people in nursing homes for personal care and nursing services than any of the other 10 jurisdictions. Many of the other jurisdictions were, to the best of my knowledge and recollection, jurisdictions that were roughly our size, that had a population base of 10 million to 12 million people, other provinces in Canada as well as states in the United States and countries in Europe. So the two associations that are mainly involved in looking after the interests of the nursing homes in this province, the Ontario Long Term Care Association and OANHSS, which is the Ontario association of non-profit long-term-care homes in this province, put a concerted effort and push on both the government and the opposition to rectify that situation.

One of the reasons they did that, Speaker, is that any of us who have been involved with nursing homes over the last 10, 15 or 20 years will notice two aspects right away: first of all, that the person living in a nursing home is much older now on average than they were 20 years

ago. I'm not talking about the individuals themselves; I'm talking about the individuals who are there. Where the average age 15 or 20 years ago may have been 75 or 80, now it's closer to 85, 90 or 95. The other thing that has been determined through scientific methods, through various studies that have been done over the years, is that the acuity levels of the individuals who are in nursing homes are much more acute than they were in the past. In other words, they need a lot more care in getting them up in the morning, getting them dressed—many of them, unfortunately, don't get dressed on an ongoing basis—feeding them at mealtimes etc. So the amount of personal care that is required for the individuals in our nursing homes, many of whom have nobody else to look after them, has increased tremendously.

As a result, these two organizations that represent the interests of these nursing homes, the over 550 nursing homes that we have in this province, put a push on the government to come up with \$6,000 more per resident in funding, which would amount to \$360 million over the 60,000 people who are in nursing homes.

Just to put an end to that side of the story, Speaker, I was very pleased yesterday when the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care was able to announce right here in the city of Toronto an increase in funding for our long-term-care homes in this province of \$191 million. Now, some people will say, "Well, it's not living up to the \$360 million," and you are correct. There's no question about it, and there's no question that certainly it is our full intent, within the term of this government, which still has three and a half more years to go, to try to make up the difference between the \$191 million and the \$360 million that is required to make sure these individuals do have the individuals looking after them from a personal care viewpoint. But it is a step in the right direction—a large step in the right direction.

1740

In the first six months of this government, we've been able to provide funding to nursing homes that in effect will allow them to hire 2,000 full-time individuals—nurses, other health care and personal care professionals—in the homes to better look after the individuals who live there. I was very pleased to be part of that announcement yesterday and I know that in the next few months to come, undoubtedly, when the money starts flowing through these different organizations, we will see a great many more people looking after individuals in nursing homes.

That isn't to say for a moment that volunteers—and there are many excellent volunteers in this province who look after individuals, sometimes young students who come in at mealtimes to help these elderly people with feeding and eating etc—are no longer required. They will still be required. It's also a great benefit, by the way, for young people to get that intergenerational relationship with older persons and to be able to look after them. Obviously, family members are going to remain an integral part of the individuals who live in long-term-care homes.

The ability of the operators of these homes, whether they are for-profit or not-for-profit organizations, to have sufficient funding to hire more people so that our elderly individuals in these homes can be looked after in a much better way than they have been in the past is extremely important. Of course, the resolution that has been brought forward by the former Minister of Health really speaks to that. All I can say to her is, what you're asking for, we have already done, as well as providing the extra \$340 million required for the completion of the 20,000 new beds that have come on stream over the last number of years.

I think it is very important that we look after elderly citizens who have served this country so well and who are, through no fault of their own, in a nursing home, and that they are looked after properly. This is just one step in the right direction.

Some of the other announcements the minister made yesterday are just as significant. Yes, there will be unannounced inspections now taking place in some of these homes. That shouldn't be a threat to any homes at all. Many of the homes, and the vast majority of individuals who work in these homes, do an excellent job. They provide the best kind of care they can to the people who live in those homes. But there are always, in every society, some individuals who perhaps don't do as good a job as they could, or operators of some homes who perhaps aren't living up to the standards that we as a society expect of them. It's those individuals that these surprise inspections will bring into the foreground.

The other issue—I know I have less than 30 seconds left—is the notion that we will mandate family resident councils so that the families of individuals who live in these homes will be much more involved in developing the overall guidelines and policies that will operate in the nursing homes.

In the last two seconds I have left, let me just say this: There is nothing better we can do for elderly individuals who live in these homes than to look after them in the best way possible, and the \$191-million investment we made yesterday is a step in the right direction.

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to join in the debate today on the opposition motion put forward by the member for Kitchener-Waterloo. I find it interesting that it took an opposition motion from the member for Kitchener-Waterloo to get the government to make a first step toward hopefully fulfilling an election promise, and that election promise was to invest \$6,000 per resident in our long-term-care facilities.

I personally heard concern about the government's clawback on property tax from many long-term-care providers in my riding. That would have taken money from the care of residents in long-term care. Just on Mother's Day recently we saw that the government, because of all the work done by the member for Kitchener-Waterloo, has backtracked on that.

I visited most of the long-term-care facilities in my beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, and most are

in the middle of being rebuilt because of what had been put in process by the past government: a complete redevelopment of many long-term-care facilities—16,000 beds and 20,000 new long-term-care beds that were put forward by the past Conservative government. That was after 10 long years when there were no new long-term-care beds built in this province. In 10 years when the Liberals and NDPs were in power, not a single long-term care bed was built in this province.

We've also seen, in the last couple of years, big investments in care—I believe \$200 million—by the past government, but more needs to be done. I did visit many facilities in my riding; I think I visited them all, pretty much: the Pines at Bracebridge; Belvedere Heights in Parry Sound; Muskoka Landing in Huntsville. The Parry Sound hospital, of course, is going to have a number of brand new long-term-care beds. Eastholme in Powassan; Our Lady Peace—

Ms Smith: That's in my riding.

Mr Miller: Eastholme serves more of the municipalities in Parry Sound-Muskoka than Nipissing. Our Lady Peace serves the east Parry Sound area; Fairvern in Huntsville. Most of those facilities are either just finishing redevelopment or are in the process of being redeveloped.

I spoke to the nurses and to the personal support workers in those facilities. They are generally doing an excellent job and they're working very hard. They said to me that the thing extra funding can provide for them is more time to spend with the people in their homes, more time to deal with people on a personal basis, to look after things you wouldn't otherwise have time to do. I think that's what extra funding can buy for our long-term residents.

I asked them about the prescribed baths and whether that was a good idea and, interestingly enough, the personal support workers did not think that was a good idea. I'm sure in some cases where there are bad operators you need to do that, but I personally think the unannounced visits are a good idea. You try to catch the operators who aren't doing a good job. But when I spoke to personal support workers, they said that many people who have dementia find having a bath a terrifying or traumatic experience and that there are other ways of doing cleanup. In those cases, doing a bath on a prescribed basis is not necessarily a good idea.

I'd like to briefly mention, because I don't have a lot of time, the many volunteers who help out, in particular in Huntsville. One volunteer, Vi Hipgrave, goes in almost every day to Fairvern to help out.

I'm running out of time. I'd like to say I will be supporting this motion to recognize that Premier McGuinty made a specific campaign promise of \$6,000 in care for every resident. I hope he keeps this promise.

Mr Levac: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: After consulting the standing orders, I realize that I made a mistake in my earlier speech. I indicated that it was the minister from Kitchener-Waterloo at the time who was responsible for the 15% increase. I am now quite aware

that it was not the former minister. It was the one after that, Minister Clement. So I withdraw those statements and apologize to the member.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, and thank you.

Mrs Witmer has moved opposition day number 2.

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

All those in favour will say “aye.”

All those opposed will say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1749 to 1759.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Mrs Witmer has moved opposition day number 2. All those in favour will stand one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Baird, John R.	Jackson, Cameron	Prue, Michael
Barrett, Toby	Klees, Frank	Runciman, Robert W.
Bisson, Gilles	Kormos, Peter	Scott, Laurie
Eves, Ernie	Martel, Shelley	Wilson, Jim
Hampton, Howard	Martiniuk, Gerry	Witmer, Elizabeth
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Yakubski, John
Hudak, Tim	Ouellette, Jerry J.	

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will stand one at a time until recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Peterson, Tim
Bartolucci, Rick	Gravelle, Michael	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoy, Pat	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Kennedy, Gerard	Ramal, Khalil
Broten, Laurel C.	Kwinter, Monte	Ramsay, David
Brown, Michael A.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Bryant, Michael	Levac, Dave	Sandals, Liz
Cansfield, Donna H.	Marsales, Judy	Sergio, Mario
Cordiano, Joseph	Mauro, Bill	Smith, Monique
Craitor, Kim	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Watson, Jim
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Zimmer, David
Duncan, Dwight	Patten, Richard	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve	

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 20; the nays are 49.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe I have unanimous consent to put a motion with respect to tonight’s sitting.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Duncan has asked for unanimous consent to put forward a motion regarding this evening. Is it agreed? Agreed.

Hon Mr Duncan: I move that the House will sit for 60 minutes, commencing at 6:05; that each of the parties will have 20 minutes—one speaker per party, or they can divide the time; and that at the end of that hour, the

debate will collapse and there will be a deferred vote during deferred votes tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Duncan has moved a motion regarding sitting this evening. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Orders of the day.

STRONG COMMUNITIES (PLANNING AMENDMENT) ACT, 2003 LOI DE 2003 SUR LE RENFORCEMENT DES COLLECTIVITÉS (MODIFICATION DE LA LOI SUR L’AMÉNAGEMENT DU TERRITOIRE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on May 4, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 26, An Act to amend the Planning Act / Projet de loi 26, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l’aménagement du territoire.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): The Chair recognizes the member for Nepean-Carleton.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I appreciate the opportunity to rise on Bill 26, an important piece of legislation and something—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Order. If you’re moving in the chamber, would you please keep it down. Sorry, Mr Baird.

Mr Baird: Thank you very much, Speaker. I can’t believe other members are speaking while I’m trying to speak. It’s something I would never do. It’s a courtesy I would always extend to them, and I’m surprised, to say the least.

I’m pleased to have the chance to speak on Bill 26, the changes to the Planning Act. I have very strong objections to this bill. I think it’s the wrong way to go. I think it is bad news for Ontario. I think it will dampen the Ontario economy, and I think it will cause substantial damage to the province.

This bill will simply turn the role of cabinet into that of a municipal council. Instead of setting some broad strategic parameters for development, this legislation, if passed, would force cabinet to adjudicate and determine the merits of local planning applications.

The thinking behind this bill is that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is somehow smarter than a locally elected city council. I know my city council and I also know the Minister of Municipal Affairs—well, maybe my city council is not the one to make an example of. I know a lot of city councillors and municipal people across the province, and I have more confidence in them than in the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and in the centralization of power in what has become known as the politburo at the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, where they centralize decision-making, much like they used to in other parts of the world.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: Obviously the member for Nipissing likes centralized decision-making, because that’s what this piece of legislation does.

I want to associate my comments with those of the member for Erie-Lincoln, who spoke the other day and has been very active on this bill. Like me, he knows it's going to cause a huge negative effect on the Ontario economy. I think we've got to recognize that in the 1980s, around the time Brian Mulroney brought in the free trade agreement, the development sector of the Ontario economy represented 13% to 13.5% of the GDP of Ontario. Today, it's risen by 10%, from 9% to 10% of the GDP, but it's still substantially lower than it was. That has a huge effect on jobs. It has a huge effect on economic growth and on the government's ability to raise revenue, because when growth is lower and our quality of life is lower, there are fewer riches to support priority areas like health care and education.

This government talks about wanting to empower local government. Well, this bill flies in the face of that; it is inconsistent with it. It sees new powers granted to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and for the provincial government to intervene in local municipalities.

What happens if a ratepayers' group, a builder or an environmentalist does not like the local decision? They'll now be able to line up outside the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing's door to lobby him. Why would people bother even voting in municipal elections? They'll just lobby the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I don't think it's right to put that much power in the hands of one individual. I say to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing that this will put you in a terribly awkward position that you can't hope to win on, and you should be tremendously concerned about that.

Local planning decisions will become much more political, and that's not a good idea. By extending the time lines for comment by municipalities, the government is removing some tension from the system. For various reasons, municipalities will take as long as they can to comment on an application. The government is now giving them more time. The decision may or may not be any different, whether one has 90 or even 180 days to decide that the application is now granted, to find itself at the bottom of the pile, delaying the process even further.

The legislation potentially opens up the system for further abuse by parties who would like to engage in endless rounds of ongoing discussions. Where an application is opposed, it's likely the municipality will not use the additional time for consideration. It will simply mean more delay. I am tremendously bothered by this.

Bill 26, in combination with Bill 27—the greenbelt legislation—and other tax measures, are going to have consequential effects on the home building and development sectors, whether it's housing, retail or industrial. That is a concern.

You talk about the relationship with the companion bill, Bill 27, the greenbelt legislation—we have a greenbelt in Ottawa, where I'm from, but that greenbelt is owned by the government. They bought the land and in some cases, regrettably, expropriated it at unfair rates. Of

course what Bill 27 seeks to do is simply mandate that and supersede legitimate property rights without any compensation.

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That should be a real concern to all of us. I'm one who strongly believes that we should have property rights in the Constitution, in our Charter of Rights. I want to thank Matt Gibson for sending in some more information. It's much appreciated. There should be property rights enshrined in the charter. That is something that should have happened in the 1981-82 discussions. I strongly supported Garth Turner when he was a member of Parliament. He led an effort to encourage property rights. I'll tell you that if there's any constitutional change planned in light of a federalist government in Quebec, that's something many of us are going to be pushing for. Constitutional change is not something that the next Prime Minister, Mr Harper, has talked about, but it could be on the agenda.

Interjection.

Mr Baird: I hear the member for Nipissing going on. I'll tell you, Mr Harper has put together a phenomenal team of men and women to contest the election in the province of Ontario. I'm happy that I've been asked to co-chair the campaign here in Ontario, to ensure we win a lot of new seats. We have some phenomenal candidates who are equally concerned about Bill 26 and Bill 27. It will be one that we watch closely. I know that if there are any constitutional changes envisioned by the federal or Quebec governments, we'll want to talk about property rights and how they should be a fair and legitimate concern.

We should be concerned about the economic impact of Bill 26, coupled with its evil twin sister, Bill 27. The development industry has experienced a steep increase in land prices that will soon begin to directly impact the cost of new and resale housing. That's not just some obscure thing. I want to tell you what this is going to mean to a young family wanting to own their first home. Because of these two pieces of legislation, the cost of the lot for their home to be built on, whether it's in Stittsville or south Nepean, but particularly here in the greater Toronto area, in York region, Halton, Durham and Peel, is going to go up considerably. It could go up by \$20,000, \$40,000 or \$60,000. That's going to take a whack of a bigger mortgage to pay for it.

I suppose it's easy to pass these bills because someone else has to pay for the consequences of them, and that should be a tremendous concern.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My mortgage is paid.

Mr Baird: What did the member for Timmins say?

Mr Bisson: My mortgage is paid.

Mr Baird: His mortgage is paid. I'll tell you, there are a lot of working families in my constituency whose mortgage isn't paid, and there are a lot of people who are tenants and who want to realize the dream that comes with owning their own home. This bill is going to make it harder to do.

The triple whammy of Bill 26 and Bill 27, the evil triplet of this thing is the government's lack of support for mortgage interest deductibility, which would have been another thing to help a young family own their own home. The cost of housing is going to go up, and that's going to have an effect not just on new homes, but on resale housing. I know the member for Etobicoke Centre is going to be concerned about the effect this has on working families in her constituency. I ask her to reflect on that and to seek some substantial changes to this bill.

Coupled with the reduced supply of serviced land, what you're going to see is job losses. When things become more expensive, fewer people can afford to buy a house. For the carpenter, the bricklayer, the carpet plant worker, the real estate agent, the lawyer, what have you, there will be less work. We know that even on resale housing there is a huge amount of economic activity that goes on in that area that is going to have consequential effects, let alone on the new home, which of course is demonstrably more.

Bill 26 lacks a comprehensive vision and a relationship to strategic growth management. Let's be honest. This government has no economic growth agenda at all. It's governing on a day-to-day basis, making haphazard decisions when it does make decisions. It has no plan. We are tremendously concerned. The official opposition is tremendously concerned about the consequences of this bill.

If it was just Bill 26 alone, it would be bad. Coupled with Bill 27, coupled with mortgage interest deductibility not moving forward, it's going to be terrible on Tuesday, when Ontarians once again brace themselves to be whacked.

Perhaps I could talk about some of the issues that have been identified by industry. The relationship of planning reform to growth management: The bill must take a more comprehensive approach and use carrots and not sticks. As drafted, the bill will not address the challenges of intensification, of brownfields and of nodes and corridors. Consider other Planning Act measures such as section 42, parkland dedication, and section 37, density bonusing. The development industry is also concerned about being consistent with the provincial policy statement. I know this is something viewers will remember the member for Erie-Lincoln spoke about.

The reform of the Ontario Municipal Board is a concern. It will be a big concern for the public in terms of their confidence in the board. The extension of timelines for appeals: The development industry needs some certainty in the planning process, and this bill makes it worse.

The declaration of a provincial interest is another issue I won't go on about at great length because my colleague from Erie-Lincoln spoke to that. The declaration of a provincial interest for zoning bylaws and holding provisions is another important one.

Transition provisions: This bill has unprecedented retroactivity powers, before the bill was introduced on December 15. Retroactivity is bad. It is not good public

policy. It's becoming an increasing trend in governments around North America and in western Europe. It's become a favourite of this gang of Liberals in Ontario. We hope they'll change course. I assume nobody is innocent in this regard. But we should be concerned as legislators about retroactivity and the effects it has. The transition provisions in Bill 26 are unprecedented and are the real concern with respect to retroactivity. So that's a concern.

There was the letter discussed by my colleague from Leeds-Grenville during question period today, who spoke about the concern about the home building sector. With the budget coming on Tuesday, with the effect of Bill 26, it could get worse. We learn now that Dalton McGuinty is talking about harmonizing the PST and the GST. Sources say it's under consideration. The government refuses to rule it out and say it won't happen. Whether it is going to happen or isn't going to happen, it's causing a lot of concern out there, for people, their future and their families, particularly in the housing sector where this could add some \$24,000 to the cost of a \$300,000 home.

Even worse, if they raise the retail sales tax—people, if you're watching, Dalton McGuinty's thinking about raising the retail sales tax, so go shopping before Tuesday because he could be raising it.

I had representatives from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business come in and see me. They had their charts from last year. They were asking their members, the small and medium-sized enterprises, "What will assist in economic growth? What tax reductions would promote economic growth among the job-creation sectors in our small and medium-sized enterprises?" They had a list of all the taxes they thought would be cut and what percentage of their membership supported each. Now things have changed so much they have to have a list of what taxes they don't want increased.

For the first time on the eve of a budget, there are going to be lineups at the LCBO, because these guys over here want to raise the taxes on spirits produced here in Ontario, produced in Windsor and Bacardi in Brampton—they want to raise taxes on our Ontario wines produced in the Niagara region and they want to raise taxes on our ales and lagers. That should be a tremendous concern.

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Getting back to the home builders and their concerns, I will read a letter sent by the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association. I think it speaks for home builders right across the province and for the folks they work for:

"Dear Minister:

"Let me cut right to the chase. If there's any truth to the speculation that the provincial government is considering harmonizing the sales tax base with the federal government, the most productive sector of the provincial economy—residential construction, new home building and renovation—will become the least productive sector overnight."

This isn't some fearmongering Conservative MPP; this is the Toronto Home Builders' Association, speaking

for home builders in places like Stittsville, speaking to the concerns that home builders would have in South Nepean, Orléans, Greely and Manotick. They are tremendously concerned.

“It took the residential construction industry more than five years to recover from the original introduction of the GST in 1991, and there is no reason to expect anything different this time around.” By way of example, he uses the \$24,000 added to the price of a \$300,000 home. That will cause great concern to home builders in Ontario. They go on.

I'll read the last part of a letter from Mark Parsons, president of the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association:

“Harmonization will get your government less money, not more, and will shatter the home ownership aspirations of young people across the province. We trust that harmonization is not under active consideration at the moment but wanted to take the opportunity to remind you of the reasons it should never be on the table provincially.”

This is the real concern the job creation industry has in Ontario. This government, with their wacky trial balloons, don't know what they're doing day by day. They're making it up as they go along, and it's starting to have effects on the Ontario economy.

With respect to Bill 26, I understand the Premier is in Washington. I know why the Premier has planned—like the Planning Act—to leave the country: because he's going to lose the by-election tomorrow night because the people of Hamilton East don't like Bill 26. They don't like the voodoo economics of Dalton McGuinty, and they're going to vote out the Liberals in Hamilton East. Tara Crugnale, a respected Hamilton business woman who has run a fine campaign, is going to be sitting right here. She's impressed a lot of folks in Hamilton East and across the entire Hamilton-Wentworth region, and she's going to be sitting right here next week. Should she not be successful, by a small chance, and the NDP candidate slips up the middle, we will bump the rump. The rump will have to go to the end and the NDP will be sitting here. And the NDP have promised that Peter Kormos won't sit beside me.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 26. I hope I've put some serious issues on the table, and I look forward to listening to the comments of my good friends and colleagues opposite.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is always a pleasure to follow my friend. This bill, the Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act, I have to tell you from the outset, is perhaps a good bill, but it's also fraught with difficulties.

One who understands planning will see that this has come almost full circle to where John Sewell once advised this Legislature on how to change the Planning Act. In fact, most of what is in here was contained in the Sewell commission report. Some of you will remember John Sewell. He came to this Legislature many times and was actually thrown out of the visitors' gallery more than

once over the whole megacity debate. But he was a good planner and did come with some good ideas, and we're pleased to see that some of those ideas have finally found their way into this government bill.

We have to say that the use of “consistent with” is far better than the previous legislation, which was enacted by the Tories during their eight years in government. The fact that it is “consistent with” will make the bill much stronger. Those words alone will make it absolutely strong that the policy statements must be complied with. They must be consistent with the whole range of policies that we are hoping will be appended to this bill.

We also see other changes too—that is, the bill that was passed by the NDP and then revoked by the Tories, thus necessitating, I guess, this bill coming back. The Tory bill and the whole period of time—if you go down to the Ontario Municipal Board and you look at what is happening around planning in Ontario, you will see that planning has largely become unfettered. The developers have money, lawyers and planners. The developers have contacts and contracts with people throughout the bureaucracy and, I dare say, even contacts with many members—MPPs in this House. They are able, by and large, to get exactly what they want, where they want it, when they want it and how they want it.

You will see consistently that new housing developments will come in the face of fierce public opposition. Whether they be large ones in suburban areas around cities like Toronto, London or Hamilton, or smaller infill developments in the larger cities where they simply don't fit into the neighbourhoods, they're being allowed in this unfettered development, sparked largely by the Ontario Municipal Board. They have included a huge amount of urban sprawl, and we have seen that go unchecked for the last eight years. If it was ever-growing before, and it has constantly been with us, the speed-up of urban sprawl in the last eight years has been horrific.

I challenge anyone who used to drive north of Toronto, up Dufferin Street, up Bathurst Street, up any of those streets going north of Toronto, up around Canada's Wonderland as an example. You would drive for miles—I need to be modern—for kilometres seeing nothing but beautiful, idyllic farmland. Today, you see urban sprawl. You see large homes on small lots, row after row on what was once prime agricultural land.

It is no wonder that gridlock has taken over southern Ontario. It is no wonder that you see gridlock almost everywhere. There is no transportation system, no housing system, the school systems are behind, the hospital systems are behind. The communities clamour, but there it is. You've got that dream, and you've got the developers willing to do it. I'm glad this bill is taking us back, at least in some direction, to be a little bit more sensible.

I've got to watch what I say, because whenever I say anything good, I end up in Liberal campaign literature. I'm not going to say anything too good that you can use, because I've been burned.

Mr Bisson: That's the danger with you guys.

Mr Prue: That's the danger with you guys. I try to say something nice and I get burned.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: But then you'll use it in the next leaflet.

Mr Prue: Yes, you'll use it in the next one.

There are three things that need to be looked at here. The first one is that cabinet's role has been expanded. We have to question how that role is going to be expanded. If cabinet makes decisions, if cabinet can overturn Ontario Municipal Board decisions or local community planning decisions, then how does cabinet make that decision? Is it done collectively by a vote of cabinet? We don't know, because the bill is silent on this.

How is cabinet to make the decision? Is it going to be collectively? Is it going to be a majority vote? Is cabinet going to vote, the 20 or so people sitting around the table, and 11 pass it? I don't know. I doubt that.

The third way is that you leave it all up to the minister. We have a little bit of doubt about that.

Then the fourth way, the one that makes me most nervous of all, is that it's simply handled out of the Premier's office and you have the so-called whiz kids making the decision on the planning.

Mr Bisson: Imagine the influence the developers could have.

Mr Prue: Yes, the influence that would be there would be horrendous. If you're going to take it out of a non-elected body like the OMB, which I think is a good idea in some circumstances, please don't give it to another non-elected body in the Premier's office, called the "whiz kids." If it needs to come to anything, then please, make it a cabinet decision. Put down some very clear rules so that we in the Legislature know and the people out there know whether it's done by majority, whether it's done collectively, by consensus, but we don't want it to end up with the whiz kids.

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Mr Bisson: Developers will be lining up at the door.

Mr Prue: I'm going to get to that.

The second problem we see is that the provincial interest can override the OMB. That, in itself, is not a problem as far as we see it, provided it is done sensitively and correctly, because you have said in the bill that they can only confirm, vary or rescind the decision of the elected councils in Ontario, and as well the OMB.

It takes me back to a little bit of the history of East York. Probably the two most famous cases of the cabinet overriding the OMB took place in East York, both maybe within a kilometre of each other, both on Bayview Avenue. The first one of course was the famous case called the Bayview ghost. You might remember that if you came from the Toronto area all those years ago. It was an apartment building that was built in the 1960s, prior to East York becoming a borough, when it was still a township. There was a developer who wanted to build an apartment building overlooking the Don Valley and the Don River, and he started to put up an apartment building.

In the midst of the building, there was all kinds of debate going around the community. The reeve and the

deputy reeve were at loggerheads. It was sent to the planning department, and from the planning department to the Ontario Municipal Board. From the Ontario Municipal Board, which deemed the building should go ahead, it finally went to the cabinet of the day. I believe it was the Robarts cabinet, although it could have been Davis. I think on the very last occasion of that cabinet, and certainly for many years, the cabinet overturned the Ontario Municipal Board and made a political decision that the building could not proceed.

What happened from that point was a huge ton of litigation. The land itself was owned by the railways, CN and CP. The Bayview ghost, as it came to be called, was an empty shell of a building that stood there, prominently, just off Bayview Avenue, and decayed over the next 20 or 30 years. It was never built. It was never completed. It never formed the basis of housing. There it was, because that was the cabinet decision. No one could overturn that decision, not the developer, not the municipality. Therefore, it sat, and it sat until quite recently.

It destroyed the reputation of and finally the electoral process of the reeve. He was not re-elected. But it did one good thing for East York. It allowed True Davidson to become the reeve and then the first mayor of East York. In East York, we always like to say, "It started with True and ended with Prue," and there you are. It did very good things, and she in turn did good things for our community. But it was the Bayview ghost and the whole planning process and cabinet's meddling in it that caused this problem.

What happened when the cabinet finally made the decision and said the apartment building can't be built is that you can build 90 single family units on the land. So 30 years later, those 90 units are being built. This is at Bayview near Pottery Road. You're about five minutes from downtown Toronto on a parcel of land overlooking the Don Valley and the Don River. I don't have to tell you that these 90 houses that are being built on very small parcels of land, about 30 feet wide by 100 feet or 80 feet—that's the whole parcel. The homes on it are 6,000 square feet each and they start at about \$1.1 million, if you want to live in one of those homes.

What they are is not consistent today with what the community had planned. Because it was a cabinet order, it could not be overturned by the municipality when I was the mayor, it could not be sent to the OMB and it could not be appealed by the ratepayers. It was a cabinet order although it was 30 years out of date. I'm just warning that if the cabinet makes that kind of decision, then you might find the same problem we had in East York.

Mr Bisson: The Bayview ghost.

Mr Prue: The Bayview ghost.

The second one was just down the road. There's a place called the Brickworks or the brickyards. Some people call it the brickyards. It was the Don Valley Brickworks. It too was the subject, first of all, of planning decisions, and the majority of the members of the municipal council in East York voted to allow housing in

what was at that time a quarry. That went to the Ontario Municipal Board. The neighbours all took it to the Ontario Municipal Board with the help of some of the local politicians, a few members of council who didn't like the idea. In turn, the OMB determined that it was a perfectly feasible idea, but then the Liberal government of the day—I'm going to salute Lily Munro. Some of you remember her. She got the cabinet convinced that this was a bad idea, and the cabinet—

Interjection: The brochure.

Mr Prue: Yes, I know it will end up in a brochure, but she's not in politics, so I'm not that worried.

She convinced the cabinet to rescind that and to declare it heritage property. Today, if you go by that property, you will see that it is alive. It has ponds and streams and fish and birds. The community thinks it's the most wonderful place. We are glad that the cabinet—that's an example of why we're putting a little bit of trust. If that is what is going to be done, that is an example of how it can work well, versus how it did not work well. Those are probably the two most famous cases in Ontario. As I said, they're both in East York and they're both within a kilometre of each other.

We have here the potential for good things to happen, but we also have the potential for politicization of the process. This is what makes me a little nervous. That's why I go back to the cabinet's role. If the cabinet's role is to be expanded, then it must be very clear from the legislation and the regulations exactly how cabinet is going to influence the process and, I might suggest, for how long the cabinet's order remains extant. If the cabinet's order is allowed to be for all time and cannot be reviewed, you're going to run into the same problem that we in East York ran into with the building of the giant megahomes on the site of the Bayview ghost. If it is going to be in the short term and if it's valid for a year or two and can be revisited as planning issues may change and zoning bylaws may change or as the needs of communities may change, then perhaps it is not a bad idea.

I certainly want to tell you that in the majority of circumstances, it is my belief that the cabinet will act in a much more responsible manner in terms of community interest than I would get from the non-elected Ontario Municipal Board. Any of you who have been in municipal politics knows how frustrating that board can be to planning in a city or a town.

There is a third aspect of the bill that needs to be talked about as well, and that is the removal of the 65-day limit to hold a meeting. This has hamstrung municipalities across Ontario. If you are not able to hold the meeting, the 65 days would allow the developer to take the case to the Ontario Municipal Board without the municipality being able to involve its citizens, its planners, its agencies, the police, the fire department and everyone else who's generally called to comment. This is a good thing, that the 65-day limit is being changed. But there is a corollary to this. So if you're going to print me in your campaign literature, the corollary is—

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): But.

Mr Prue: Yes, it's called a "but."

This will delay public input, because the one good thing about the 65 days was that it forced the municipalities to act expeditiously, and if they were going to call in the public, they had to do so within the 65 days. There were problems sometimes in meeting those 65 days, but the involvement of the public is paramount and it cannot be neglected. If you extend it to 90 or 100 or whatever days it's being extended to, then you need to act and put very clearly in the legislation what that is.

We also looked at, and I think we must agree that the lengthening of the deadlines is long past. The deadlines that were put in place by the NDP all those years ago were perhaps a little idealistic, but they were an attempt to get the municipalities to act more quickly on development that needed to be acted upon. The times were set, and quite frankly I think the Tories sort of left them where they were.

1840

The times that are being proposed here for an official plan amendment are from 90 days to 180 days, which is a good thing. For cities and towns that have an official plan—where they want buildings built, where they don't want them built, where they want industry versus where they want housing, where they want commercial areas versus institutional areas—that is of huge interest to municipalities. The lengthening of the time from 90 days to 180 days will allow a proper review. The rezoning is being changed from 90 days to 120 days. Rezoning, of course, is not as extensive as an official plan amendment and that should accommodate the majority of rezonings. Last but not least, the consent to sever has been changed from 60 days to 90 days.

These are OK, but I have to tell the Legislature that a municipality that really wants to attract industry or commerce or housing has a much better way of doing it than this. It has a much better way than lengthening the deadlines in order to assess and to get people interested in building. The best thing they can possibly do is to act expeditiously on development applications.

When I was the mayor of East York, we found that the best way to get development of the kind we wanted was to lower the timelines in which people were expecting to have their developments actioned. We set a goal to attract industry into East York. In fact, during that whole recessionary period in the late 1980s, early 1990s the only new factory that was built in all of what was then Metropolitan Toronto was in East York. The reason the guy came was because we said we would give him an answer to his planning development within 90 days. That was the law everywhere else too, but within 90 days we guaranteed that all the reviews would be done, that the public meeting would be held and that council would make their decision. No one else would do that; no one else could do that. In Mississauga, even the fabled Mayor McCallion told them it would take a year. We were able to do it in 90 days, and I believe that a municipality that

has the wherewithal, the intelligence and the staff to make that kind of commitment is going to attract, not detract from, development.

I did hear the previous speaker talk about detracting from development and all this stuff. I frankly don't believe it. What is essential here is making sure the timelines are obeyed whenever possible. Giving the municipality the kind of authority that they can push aside some of the developments that they may not hold to have the same significance, like someone building an extension or a shed on the back of their house, or whether you want a factory—if the municipality has that authority, that will do more for development and pro-development and industry and commerce than you can possibly imagine.

The history of all this is that the NDP put in the time frames and the deadlines because it was taking too long. The Tories shortened this, making the timelines impossible. Hopefully, this legislation will try to redress the imbalance, will try to get us back to where John Sewell originated the whole argument all those years ago.

I'm asking that this go, and I'm sure it will, to public committee hearings. It is essential that we hear from everyone—from the municipalities, from the environmentalists, even from the developers. We need to know what we can do to make this legislation proper so that we can balance the need for growth versus the enhancement of local community and neighbourhood areas. If we can succeed in doing that, then it will be a good bill. If we do not succeed, then all it's going to do is politicize an already politicized process.

Mrs Donna H. Cansfield (Etobicoke Centre): I'm pleased to speak to Bill 26 for several reasons. I'd like to comment, of course, on the manner in which the bill returns control of local planning to municipalities, but I'd also like to make an observation about the democratic principle that's demonstrated in the piece of legislation.

I'm going to share my time with the member from Oakville.

It is a well-accepted fact that democracy works best in government, in business and in society in general when we enable decision-making at the closest point to the people involved, but ensure that this local control is guided by well-tested and well-recognized standards with which the decisions must comply. This sounds simple but it is an extremely important principle.

When you think about it, the entire technology industry is actually based on this principle. You can buy hundreds of devices today, each with a different design and many with varying purposes, but each of these devices must comply with the particular industry standard or it won't work. That is what we're saying about this process. Good government in Canada was built on this principle. Medicare allows for local autonomy of decisions as long as they comply with national and provincial standards. Our justice system is constructed this way, and on and on.

As simple as the principle seems, this basic principle of good government and good business was ignored in the not-too-distant past. The former government took

away local decision-making powers from local municipalities. At the same time, they disrupted the setting of standards by placing control almost totally in the hands of bodies like the Ontario Municipal Board, which often acted unilaterally and often ad hoc. This disrupted the standards that should have been applied across whole ministries. Through their endeavours, in fact, universal standards disappeared, to be replaced in the public perception, at least, by idiosyncratic rules and regulations created by Star Chambers.

Bills 26 and 27, for that matter, along with a new provincial policy statement on land use planning, return the principle of local decision-making guided by defined standards. Rather than having these good and proven standards watered down with language such as "have regard to," the decisions of municipalities must now "be consistent with" standards that are subject to voter acceptance or voter refusal.

Through the changes instituted by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, our government has replaced a system that wasn't working with one that actually will work. We have returned to one of the soundest principles of democracy: local control consistent with universal standards. I note that the Minister of Municipal Affairs has said these bills and the public policy statements will make the planning process more open and more transparent in Ontario. Certainly, the setting of standards will be more open. What's wrong with open and transparent decision-making? Certainly nothing that I know of.

The setting of standards must always be open. Rightly or wrongly, the Ontario Municipal Board has been perceived as secretive, autocratic and largely a body that's without comprehensive standards. So now Ontarians will be able to see how standards are set, how they're maintained at the provincial level and how decisions are made with these standards at the local level.

I have heard and seen comments about this new legislation by groups like the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute. We have listened to, and continued to listen to, the comments and criticisms of all stakeholders to make certain we have given each fair treatment. I believe we have done this in the new legislation.

For instance, I note that the province's planning profession applauds the principle I described earlier. They say, "Communities not only need proper tools to deal with the range of issues affecting how they grow and prosper, but they need a complete range of tools to do so." They note that the public policy statement is "the tool that makes everything else work." The PPS is the set of standards that guide local land use decisions. The province's planning profession asked for clear direction on the province's priorities for environmental protection and community growth and ways to overcome conflicts. I agree, and I certainly believe that these will be provided by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

The province's planning profession also asks that the municipalities have the flexibility to go beyond the minimum standards. I agree again that municipalities should

have the abilities to be innovative and progressive once they have met the standards of the public policy statement. I trust that the Minister of Municipal Affairs will provide this flexibility.

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Another example of commentary comes from the Greater Toronto Home Builders' Association. Unfortunately, the comments by the home builders seem to be somewhat cynical or distrusting. The association comments that the legislation is inconsistent with the goals of empowering local municipalities because many decisions will be bounced back to the minister's office. I can ask the home builders to go to the municipal councils and ask them if they had more local control under the unfettered rule of the Ontario Municipal Board during the previous government. I know that every councillor I know will laugh at that suggestion.

Mr Baird: Name one.

Mrs Cansfield: You soon will have one, sir.

The association also says municipalities will abuse the new legislation and will use it to stack decisions and stall those decisions. "It will simply mean more delay," the association says. I wonder if this means they won't be able to rush into any more projects on our now endangered landscapes. I think that's a question that needs to be put to the home builders' association.

I cannot accept that municipalities will abuse the new legislation to stall or to run to the minister with legions of problems. I ask the home builders to have more faith in the democratic process and in the people elected by the voters who represent their best interests.

I ask the home builders to accept the democratic principle that local decisions consistent with universal standards creates a system that actually works for all of us and not just for the privileged few.

Underlying the comments, however, there is a request for the continuing dialogue that must occur between the government and all stakeholders, including the home builders. Land use planning is dynamic, and we should not allow our standards to fall behind the needs of our citizens. But we also should not allow our standards or our local decision-making to be usurped again by unelected boards or agencies, nor should we allow urban sprawl to destroy the lifestyle for which Ontario is known and prized, not now and not ever.

I know that the member from Beaches-East York does not like to be quoted. However, when he says something that truly is well worthwhile, it is well worth quoting. He indicated that there may be a delay in the process of planning by the politicians themselves. But it may improve the process of planning by the politicians themselves. He indicates that it would be difficult in terms of that time frame, but I actually suggest it might be easier in terms of that time frame. I'd like to quote another member of this Legislature, Ms Munro, who actually said, "I think one of the things that is critical in understanding even the word 'planning' is that it requires decisions to be made with a long-term vision and a plan."

Actually, the member from Beaches-East York said the same thing in terms that it takes a concentrated effort,

it takes a well-planned initiative to work with the issues within a large cosmopolitan city such as metropolitan Toronto. It can't be done willy-nilly. It takes the concerted effort of a lot of people to work together.

I say to you, Mr Speaker, that I'm pleased to support this bill. I know it will receive a judicious hearing in committee and that the members of this Legislature who have the extraordinary experience that they bring to the table of having been local councillors will bring that expertise to bear.

Mr Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): It's always a pleasure to follow the member from Etobicoke Centre and certainly on an issue such as this. Elections are fought over different issues in different ridings, and tomorrow we'll find out just what the people of Hamilton East think of how the various candidates from all three parties have addressed their concerns.

Interjection.

Mr Flynn: We're pretty well unanimous in our estimation that we know who will finish third. But tomorrow we'll find out.

If you had the same election in Oakville—

Interjection.

Mr Flynn: I think we all know who's going to finish third tomorrow.

Interjection.

Mr Flynn: The Green Party? Fourth, perhaps.

If an election, however, were held in Oakville today, the same issue would hold that was the same issue in the election last October and the issue that was fought in the municipal elections in my community in November, and that's all about planning, it's all about urban sprawl, it's about green space preservation. The one thing that the people in Oakville have caught on to is the issue that the OMB needs to be reformed.

To many people, the OMB is a bit of a mystery, but when people start to deal with it, when it starts to affect their own communities, when planning issues arise, they realize how strong a role the OMB can play in the life of their communities, in the future of their communities. People are smart enough to know that in their estimation—and it's an estimation that I share, an opinion that I share—we have a system that isn't working now and needs to be reformed. We are prepared to take that on.

Our communities have suffered as a result of the lack of OMB reform in the past, and there's a perception, certainly in Oakville, anyway—I don't know if it's true or not—among the public that developers are controlling the planning process. I'd like to see that change, and I think this bill goes a long way to allowing that type of change to take place.

If we take a look at people's interest in planning issues, they talk about urban sprawl, they talk about the environment and, as I said, they talk a lot about the OMB influence on planning advice that's given by staff. In the current situation, what happens today is that quite often a person will make an application, a company will make an application, an individual will make an application. On the very same day they go into the town hall or the city

hall to make their application, they file with the OMB to get a hearing date, on the very same day. I have examples in my own community where issues have gone to the OMB without even reaching the council table, where the 90 days have expired, the time frame has not allowed the council to consider the issue and it winds up on the OMB table. That simply is wrong. That takes the community out of the planning process. Maybe that was the intent when this was introduced, but I certainly don't believe it is the intent of our government to allow that to continue.

We've got a couple of examples of planning decisions that are underway, where we've got somebody who wants to convert a low-rise restaurant on a creek bank to a high-rise. Somebody else wants to take land that's zoned low-density in private open space and build high-rises on the lakefront. Both these planning applications are being held currently under the shadow of an OMB hearing. So what happens, in my estimation and my experience from serving as a local elected official, is that the advice that is given by planning staff is not necessarily based on good planning criteria or on the science of planning. It's based, in large part, on how they feel the application will fare when it gets to the OMB.

We hire planners. We pay them with our tax dollars to provide us the best planning advice. With the current system with the OMB, they end up giving us quasi-legal advice, and that's not the idea of the process at all. That's where the process has gone wrong. In some cases in the past—I know of examples in my own community—the OMB has actually done the site planning. I can take you, if you'd like one day, to a service station/convenience store. You can't drive through the site without driving through the gas bays. There's inadequate area for parking, there's no area for garbage storage. This was a site where the OMB actually said, "This is how the site is going to look, and you will build it this way."

Let me tell you, it works, but it doesn't work very well. I know the expertise that resides in planners in towns and cities around this province. They could have, had they had the opportunity, come up with a much better site plan than that example.

I was very proud earlier last year to be a part of the region-wide GTA task force on OMB reform. We came up with some very good recommendations as a result of that. All the regions surrounding the GTA sat down and spent about a six-month period going over things that they knew affected their own communities and how the OMB had impacted on them. As a matter of fact, the member for Beaches-East York made a presentation to that committee. I remember that. I think he did a very good job.

A lot of the information, a lot of the recommendations from that committee have now found their way into Bill 26. Hopefully, more will follow over the years to come, but it certainly is a start. I think that the vast majority of people who were members of that GTA task force, who were representing their own constituents in places like Peel, Durham, Halton and the region of York, will find that a lot of the things they wanted are contained in Bill 26.

I think we need to open up the planning process. We need to allow more time for municipalities to deal with planning applications. The extension of time to 180 days on a planning application is something that will allow the planners in the towns and cities who have to deal with these applications to do a much better job, to have good, full public input on these issues and to actually provide much better advice to the councils than that being provided today.

It's also an act whereby conservation authorities will be restored to the status they once held. In the region of Halton, conservation authorities have been responsible for places that perhaps you've visited—places like Kelso Park, Rattlesnake Point, Crawford Lake or Mountsberg. These authorities were cut to the bone by the previous government. They simply weren't allowed to do the things they were intended to do when they were first set up.

I believe we've lived on the good work of our ancestors. In the past, people were smart enough to set aside land for highways. They built provincial parks. They built transit and rapid transit in the form of subways. They understood how to plan for the future. But somehow for the past eight to 12 years we've decided we're just going to live off the work of our ancestors and forefathers and have not really contributed to that planning in a meaningful way ourselves.

Prior to the election of this government, when was the last time a large portion of green space was saved in southern Ontario? Think about it. It's been a very long time since that has happened. We built and we built, we paved and we paved during the past 12 years of Conservative and NDP rule. We built some little trails, we built postage-stamp-sized urban parks and let large tracts of green space become paved over. People want better in their planning and they expect better planning.

I'm not anti-growth. We understand that immigrants are attracted to the GTA. We understand that in this area we also have some great builders, and we have some excellent members of the skilled trades who build homes and industrial-commercial properties for us. They build places for our own children to live and raise families. We've talked for years about changing the way communities plan, but nobody has ever really done anything meaningful about it in the past decade, partly, I think, because of fear of the OMB, and also due to uncertainty over provincial policy statements.

Bill 26 makes it very clear where the province is going on planning. People want and expect better planning from local government. Previous governments simply did not give the municipalities the tools they need to do the job.

Over the years, I've had some great colleagues who have expressed a real interest in green space preservation. Some of you may have met people like Councillor Allan Elgar, Councillor Renee Sandelowsky, newly elected Councillor Tom Adams, Councillor Mike Lansdown, and a gentleman who's been around for a long time in Oakville, Councillor Ralph Robinson. They're all wonderful people and they all, over the past three to five

years, have developed such a strong interest in urban planning and protecting the environment. Groups have sprung up in my community. I think of Oakvillegreen and Hank Rodenburg, its president. They've all expressed an interest in saving and preserving the environment.

We've seen planning study after planning study in the GTA—lots of talk, but we've just kept sprawling into communities without transit. It's my opinion that Bill 26 is a very strong step forward in changing how communities are planned in a sensible way. I believe the people in our communities will express support for this. I'm hoping as it winds its way through the process and eventually to passage that it will serve Ontario well, and into the future as we plan our communities.

The Deputy Speaker: On May 4, Mr Gerretsen moved second reading of Bill 26. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

As a recorded vote is being demanded, pursuant to the motion passed earlier, this division is, by unanimous consent, deemed to be deferred until deferred votes tomorrow.

The House stands adjourned until 10 of the clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1905.

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