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of Debates
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Tuesday 18 May 2004

Mardi 18 mai 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 18 May 2004

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

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*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Today at 4 pm Finance Minister Greg Sorbara will without question break the laws of the province of Ontario. This betrayal to the working families of Ontario will result in Ontario returning to the lost decade.

Ontario's working families will remember finance critic Gerry Phillips last year stating that Ontario, with a loss of revenues as a result of BSE and SARS, could be facing a \$5-billion deficit. Ontario's working families will recall the election campaign and the TV ads, where Dalton McGuinty clearly stated, "I will not raise your taxes." Ontario's working families will recall the famous photo op when Dalton McGuinty signed the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Ontario's working families will recall Dalton McGuinty and his candidates promising not to run deficits. Ontario's working families will recall Dalton McGuinty and all his candidates promising to deliver balanced budgets. Ontario's working families will recall the orgy of broken promises since October 2.

Ontario's working families will today see increased taxes, the demise of a strong economy, more broken promises and the official introduction of two-tier health in Ontario. The citizens of Ontario have been betrayed. Any tax increase or deficit requires a referendum by the citizens of Ontario. That is the law.

The lost decade has returned. The working families of Ontario have caught on to the Liberals and their leader. In a highly touted speech today, Greg Sorbara will send Ontario back to the era of tax and spend. Ontarians had eight and a half years of a government that made and kept their promises. Today Ontarians live under a government that thrives on breaking their promises.

VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Last week was Nursing Week. On Friday, I was invited by the local Victorian Order of Nurses to join registered nurse Ruth Anne Luckhart as she made home care visits in Stratford.

We visited Mary, a senior living at home. She suffers from constant pain and uses a technological breakthrough, a pain pump. Every three days the VON come to her house to change the site of her subcutaneous injection. Then we were off to visit another constituent, Paul. He's 28. He and his wife have a toddler and a newborn infant at home. Paul suffers from Crohn's disease and recently had a temporary colostomy. I watched as Ruth Anne changed his dressing.

I was impressed by the professionalism and care of a remarkable registered nurse. That is why I believe we must direct more resources to home care. It allows people to get better surrounded by their loved ones in their own homes, and frees up beds in our hospitals.

On Sunday, I was proud to represent the government at an appreciation brunch for those remarkable people who volunteer throughout the year for the Huron-Perth VON. Over 100 citizens were thanked for providing the work that makes our community such a wonderful and caring place to live.

I'm sure that all of my colleagues at the Legislature join me in thanking the dedicated staff and volunteers of the Victorian Order of Nurses.

CONSERVATION

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): As this government continues with its Greenbelt Protection Act, I describe an ambitious farmer-driven conservation plan taking shape in my riding of Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant and elsewhere in Canada. I speak of the alternate land use services, or ALUS. It's a program headed up by our local Norfolk land stewardship council.

Through ALUS, good stewardship of the environment is not just a personal responsibility, it's also a public value that's based on payment to farmers for rendering ecological services that provide environmental benefits to the public at large. ALUS not only protects and enhances natural areas, it also encourages environmental partnerships between rural and urban Ontarians, and between government, landowners and conservationists.

While the Greenbelt Protection Act simply freezes development, the ALUS program goes further by encouraging the planting of trees and the setting aside of land for growth of marshes, grassland, forest cover and natural wildlife habitat, all with the public paying for the environmental benefits that society at large will derive.

I'm happy to say the proposed pilot project for ALUS to be implemented in Norfolk county has received strong

support: 37 different organizations have contributed their logo to the proposal, 10 have shelled out \$45,000 for a benchmark survey, and the MNR will continue to fund this pilot at the \$20,000 level that our government initiated in 2003.

TOWN OF WALLACEBURG

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

The year 2004 is a very significant year for Wallaceburg, which is one of the largest communities in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Wallaceburg traces its roots to 102 brave souls who set sail from Scotland over 200 years ago. They had made a solemn agreement with the fifth Earl of Selkirk to cross the Atlantic and build new lives for themselves in Upper Canada.

These extraordinary people met with numerous misfortunes: bitter winter snows, overwhelming spring floods, malaria-carrying mosquitoes, invading American troops who looted the community during the War of 1812, and unyielding administrative incompetence. Thankfully, they also had helpful and co-operative neighbours in the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Pottawatomi First Nations to help them weather these difficulties. They also had the courage to keep going.

Today a local group of volunteers, the Baldoon bicentennial committee, is assisting Wallaceburg to celebrate the fact that 200 years after the landing, it has become an industrious community of over 10,000 in southwestern Ontario that continues to build for its children's future.

Wallaceburg is celebrating this year, and in early September they will have events like the Highland Games and a re-enactment of the Selkirk settlers' landing. We welcome everyone to come to Wallaceburg. I know that all Ontarians will feel as welcome as I do when they visit there.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Deborah Walden of Thorold got ripped off by Co-operators insurance, and she is some ticked off. Co-operators insurance agent Vern Furtney got a letter from her on March 16. In that letter, she says to Mr Furtney that he is "a lying, cheating, thieving, scum-sucking weasel," and that he is "a 'bait and switch' operating dickhead."

She doesn't stop there. She has been picketing Co-operators on Fourth Avenue at Ridley Square in St Catharines, with her picket sign telling the world that Co-operators—and, quite frankly, all private for-profit auto insurance—is a rip-off and a scam, and she's been collecting thousands of names on petitions.

In fact, Co-operators sent the police to try to have her busted. The police said, "We're not going to arrest you." Quite frankly, I suspect the cops who arrived agreed with her and her opinion about Co-operators and every other private, for-profit insurance company.

1340

Two weeks ago, she got a letter from a high-priced law firm saying that Co-operators is going to sue her. I joined her last Saturday, picketing outside Co-operators' Vern Furtney agency in St Catharines. I agree with her: Vern Furtney and Co-operators are a rip-off. But then again, so is every private, for-profit auto insurance company and auto insurance premium here in Ontario.

We presented thousands of names on petitions yesterday. We'll keep on presenting those petitions and joining Ms Walden as she encourages thousands of other Ontarians to call for public auto insurance in this province—a true end to the highway robbery.

MEAL EXCHANGE

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): I rise today to speak to this House about entrepreneurship and volunteerism, and how these two ideals can go hand in hand to make a big difference in all Canadians' lives.

Two weeks ago, a graduate of Wilfrid Laurier University visited me here at Queen's Park. This young entrepreneur brought with him information on a great program he had started while at Wilfrid Laurier. The program is called Meal Exchange. As a freshman, Rahul Raj wanted to ensure that the meal points that he would not use on his one-size-fits-all meal plan were not wasted. Out of this concern, Meal Exchange was born, a program which exchanges unused meal points on university campus meal plans to order food from the university's wholesalers, which in turn students deliver to shelters and charities.

Rahul began this program in 1993, and since then this great partnership of entrepreneurship and volunteerism has spanned to 21 Canadian universities with a grassroots group of approximately 50 volunteer staff who run the program out of their homes. Rahul still heads the program, spending 30 hours a week at night to keep the meals coming.

This program could not have been successful without Rahul's commitment. Although awarded a two-year \$16,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in 1997, Rahul has invested \$40,000 of his own money to keep the program running. I believe in programs such as Meal Exchange and I hope that my colleagues here at Queen's Park also applaud the work that Rahul has done.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Good government is about setting priorities: finding solutions to urgent problems that affect all Ontarians.

Yesterday, we learned from Minister Meilleur that she considers the appointment of a language ombudsman a top priority. I respectfully suggest that this somewhat scary proposition is a reflection of social-engineering Liberals' priorities. I further suggest that personal safety, especially the safety of our children, ranks as a higher priority.

I am offended by the suggestion that the hiring of a linguistic top cop is considered a higher priority in Ontario than the hiring of front-line police officers. We've heard over and over that many Ontario citizens fear for their safety, especially in urban areas. They want to see more police officers patrolling the streets, they want to see more officers investigating gangs and organized crime, and they want a government committed to protecting their children.

Creating a force similar to the language police that have created havoc with ordinary citizens and businesses in the province of Quebec should not be a priority of this Liberal government. Their priorities should be hiring more front-line police officers and providing small municipalities with the resources they need and deserve to support their police services.

MACNAB STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Ms Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I am pleased today to acknowledge the 150th anniversary of MacNab Street Presbyterian Church in Hamilton. This church is a beautifully preserved heritage church in the centre of our wonderful city. Built in 1854, one of its most remarkable features is its windows, designed by Edinburgh artists and considered to be the finest example of stained glass anywhere in Canada.

The MacNab Street Presbyterian Church is but one magnificent example of architecture in the streets of downtown Hamilton. Some buildings are ravaged by time and use, but still they display their architectural elegance.

I invite all Ontarians to discover the wonders of Hamilton's history. The church has much to celebrate: a grand Hamilton heritage and the good company kept with the likes of the McQuesten and Buchanan families and other prominent Hamiltonians throughout its history.

Although the neighbourhood has certainly changed since the church's inception, it still serves as a spiritual home to a congregation of over 300 families. I commend Reverend J. Mark Lewis for the energetic spirit of his congregation and the very energetic anniversary festivities that will be culminated in December with A Dickens of a Christmas and the old adage, "The more the merrier." I bring you this information today because I would like my colleagues to know about a wonderful jewel at the end of the lake named Hamilton that is worth the trip and the exploration.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Evidently, the geniuses in the Premier's office are at it once again. Just days after the resounding—no, gargantuan—rejection of Premier McGuinty's weak leadership and broken promises in Hamilton East, they have come up with another great plan, this new Dalton McGuinty health care tax that's going to cost working families potentially \$1,000

per household. This shows the same judgment as that of Kevin Costner when he followed up *Waterworld* with *The Postman*. Another way you can describe this: One wonders if it's going to be like a Liberal health care user fee; if you don't pay your \$1,000 per household, you can't access health care.

I know that the member for Sudbury didn't come up with this plan. The member for Kingston and the Islands seems like a reasonable enough member, but just like the Toronto Star reported this week—a lot of questions from disgruntled Liberal caucus members over the decisions in the Premier's office. Even the education minister was openly questioning the wisdom of the backroom strategy. Clearly it wasn't caucus; it had to be a Don Guy or a Matt Maychak. We never did find out who brought forward the soup and salad tax, but it was the same backroom adviser who has emerged from the bowels of the Premier's office, lugging this electoral albatross of the \$1,000 health care increase. I remember the Premier looking into the TV screens and saying he was not going to raise taxes, perpetrating the biggest voter fraud in the history of Ontario.

ORAL QUESTIONS

TAXATION

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. In just seven short months, you've established your reputation in this province as a breaker of promises, unreliable and not to be trusted. You promised Ontarians that you wouldn't raise taxes for working families. We're about two hours from a budget here and there's a general consensus that you will break yet many more promises in the next few hours. Can you confirm for this House that in this budget, as it is predicted that you will break the promise not to raise taxes, you'll at least keep the other half of your promise that you will have a referendum first, before you raise those taxes, that you will get the support of Ontarians through a referendum?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): At 4 o'clock today all will be revealed, and I'm sure the member's genuine curiosity with respect to our budget will be fully and completely satisfied. We are making, no doubt about it, some very difficult decisions within the context of the budget. But I can tell you that there are some things we have specifically chosen not to do: We will not fire water inspectors, we will not fire meat inspectors, we will not fire teachers and we will not fire nurses.

1350

Mr Klees: I'm going to ask the Premier if he will repeat after me, "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, do promise, if my party is elected in the next government, that I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters." The reason I'm asking the Premier to

repeat after me is because he signed that pledge on September 11, 2003. Now we are just about to go into the budget. I'm going to ask the Premier what has changed that he is not prepared to make the same commitment now, when we'll have a budget two hours from now, that he made on September 11, 2003. Will he do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I can say that we have devoted an unprecedented amount of time and energy to consulting Ontarians before this, their budget. They have told us that they want us to invest in their health care, and we intend to do that. They've told us they want us to invest in their education, and we intend to do that. They've told us never, ever to forget our most vulnerable. They feel a sense of responsibility toward those people, and so do we, and our budget will reflect that.

We have listened to the people of Ontario, we have heard their concerns, and today, through our budget, we will deliver the leadership that they can count on.

Mr Klees: The people of Ontario have listened to this Premier for the last seven months. What they've heard is continual breaking of his word to the people of Ontario. What the people of Ontario want from this Premier is that he keep at least one promise. If he's not going to keep the promise, as we know he won't in this budget this afternoon, not to raise taxes, why will this Premier not at least keep the promise to the people of Ontario that, before he does raise taxes, he will go to them, not through focus groups, but through a referendum? That is what this Premier pledged to do. We're challenging the Premier now to have the courage to go to the people of Ontario and hear from them through a referendum as to whether or not the budget he'll present this afternoon is acceptable to the people of Ontario.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Let me offer some gratuitous and unsolicited advice in the matter of leadership to my friend here. There is a time to listen, there is a time to hear, there is a time to act and a time to lead. We are acting today, through this budget; we are leading today, through this budget; and we are going to satisfy the single most important concern on the part of the people of Ontario, and that is their public services. We're going to revitalize the public services in the province of Ontario.

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is to the Premier. The people of Ontario are waiting for the time, Premier, when you will keep your promises: your promises that you will not raise taxes, your promises that you will hold the line on taxes. Today in the newspapers we read about an OHIP premium tax to be imposed on working families in Ontario, so I decided to go back and look at the Liberal fiscal bible on OHIP premium elimination: the 1989 Ontario budget. In this place 14 years ago—May 17, 1989—the Treasurer at the time, Robert Nixon, and the Peterson government eliminated the tax. Here is what he said about it. He said, “The budget provides individuals and families with \$1 billion

in direct savings and lower taxes through the elimination of OHIP premiums.”

Do you agree, Premier, with the Peterson government, Mr Nixon and the Liberal brain trust of the day, such as it was, that OHIP premiums are taxes imposed on working families in Ontario?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I really do appreciate the references to matters arising in the last millennium. Let me just say that we have a challenge before us today, and that's to find a way to put our health care here in the province of Ontario on a vibrant and sustainable footing. We are rising to that challenge. We are going to find a way to make absolutely essential investments. It's not just a matter of money, and I'm sure my friend opposite appreciates this. It's a matter of reducing waiting times for things like cardiac care, cancer care, MRIs, CTs and cataracts. That is what we are determined to do. We're going to throw everything we can behind our effort to improve health care for Ontarians.

Mr Flaherty: I hear the Premier say this new tax on working families will improve access to health care. Premier, surely you've checked the Liberal records on that. Treasurer Nixon, May 17, 1989, and I quote: “The Social Assistance Review Committee indicated that it believes the elimination of Ontario health insurance plan premiums ‘is essential and would greatly improve access to health care.’” The elimination of the tax improves access to health care: 1989, Liberals of the day, Mr Peterson's government, Robert Nixon, Treasurer of Ontario.

What has happened in your mind that you've come to this strange conclusion that by imposing a tax on working families of Ontario, you are somehow going to improve access to health care, contrary to the Liberal thinking of 14 years ago?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm not going to speak to the specifics of the speculation with respect to the budget, which will be delivered in this House very shortly, but I can say that Ontarians have a very good sense of where we want to go in the matter of health care.

This Minister of Health is bringing a notion that has been missing from health care in Ontario for a long time. It's called accountability. We're going to get genuine results in terms of better patient care. We're already working to employ more full-time nurses in Ontario. We've already made some dramatic announcements with respect to how we're going to improve long-term care for our seniors. I am proud to say there is much more to come when we invest in health care in a way through this budget that will bring about still better performance for patients.

Mr Flaherty: Not only is the imposition of this tax on the working families of Ontario a breach of a promise, another broken promise by this Premier; it's also the imposition of a regressive tax. If you bothered to look back at what your Liberal government did back in 1985 to 1990, you would see on page 8 of the budget in 1989, “The elimination of OHIP premiums is a major benefit to

low-income individuals and families.” Of course it is, because it’s a regressive tax. Why in the world would you go backwards 15 years, impose a tax on the working families of Ontario, which you never mentioned during the election campaign, and flip-flop on the position that your Liberal government took 14 years ago?

Hon Mr McGuinty: As foreign a concept as this may be to our friends opposite, this budget is not motivated by political expediency. It is not motivated by short-term political interest. This budget is entirely motivated by our sincere desire to do the right thing for the people of Ontario, and that’s what we’re going to do.

Interjections.

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

CHINESE GATEWAY

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Minister of Tourism. Get ready.

Interjections.

Ms Churley: I’ll go get him.

Minister, Victoria, Vancouver, Montreal, San Francisco and London all have traditional Chinese gateways framing their popular Chinatown commercial areas. Thanks to the hard work of former councillor Jack Layton, myself, and in particular the Toronto East Chinatown chamber of commerce, we have a proposal to build the first Chinese archway—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I’d like to hear the member for Toronto-Danforth’s question.

Ms Churley: Thanks to the hard work of many of us in the community—

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Thanks to the hard work of Jack Layton, the former councillor of the area, myself and the east end Chinese chamber of commerce—

The Speaker: Question.

Ms Churley: —we have a proposal to build—wait a minute. They interrupted my question.

They have a proposal to build the first Chinese archway in Toronto. They are raising money in the community and the city of Toronto has provided some funding. Minister, the project is very important to the Chinese community in my riding, and indeed across the city. Will you pledge support to help build this Chinese archway in Toronto east Chinatown?

1400

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): I don’t know if I agree with who is important in this. I appreciate that the present member for Toronto-Danforth is very committed to this project. She has been kind enough to draw this to my attention in the past and has provided me with some additional information, including information about the CBC program on it, which was very good. I look forward to working with the provincial member for Toronto-Danforth and with whomever they choose as the federal member for

Danforth. It may even be Dennis Mills, the long-time, hard-working member, or it may be the individual my friend Marilyn Churley mentioned earlier. That’s the choice of the electorate.

I think it’s a good project. I want to work with her. I’ve committed to going down to the area with her and other officials to view the potential project there, because I think it’s got a lot of potential.

Ms Churley: Indeed, this is a very important project to the riding of Toronto-Danforth. I’ve had the privilege of working alongside the Chinese community and the east Chinatown chamber of commerce for a number of years now. They work very hard in the community. They work day and night in their small businesses. They were particularly devastated by the SARS outbreak, as you are well aware. I’m doing everything I can to assist them in getting the appropriate funding to get this project up and running.

China itself has donated, and sitting in storage right now are two huge hand-carved lions and material for the gates. It’s an incredible project that will not only help east-end Toronto, but will lead to improved tourism across the city of Toronto. I’m hoping you will join me in meeting with the Chinese Chamber of Commerce some time in the near future so we can discuss in more detail how the province of Ontario can be of some assistance.

Hon Mr Bradley: I would welcome the opportunity to meet with the officials who have been suggested by the member for Toronto-Danforth. She is quite right in knowing there is a huge potential in tourism not only for Toronto, but for the entire province. As people come to Toronto from around the world, and then into other destinations in this province, the project she has discussed is one that I think not only will contribute immensely to the Chinese heritage in Toronto—the Chinese community has been a hard-working and contributing community to Toronto—but it also has tremendous potential for tourism in this province, particularly as we reach out more and more to various points in the world to attract tourists to our area.

So I am delighted to meet with the officials of the Chinese community she has mentioned, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and others in her constituency. I know she will be there to accompany me to these meetings and introduce me to the appropriate people. I think it’s a winner for everybody.

CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. The Northeast Mental Health Centre is being forced to cut services in order to balance its budget, and the impact on children includes the following: the end of mental health services for children under six in Sudbury district, east Manitoulin Island and Espanola; the end of mental health supports for children in CAS foster care; the end of the district day treatment program, which permits high

school students to finish their credits while being treated for substance abuse; a reduction in services for children who are dually diagnosed with mental illness and developmental disability; and an increase in the wait time for preschool language and speech service from eight months to one year.

On April 2 the board wrote to your ministry, asking for \$436,000 to avoid these devastating cuts. On April 15, your ministry said no. Why, Minister, is your ministry turning its back on these children?

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): In fact, I'd like to reassure the honourable member that we will be looking at all of those programs right after today's budget. We have done consultations across the province. We're well aware of the need. We're well aware of how these programs were gutted over the last decade—no increases—and we have begun our planning, but we needed to wait for today to see the whole picture financially of the ministries, and we will go forward to solve the problems. I want to thank her for bringing this to my attention.

Ms Martel: Minister, the board made a very specific request on April 2 for \$436,000, and on April 15 your ministry said no. And I can tell you, because I read the letter, that your ministry gave no indication of any additional funding after the budget. The board knows that you made a promise during the election to increase funding for mental health. The board thought you meant what you said. That's why they wrote to you for the funding. If you don't do anything, these cuts will be devastating to children across the northeast, who, I remind you, are already very fragile because of their mental illness. The board has asked for \$436,000. Can you guarantee today that after today's budget that's what they are going to get?

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: As the honourable member knows—she was in cabinet—I cannot talk about what's in the budget or what's not in the budget. I can reassure her that we will be looking at all the programs, including the one she mentions today, with respect to funding. This is very serious. All these issues are very close to my heart, given what I did professionally before I came to this place, so I can reassure her that I will look at it very seriously right after the budget today.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Last week you put a moratorium in place on small rural water facilities so they won't have to comply with regulation 170 until December 31 of this year. You also instructed your ministry to review the regulation to, in your words, "examine different ways for smaller systems to meet the drinking water standards in an affordable fashion."

If these facilities need to comply by the end of the year, even though they won't know what they need to comply with until then, they will need to begin the process of engineering reports and upgrades now, regardless

of your moratorium. This moratorium seems to serve your purposes more than those of rural churches and halls you claim to protect. Minister, will you make this an effective moratorium by extending the implementation date to six months after your review so it can serve the people instead of your own political purposes?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I find it interesting that today the honourable member has some issue with the announcement that was made last week with regard to regulation 170, a flawed regulation, by the way, that was introduced by the Conservatives when they were government without consulting the partners in the province that it would affect.

Last week, I seem to recall, and I think Hansard would bear me out, the announcement that was made would be most welcome by the people of Ontario and that it was quite appropriate that there would be a moratorium until this government had taken the time to appropriately consult the people who would be impacted. So last week the member said it was great news, and this week he has a problem with it.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Minister, you know as well as I that a six-month moratorium does nothing but prolong the inevitable if there is no money available. Six months from now, we'll still have the same requirement for safe water in our small and rural communities. Six months from now, owners of small, privately run water systems will still be facing the same challenges. The problem is not time; it's cost. It's about time this government made a commitment. Minister, have you budgeted financial assistance for these small water systems?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: I'm very happy to speak to the commitment this government has made with respect to protecting water in Ontario. We are committed to making clean, safe water our priority. We are committed to listening to the concerns of the people of Ontario. We are committed to working with the people in our communities, with municipalities, with the Ontario Medical Association to ensure that the plan we bring forward will meet the needs of the people in the province and enable us to say with confidence that when someone turns on a tap in the province of Ontario, they can be assured that the water is safe. We are going to bring a practical, feasible plan, which is something that regulation 170, which they approved, did not do.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. I was thrilled to be part of last Friday's announcement in Ottawa that a combined \$600 million will be spent on building a light rail system from the north to the south of Ottawa, the largest-ever single amount spent on public transit in the city's history. This momentous announcement is good for the environment, the economy and the people of Ottawa, and will help make Ottawa a sus-

tainable city. It is a testament to what can be achieved when all three levels of government work together to get things done.

My question is, will the provincial government continue to work with other levels of government to build a light rail line to service over 80,000 residents in Orléans?

1410

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I was in Ottawa on Friday with Premier McGuinty, Defence Minister Pratt and Mayor Chiarelli to announce the expansion of the Ottawa transit system. I want you to know that this represents the largest intergovernmental investment in infrastructure in the history of the city of Ottawa. I was very pleased to be able to do that. I know all members of this House will be happy.

The transit expansion will provide a better quality of life for the region's residents by helping to reduce gridlock, by controlling urban sprawl and by protecting green space. The city of Ottawa, as part of the initial phase of the light rail project, will carry out an environmental assessment of the east-west section from Orléans to Kanata. The decisions on funding and on construction dates will follow the completion of the environmental assessment.

Mr McNeely: Residents of Orléans and area have 30% of the ridership on public transit when compared to the average of 70% across the city of Ottawa. One reason is a limited number of poor road connections from Orléans that all people depend on. The intersection of Highway 417 and Ottawa 174 is known as "the split." This interchange forces commuters to face extensive delays, and in the last two weeks alone has caused city-wide gridlock. Improving safety at the split and decreasing traffic demand by providing alternative road links to Ottawa South is part of the Queensway east planning study currently being worked on by the Ministry of Transportation. This study will be completed in 2005. Will the minister indicate to me in this House when dollars will be provided to implement the recommendations arising from the Queensway planning study and work to fix the split.

Hon Mr Caplan: The Minister of Transportation.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I want to thank my colleague from Ottawa-Orléans first, and I want to assure him that it's not either-or; we are committed to making an investment in public transit as well as in roads. The easterly study is well underway. As the honourable member indicated, it's supposed to be completed in late 2005. Based on those recommendations, we will move forward to see what needs to be done in that area.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question today is for the Minister of the Environment. Minister, I think you understand that the implementation of Justice

Dennis O'Connor's report on the Walkerton inquiry is going to cost all water systems stakeholders a lot of money. Recently you announced a deadline extension on regulation 170 for some of the water systems stakeholders.

In my riding of Simcoe North, I have many small municipal residential systems that have fewer than 100 hookups to private residences. The costs of upgrading the systems to regulation 170 are very prohibitive; the citizens simply cannot afford the upgrades.

Minister, will you provide funding to small municipal residential systems, and will you be providing a deadline extension to the municipalities that operate these systems?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): With regard to regulation 170, one of the reasons this government has decided to review the regulation is because the people of Ontario—people in communities, people who run and operate church halls and trailer parks and campgrounds—explained to us that the regulation was prohibitive and it would have required them to perhaps close down their facilities. We heard what they said. We have indicated that we believe we need to improve the regulation so that we can continue to ensure that the quality of the water is safe and that it can be provided in an affordable fashion. That is the undertaking we have given to the people of Ontario. That is the work that is underway now. We look forward over the summer, in the next months, to bringing back a regulation that will do exactly that.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question? The member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Supplementary, Mr Speaker.

As usual, the minister avoided the question completely. I understand the quandary the minister finds herself in, because certainly when we suggested applying common sense to these regulations, she was the first one to scream bloody murder with respect to any possible change.

Minister, you talk about being consultative in finding out what communities and others wish to see with respect to the final draft of the regulations. I would ask you about that with respect to the advisory council that you've appointed—people who will recommend the changes you're talking about. It doesn't appear, in any event, to include any rural municipal politicians or leaders who represent rural churches, community halls, legions, small tourist operations, campgrounds or bed-and-breakfast operations. These are the voices that everyone believes should be heard. Why are these groups being excluded from your advisory group?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: If the honourable member were familiar with the Walkerton inquiry report, the honourable member would be aware of the recommendations that speak to the advisory council for drinking water testing and standards. Clearly, O'Connor has told the people of Ontario in this document that we need a cast of scientists and professionals who are familiar

with drinking water standards and the science that is required to ensure that the water quality is all that it can be and should be. Those are the people who are on the advisory council. We make no apologies for the quality or calibre of people whom we have been able to attract to that particular body.

With respect to regulation 170, it is absolutely our intention—I have indicated so in this House—that we will consult with municipalities, campground representatives, trailer park representatives and also with the Ontario Medical Association to ensure that in the end we bring forward a regulation that will work in the province, unlike what that government did.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): My question is directed to the Minister of Health. Last week in this House, you stood in your place and promised the people of Niagara a decision on whether or not they would receive their own ambulance communications service. I've heard from many constituents in Niagara Falls who are concerned about the ambulance communications service and when it will be provided. Can you provide the House with a good-news update on this important service for the people of Niagara?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I would like to thank the member, in fact, all members from Niagara who lobbied hard on behalf of an initiative that is important to the people of Niagara region. On this point, I would say about our government that, as opposed to the hot air delivered on this subject from previous governments, we are going to deliver the cold, hard cash.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to write a letter to Niagara region, and we have approved Niagara region to operate its own ambulance communications service as part of a five-year pilot project to evaluate the effectiveness of that dispatch service as they are evolved to more local areas.

I want to say in particular that it was the hard work and lobbying of the members from Niagara Falls, Stoney Creek and St Catharines that were persuasive on this issue. I think it's also incredibly important to acknowledge the good, hard work of former regional chair Deb Zimmerman.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): Minister, we are delighted that you moved so responsibly to correct a perilous situation created by the former government in Niagara. As you know, the people of Niagara are currently served by the Hamilton central ambulance communications centre. What does it mean for the people who work there?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think one of the issues that we confront in making a decision like this is that in the Hamilton ambulance centre we've had people there who have been dramatically overworked in trying to provide services to a broad array of Ontarians. As a result, I can

say to the honourable member, to the people who work in that environment in Hamilton and to the people of Hamilton and that greater area that there will be no staff dislocation as a result of the announcement we are making today.

1420

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question to the Minister of Health is about the delisting of important health care services from OHIP.

Judy Trudel from Kapuskasing suffers from intercostal myalgia. It's a condition that weakens her spine and allows her disks to slip easily in and out of place. This condition can only be treated by chiropractic services and not by a standard MD. Judy has been seeing a chiropractor twice a week for four years and will have to remain in his care for the rest of her life, but she can't afford to pay for treatment if your government delists chiropractic services. My question to you is, if you delist chiropractic care from OHIP, what will happen to Judy and the thousands like her who rely on OHIP coverage for their health and well-being?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The member would know well from his long days around here, with respect to the service that he references, that the government of Ontario and OHIP contribution to that is limited to \$150 a year. I would say, on this important subject, that I'm not interested in speculating—we'll have our opportunity in the next bit to move forward. But at the end of the day, government is about making priorities and choosing the right priorities. We have a significant challenge to redress some of the experiences Ontarians have had with their health care system. What they'll see from our government today is a strong commitment to a better medicare system to the benefit of the people of Ontario.

Mr Bisson: I've got to tell you, days are going to be a lot longer when it comes to the health care needs she is going to have when you delist those services. You talk about governments having to choose priorities. This woman has no choice. She has a medical condition that needs treatment and your government is going to delist it. How can you look at yourself in the mirror in the morning when you know that people like her are going to be without services that affect their ability to go through their daily lives?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'd say to the honourable member that I have no difficulty looking at myself in the mirror any morning, because I realize I get prettier by the day. I'm playing. This is a serious subject; I don't mean to make light.

I say to the honourable member that every single day we are forced to make difficult decisions. The difficult decisions we are making are on the basis of providing a better-quality health care system to Ontarians. With respect to the service the member was specifically asking about, I remind him that the government his party led in

this province was involved in some of those tough decisions too. At the end of the day, we will send a very strong message about the priorities we're working around in Ontario, things like the wait-time challenges the Premier spoke about earlier and our commitment to drive more care to the community level in the form of family health teams that will offer comprehensive care, which could very well include the services you've referenced in your question.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): My question is for the Premier. Gas prices are over the top, and they continue to rise each and every day. People and businesses in Ontario can't afford the huge increases. Yesterday, your Minister of Tourism said in this House that your Minister of Energy is "monitoring this matter carefully and is prepared to take whatever action he deems appropriate at the appropriate time." Premier, how high will you let gas prices climb before your government, and I reiterate, "takes whatever action" it "deems appropriate"?

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

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): We are very concerned about the price of gasoline. The impact of rising gasoline prices on our economy is very serious. Quite apart from the distress it causes drivers, the potential impacts of the price rises affect every sector of our economy. This government is watching carefully, and we intend to continue to monitor this situation to ensure that we are able to deal with this problem, which is affecting most of the western world.

Mr Tascona: Premier, the time is now and the solution you are looking for is right here before the House. It is Bill 48, my private member's bill, the gas pricing freeze act. Will you stand up today and make a commitment to all the suffering businesses and taxpayers who are being gouged at the pump as a result of the outrageous price of gas, pass my Bill 48 and do the right thing for the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr Duncan: Let me tell you what his government did when they were in office. They would like to forget the last eight years, but we won't forget the last eight years, and certainly people who use gasoline. They appointed the gas busters, and Mr O'Toole was one of those gas busters. They did a report and that report made 14 recommendations. They implemented one of them, and that involved consultation. Now let me tell you what the gas busters said:

"We believe, however, that the heart of the solution to high and volatile gas prices lies in a more competitive marketplace. Only the federal government has the jurisdiction"—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. It's my jurisdiction. It's a new question now.

SPORT FISHING

Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin): I have a question for the Minister of Tourism and Recreation. As the May long weekend approaches and Ontario's anglers emerge for the summer fishing season, many of my constituents are wondering where they can turn to for information on their favourite sport. As the Minister of Tourism and Recreation, what are you doing to ensure that anglers from across the province and around the world are made aware of the world-class opportunities available to them here in Ontario?

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Excellent question, and I happen to have a response that I think the member will like. I'm pleased to announce that the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp has entered into a contractual agreement for 2004-05 with four leading angling television companies to promote Ontario. These four companies—Real Fishing, Going Fishing TV, Fish'n Canada and Canadian Sportfishing—will produce a number of Ontario angling content shows in which celebrities will have the opportunity to promote Ontario's competitive edge in angling, the regional location of the lake on which the show is taking place, as well as specific details of the local fishing tactics that the viewer can use to catch fish.

This is great news for the angling community in Ontario as they prepare to enjoy another wonderful summer season.

Mr Brown: I'm pleased that we are doing everything we can to promote angling in the province of Ontario. This would appear to be an area that provides a merger between the two aspects of your portfolio: tourism and recreation. Aside from these valuable television programs, what else is this government doing to ensure that those communities that enjoy the sport of fishing will also reap the benefits of tourism dollars generated by visiting anglers?

Hon Mr Bradley: My ministry recognizes the importance of angling as a sport and as a tourism industry. That is why the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp has developed an aggressive angling promotional campaign to attract visitors to Ontario. The Ontario angling shows will each contain one 30-second commercial that will focus on topics central to fishing in this great province. At the conclusion of each commercial, the viewer will be provided with a Web site and a 1-800 number that will provide more information on angling in Ontario.

CONSERVATION

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. As you know, the general government committee has had a series of deputations on Bill 27, the greenbelt legislation, and several very clear themes have emerged. One important and compelling theme has been if you save the farmer, the farmer will help save the land. We've heard that theme from groups as diverse as the Ontario Tender Fruit Producers'

Marketing Board, the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and environmental groups like Earthroots and PALS.

Last Thursday, your Greenbelt Task Force called upon you to create a provincial task force on agriculture in support of the greenbelt. How will you commit to helping farmers achieve viability on farms affected by the greenbelt legislation in particular, and what will you announce before the general government committee reports back to the Legislature?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): The legislative committee that's looking into the greenbelt commission has had some very extensive hearings. They've heard from a wide variety of individuals. They realize full well, as does the Greenbelt Task Force, that the agricultural component of the greenbelt is extremely important.

As has been indicated over and over again, we want to make sure that agriculture remains a viable institution within the greenbelt area. In everything the committee will do and everything the Greenbelt Task Force will do, one of its prime aims is to make sure that happens. I can give that guarantee to this member and the House in general.

1430

Mr Hudak: I appreciate the minister's answer. All members of the committee agree that if we can help save the farmer, the farmer will help save the land.

I think it's important now for us to move forward with details, because farmers are wondering how you're going to help them manage the viability of their farms. One suggestion is a task force. Your own greenbelt advisory committee has recommended that. We certainly heard that from many of those committees. I'd like to know if you'll commit at this time to forming that task force before the committee reports back to the Legislature.

Secondly, municipalities like Lincoln, Hampton and Clarington are concerned that if their boundaries are boxed in and if they don't have the opportunity to create jobs for the local citizens, how then can they afford increases in infrastructure, in benefits like local roads, water and sewer? What also will you do for municipalities, in addition to local farmers?

Hon Mr Gerretsen: First of all, the Greenbelt Task Force has been looking at certain criteria by which the definition of the ultimate greenbelt can be measured; that's number one. Agriculture is an extremely important component of that. That has been recognized throughout the entire hearings.

Obviously, once the Greenbelt Task Force has issued its report, which we hope to have by the end of June, we will then try to implement that, in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture. I can tell you, this Minister of Agriculture has had a tremendous interest in what's going on in the greenbelt and the discussions that are taking place, because he is assured, as I am, as Minister of Municipal Affairs, that we want to make sure that agriculture remains viable within the greenbelt area. That's one of the reasons why the Greenbelt Task Force and the greenbelt act were put in place in the first place.

ROAD AND BOATING SAFETY

Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the Honourable Monte Kwinter. This week, May 17 to May 24, marks Canada Road Safety Week, and includes the Victoria Day long weekend. Unfortunately, sir, such long weekends are notorious for an increase in incidents of drunk driving. To their credit, Labatt and Molson breweries, both of which I am proud to have in my riding, wage campaigns annually on the responsible use of alcohol. Minister, what steps is the government of Ontario taking to ensure that roads are safe this weekend from impaired drivers?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I thank the member from Etobicoke North for his question. You should know that Ontario roads are among the safest in North America. Having said that, we have a situation that occurs every year. Coming up, we've got Canada Road Safety Week. We've got the long weekend, the first long weekend of the summer. Notwithstanding all the work we do, both in conjunction with the Ministry of Transportation and my ministry, we still have people who somehow or other think it's acceptable to drink and drive. When they do that, they put themselves and others at risk.

We contribute \$1.2 million a year to the RIDE program to make sure that we try to identify those people who are at risk because of alcohol abuse. We have implemented many other programs, educational programs, stiffer fines—all of these things to ensure that what should be a pleasurable weekend doesn't turn into a disaster for citizens of this province.

Mr Qaadri: Thank you for the outline and summary of the government's initiatives. But we must remember that roadways are not the only place where impaired drivers are found. For example, over 40% of power-boating fatalities have alcohol as a factor. In fact, National Safe Boating Week begins this Saturday. Minister Kwinter, what are the province's police forces doing to remind Ontarians that drinking and boating are a dangerous combination?

Hon Mr Kwinter: Again the member from Etobicoke North has raised a very important issue. We have a situation where people who use boats as a recreational facility somehow or other think they don't have the same dangers and problems that drivers have when they drink. As a result, the OPP patrols 95% of the waterways in Ontario. They have a RIDE program similar to the program we have for automobiles. Notwithstanding that, in 2003 we had seven fatalities that were alcohol related and over 1,200 alcohol-related charges, a direct result of people driving boats under the influence of alcohol.

As a former chairman of the Toronto Harbour Commission and as a boater myself, I want to tell the people of Ontario that boating is supposed to be a recreational facility where they and their children can enjoy the beautiful physical attributes of Ontario. To have it marred

by people who abuse alcohol is really unacceptable, and we are doing whatever we can to stamp it out.

SENIOR CITIZENS' HOUSING

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question for the Minister of Health. Patricia Gardens is a supportive housing complex in Dryden. Since August 2003, there has been an ongoing labour dispute because the workers there believe the board's strategy to try to reduce supportive services is not in the best interests of the residents. They know that with minimal supervision and intervention, the residents are able to live independently. Without that, many of those residents would be forced into long-term-care beds. In Dryden there are already 122 people on a waiting list for long-term-care beds, so those people who are going to need support are going to end up in an acute care bed in the hospital.

Minister, will you direct your staff to intervene at Patricia Gardens so that those important housing services will be maintained?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the question from the honourable member. I'm going to take the word "intervene" out, because there's a labour issue there, and I'm going to make this commitment to the honourable member: I spoke to the local MPP about this subject. I have put a request in to the ministry to get back to me with an options report. I don't have that on my desk yet. But on the central issue at hand here, which is making sure we enhance, and don't allow to be diminished, the supply of supportive housing environments in that community, I assure her and the local community that that is the resolution we are working toward.

Ms Martel: The local MPP did raise this with you, but I want to raise a broader question, because I'm certain that Dryden isn't the only community with supportive housing units and I'm certain that local boards in many other communities are making the same decision to cut those kinds of services, which will force seniors into long-term-care beds.

There was no announcement of funding for supportive housing services in your more general announcement regarding long-term care. So can you tell me if the funding to support these types of services will be made from that allocation, and if not, where will the money come from to support seniors who want to be independent and live in supportive housing?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm not in a position to say as much on this subject as I might in a day or so—it was never intended to be lumped in with long-term care. But on the central issue of the independence of our seniors, I think we're all in agreement that the longer people can have that independence before the step of arriving in a long-term-care facility is a priority for all of us. It's on that basis that we are pursuing this policy across Ontario, and I can assure the member that as these situations crop up, where we've got existing supports in place that are at risk of being diminished or removed altogether, it will be

our position to work very hard to hold on to what we've already got in communities and to look for other opportunities for expansion over time.

SEX OFFENDERS

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Minister of Community Safety. Sixteen years ago, 11-year-old Christopher Stephenson was murdered by a sexual predator on statutory release, a federal prisoner. As you know, there was an inquest into Christopher's death that led to many positive changes and many positive initiatives at both the federal and provincial levels, including the establishment of Ontario's sex offender registry.

We now know of three young men murdered in Mississauga. The accused was a sexual predator, Douglas Moore. With respect to the last missing young man, René Charlebois, 15 years of age, whose body has now been found, would you consider—and as the minister you have the authority to do so—calling for an inquest into René's death?

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member, who was a former minister, would know that a minister has never in the history of this province called for an inquest or directed the office of the chief coroner to conduct that. There's no question that I have the authority to do it, but I also have confidence that the professionals, the chief coroner and his staff, have the ability to determine when an inquest is necessary. I say to him that I am not at this stage prepared to be the first ever to call for an inquest and to override the authority of the chief coroner.

1440

Mr Runciman: Knowing the chief coroner quite well, I don't think he would be offended. Hopefully, and if nothing else, this question and the minister's response will encourage him to take a look at this situation, because there are certainly a great many questions surrounding Mr Moore's presence in Mississauga: the fact that the community was not informed of his presence; the fact that he lived across from a school; the fact that he was mixing with teens, and that he was babysitting.

For a variety of reasons, there was never a dangerous offender application pursued with this individual. There is a whole series of questions surrounding this case which call out for an inquest, which could lead to many positive changes in terms of improving public safety, and make some sense, I suggest, out of the deaths of these three young men which could perhaps preclude the murder of a young man in the future by a sexual predator in Ontario.

I encourage the minister to give this very careful consideration.

Hon Mr Kwinter: I'm sure the member knows that the chief coroner is investigating that particular incident. After his investigation is complete, he will make the determination as to whether there should be an inquest. If he determines that there should be, then of course it will happen. If he determines that there is no cause to have it,

then I will accept his recommendation because, as I said, he is a professional. He is the person I have confidence in, and it's up to him to make that determination.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): My question is for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. Mississauga West constituents tell me of their frustration in obtaining services and information from government. In years past, I shared in this frustration myself when, as a business person, I tried to obtain these services.

Consumers frequently have to go to two or more government offices to obtain documents and services. Small businesses complain of having to provide registration information multiple times in order to receive basic government services. Surely this administrative burden on businesses and individuals can be streamlined.

Minister, what is the ministry doing to help Ontarians receive basic government services more easily?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Last Thursday, I was delighted, on behalf of the Premier, to be in Brockville, where we signed an historic agreement with the federal government. For the first time, the federal government and the province of Ontario will be co-operating in a series of agreements to better deliver services to the public through a joint public service delivery program.

I want to pay special tribute to the honourable member from Kitchener Centre, John Milloy, who is the parliamentary assistant to the Premier. He did a lot of very good work in terms of getting to the agreement so we can provide the kind of level of service to the constituents regardless of what level they're working toward, whether it's the provincial, municipal or federal level, to create a one-stop shopping environment so that individuals don't have to take a civics lesson to figure out who is in charge of what.

Mr Delaney: Minister, different levels of government provide many services that consumers and businesses use. For example, a small restaurant might need a liquor licence, which they obtain from the provincial government, but then has to line up at city hall to obtain a visitor parking permit. The same also applies to consumers when they obtain services at the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government.

Minister, what can be done to integrate service delivery among the three levels of government?

Hon Mr Watson: The reality is that for too many years under the previous regime there was so much finger pointing and buck-passing that they did not realize it is in the best interests of all taxpayers in Ontario to work together so that perhaps we can see one day in the not-too-distant future when individuals can go into a city hall, perhaps, and apply for an application for a building permit, or perhaps they can get a provincial or federal document all under the auspices of serving the people.

It's not about turf protection; it's about making sure that the individuals have unfettered access to those

government services in an efficient fashion. We're working with the federal government, we're working with our municipal partners to create a new era of co-operation in the province of Ontario.

WASTE DISPOSAL

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): To the Minister of the Environment: This is the time of year when people are picking up sticks and branches and pruning trees. What percentage of Toronto-area garbage, garbage that's exported to Michigan, contains yard waste?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm always surprised when I get a question like that from the—

Hon James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism and Recreation): Any environment question from a Tory.

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: Well, yes. As my colleague the Minister of Tourism said, we're always surprised when we get questions about the environment from the opposition, because they certainly weren't particularly interested in the environment when they were the government.

In any case, for the information of the honourable member, municipal solid waste is a responsibility of municipalities. Quite frankly, I don't have that figure, nor do I know the percentage of recyclables in the waste stream of the city of Kingston, even my own municipality of Tweed, because it is not a provincial responsibility; it is a responsibility of municipalities. I have great faith that municipalities are going to work with this government to assist us to meet our 60% diversion goal.

Mr Barrett: Thank you, Minister. We can work together. We will get an answer to that question, the reason being, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has found that more than 25% of the waste being imported from Ontario into Michigan contains yard waste: twigs and branches and leaves and bark.

Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow is very concerned about the import of the Asian long-horned beetle in Toronto garbage and in this yard waste to Michigan. Minister, with the threats of a US border closure to Toronto trash, including trash with yard waste, these threats are growing every day. Have you spoken with Senator Stabenow about this? Second, what steps have you taken to ensure that Toronto's garbage is not exporting the Asian long-horned beetle to Michigan?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: I've had the opportunity to speak with Mayor David Miller, who would say to me that the city of Toronto is confident that it will be able to continue to meet the new regulations that have been put in place by the state of Michigan.

I have also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from Michigan to talk about environmental policies: air policies, water policies and waste management policies. Those representatives were very encouraged to hear that there is finally a government in this province that is looking to improve the framework to

assist municipalities so that they can manage their municipal solid waste issues more easily and in a more timely way.

So I've had some very good interaction with representatives from the city of Toronto and representatives from the state of Michigan, and I believe that Toronto and Michigan will continue to have a very good business relationship.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I just want to take a moment to recognize Terrence Young, former member from Halton Centre in the 36th Parliament, and another former member, Hugh O'Neil from Quinte in the 32nd to 35th Parliaments. Welcome.

PETITIONS

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have 8,000 more signatures today, bringing my total to 30,000 from the schedule 5 physiotherapy clinic clients. This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"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 has my signature in support as well.

1450

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

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

"Whereas auto insurance rates continue to skyrocket, contrary to the official position of the Liberal government and the insurance industry; and

"Whereas more and more drivers are being cut off by their insurance companies for no valid reason and are being dumped into the Facility Association; and

"Whereas all attempts to regulate the auto insurance industry have failed;

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

"That the Ontario government immediately introduce legislation that would bring to Ontario a public, not-for-profit automobile insurance program similar to the ones

currently in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia."

Signed by thousands, and I've signed it as well.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the previous Speaker of the Legislative Assembly criticized the actions of the Conservative government and is now running ... for the federal Liberal Party; and

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

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

Holy mackerel, Mr Speaker, and I've signed that.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a petition that's been sent to me by Toula Reppas and Judy Gelman of the Schedule Five Physiotherapy Association, which 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 has been signed by 9,000 Ontario residents. I agree with the petitioners. I support them entirely.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition and it's quite timely as it refers to today's budget. It reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas the previous government in 2003 showed disrespect for our public institutions and the people of

Ontario by presenting a budget inside a private, for-profit auto parts factory; and

“Whereas the Dalton McGuinty government and the current Minister of Finance will be presenting the 2004 budget inside the Legislature on May 18, 2004;

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

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

LONG-TERM CARE

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

“Whereas the numbers of Ontario citizens requiring long-term care is increasing and the funding of that care is inadequate;

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

“(1) to examine the long-term-care situation in the province with an eye to commit to improvements;

“(2) to increase the budgetary portfolio for long-term-care facilities, especially in the areas of nursing care and dietary requirements; and

“(3) to safeguard the very people who elected you from increases in long-term-care accommodation rates, thereby allowing the citizens of Ontario to age gracefully and with dignity and integrity under your careful watch.”

I’ve affixed my signature as well.

PRIMARY CARE

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

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

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

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

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

“To work with representatives of the local community to ensure that all residents of Peterborough have access to an appropriate primary care provider through the timely

implementation of the proposed integrated primary care model, as this model provides appropriate and equitable compensation for family physicians while incorporating sufficient interdisciplinary health care providers, community linkages and appropriate administrative, infrastructure and information technology supports to enable health professionals to enjoy a more realistic, healthy work-life balance.”

I’ll affix my signature to this.

RETAIL SALES TAX

Mr John O’Toole (Durham): It’s my pleasure to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the sale of used furniture and household wares by charities is currently subject to provincial retail sales tax under the Retail Sales Tax Act; and

“Whereas the collection of RST on used goods sold by charities places an additional burden on the charities collecting the tax and increases the price of the product” to the consumer; “and

“Whereas the collection of RST under these circumstances amounts to double taxation because owners of the donated goods have already paid the original retail sales tax; and

“Whereas the federal government does not require charities to pay goods and services tax (GST) on used items donated to charities for resale;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, request the Ontario Legislature to take immediate action to remove the RST from used furniture, housewares and all used goods donated for resale to charitable organizations.”

I am pleased to sign this in support of those people working to help the most vulnerable, and present it to Sameer.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition and affix my signature thereto.

LIQUOR CONTROL BOARD OF ONTARIO

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from constituents in Parry Sound-Muskoka, "Ontarians Against LCBO Privatization":

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) collects over \$1 billion in taxes to support a wide range of important government social programs, services and capital projects; and

"Whereas the LCBO operates nearly 600 stores across the province, offering products from around the world; and

"Whereas the LCBO and its employees provide professional, courteous service;

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

"That Dalton McGuinty abandon his plan to privatize the Liquor Control Board of Ontario."

I support this petition and affix my signature.

TFO

Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): J'ai une pétition qui contient plus de 200 noms provenant des citoyens et citoyennes d'Ottawa et de Vanier.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario:

« Attendu que TFO est la seule télévision qui diffuse pleinement, à partir de l'Ontario, des émissions en français qui s'adressent spécifiquement à la collectivité francophone;

« Attendu que TFO reflète la réalisation de nos communautés en milieu minoritaire;

« Attendu que TFO nous informe dans notre langue;

« Attendu que TFO est un outil pédagogique unique en Ontario;

« Attendu que TFO fournit aux écoles de langue française une importante partie du matériel dont elles ont besoin pour leur enseignement;

« Attendu que TFO est trop précieuse pour être sacrifiée au déficit provincial;

« Nous, soussignés, demandons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de ne pas privatiser notre télévision publique ontarienne et de ne pas en réduire le budget. »

J'y ajoute ma signature avec plaisir.

TOBACCO TAX

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): This petition is timely, given that we are within an hour of hearing the budget. It's titled "We Reject Tobacco Tax Hikes and a Smoke-Free Ontario."

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty has stated that he will increase tobacco taxes by \$10 a carton, force store owners to hide tobacco products behind a curtain, and support a smoke-free Ontario; and

"Whereas history has proven that increases in tobacco taxes cause increases in the" underground "trade for illegal black-market tobacco whose contents are neither regulated nor inspected; and

"Whereas forcing store owners to hide their tobacco displays unduly punishes both store owners and consumers for the" transition "of what remains a legal product;

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

"That the government of Ontario reject the tobacco tax hike, reject the smoke-free Ontario, reject the ban on tobacco displays and protect the rights of consumers to purchase a legal, regulated product."

1500

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): This is a petition that is written to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

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

I sign my name to this petition.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to present a petition on physiotherapy. It reads as follows:

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

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

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

I affix my signature in support.

ONTARIO BUDGET

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

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

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

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

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

I’ll affix my name to this petition.

LANDFILL

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): Instead of talking about where this budget’s being read, maybe we can petition about clean water.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, call upon the government of Ontario and the Ministry of the Environment to immediately place a moratorium on the development of site 41 until the water source protection legislation is imple-

mented in Ontario. We believe the legislation will definitely affect the design of site 41 and the nearby water sources.”

I’m pleased to sign my name to that.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That’s the end of the petitions.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Mr Speaker, I believe we have unanimous consent to suspend proceedings until 4 pm.

The Speaker: Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

The proceedings are therefore suspended until 4 pm. The bells will then ring for five minutes to recall the members.

The House suspended proceedings from 1504 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2004 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L’ONTARIO DE 2004

Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance): I move—*Applause.*

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Before the minister gives his presentation, may I warn the members in the galleries not to partake in the applause and allow the Minister of Finance to give his presentation.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I move, seconded by Mr McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I’m quite sure that all members of Parliament know that decorum is one of the things that we would respect and would allow for the proceedings.

Mr Sorbara, seconded by Mr McGuinty, has moved that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government. I would ask now the indulgence of the House to allow the pages to distribute the packages.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Mr Speaker, 14 years ago, my friend and colleague Bob Nixon rose in this chamber to deliver a budget. He was, until today, the last Liberal finance minister to do so. And so it is with tremendous pride that I stand as the Minister of Finance in Premier Dalton McGuinty’s new Liberal government to present a budget that sets out a comprehensive four-year plan: a plan for growth, a plan for prosperity, a plan for better health care and a plan for better education for our kids.

Notre plan favorisera la croissance, la prospérité, l’amélioration des services de santé et une meilleure éducation pour nos enfants.

On October 2, the people of this province voted for change. Today this government is delivering the plan for change.

Mr Speaker, the problems that we inherited are well known: a large fiscal deficit, deterioration of core public services, overcrowded classrooms and crumbling

schools, a shortage of doctors and nurses, cities and towns struggling to meet and deliver basic community needs and services, and a steady decline in Ontario's infrastructure. These deficits, sir, are not our legacy, but they are our responsibility, and we're assuming our responsibility. And in that regard, we are assuming our responsibility to be prudent managers of the public purse.

We cancelled the private school tax credit so we could invest in public schools. We cancelled a tax credit for some seniors so that we could improve services for all seniors. We said no to irresponsible tax cuts for some so that we could assume our responsibility to provide public services for all.

We introduced legislation to ban the waste of taxpayers' dollars on partisan political advertising, and to give the Provincial Auditor the power to examine not just government ministries, but also hospitals, school boards, colleges and universities.

This government said no to a pay hike for MPPs, and with this budget, this government accepts a pay cut for cabinet ministers.

Our plan flat-lines or reduces the operating budget of some 15 ministries so that we can provide historic new investments in Ontarians' most important priorities: health care and education.

Au cours des derniers mois, nous avons mené dans toute la province de vastes consultations au sujet de l'avenir de l'Ontario. Les citoyens se sont exprimés clairement et avec passion.

Over the past many months, sir, we consulted extensively with the people of Ontario. They spoke to us with clarity and passion. They spoke about the need to transform health care. They spoke about the importance of education. They spoke about building stronger communities. They spoke about helping Ontario's most vulnerable. They spoke to us about a plan that would lay the foundation for economic sustainability and growth.

1610

In this budget we speak and we respond to the people about their aspirations. It is a budget by Ontarians, about Ontarians, for Ontarians. It is rooted in a fundamentally different approach. For the first time, a government of Ontario is presenting a detailed four-year fiscal plan.

It's a plan to balance the budget and return the province to financial health. It's a plan to invest in health and education to produce concrete results. It's a plan to include better access to primary health care, shorter waiting times for critical services and smaller class sizes. It's a plan to foster economic growth and innovation through investments in education, training, health and infrastructure.

But every budget is about choices. We had to make two very important choices that were especially difficult. The first is to increase revenues, and the second is to balance the budget over a number of years.

They were choices that were inconsistent with our election commitments, and we openly acknowledge that. However, it would simply not have been possible to deliver a balanced budget this year without destabilizing

vital public services and perhaps even the economy itself. Such an approach would have been irresponsible, and we rejected it.

Likewise, none of us can afford to believe any longer that the problems in our health care system, from ever longer waiting times, to the lack of family doctors, to deteriorating long-term care—none of these can be solved without additional revenue. And so, to shorten wait times, to provide more doctors and nurses, to deliver results for patients, we are proposing an Ontario health premium. The premium would be based on income, and it would be dedicated entirely to health.

Our plan is clear: It is to make Ontario a leader in economic growth, with vital public services and a higher quality of life. This plan calls for a responsible mix of investment, revenue generation, cost cutting and economic growth. It calls for some difficult choices. We've made them, because they are the right choices.

I'd like to speak about health care.

We live in a province that has been a leader in publicly funded health care in the past, and we need to be leaders again. On the national stage, our Premier has been demonstrating tremendous leadership, working toward a new national health care deal.

But I say to you that the health care needs of our people cannot wait. So we've been diligent in developing a four-year plan for better health care throughout the province. It will shorten wait times, it will focus on patients' needs, it will increase the number of doctors and nurses, it will deliver results and it will have the resources it needs to do this work.

In that regard, I am announcing today that by 2007-08, we will provide an additional 36,000 heart procedures per year. We will provide an additional 2,300 joint replacements each year. Beginning next year, we will be funding nine new MRI and CT sites, and an additional 9,000 cataract surgeries per year.

I want to talk about primary care. In study after study, year after year, we have been told that change in health care begins with change in primary care. We're going to provide that change by creating family health teams: doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners working alongside other health care professionals, providing the best in round-the-clock health care.

For 2004-05, we'll invest more than \$600 million to reform and support primary health care in Ontario. Over the next four years, we will establish 150 family health teams around the province. The 54 existing community health centres will receive an additional \$14 million this year, and we will expand the number of centres over the course of our mandate. Our investment in primary care this year will ensure care for up to 167,000 Ontarians who today cannot find a doctor.

I want to talk about home care. In his landmark report on Canada's health care system, Roy Romanow called home care the next essential service. We agree that home care is a critical component of our health care system. Our plan will provide home care for an additional 95,700 Ontarians by the end of our mandate. It will provide

compassionate end-of-life care to another 6,000 Ontarians in their homes by 2007-08. This expansion of home care will require an additional investment of \$88 million this year, and that will rise to \$448 million over the course of our mandate.

Our seniors have made a unique investment in this province. So when they can no longer stay in their homes, they deserve long-term care that is the best care. We will ensure the safety and the dignity of our seniors with an additional investment of some \$406 million in long-term-care facilities, growing to \$546 million by 2007-08. This is going to dramatically improve the quality of care for thousands of Ontarians already in long-term-care facilities. As my colleague the wonderful George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, announced last week, we will hire 2,000 new staff, including 600 nurses, in our effort to improve long-term care. As well, in 2004-05, we'll open an additional 3,760 long-term-care beds.

Too many Ontarians suffer from mental health problems, and far too many of them suffer alone. Our four-year plan provides community-based mental health services to an additional 78,600 Ontarians.

A word about hospitals: While improving community care, we know there will always be a need for high-quality care provided in a hospital. Our hospitals have asked for multi-year funding so that they can plan for the long-term needs of their communities. They will receive increases that average 3.4% between 2003-04 and 2007-08. By putting more resources into community and home care, and by focusing more on prevention, we will enable our hospitals to focus more on those with acute needs.

1620

Like most health care systems, ours is much better at treating illnesses than preventing them. We want to shift the focus to healthy living and illness prevention. This is the very best way to lower the cost curves in health care.

We will provide free vaccinations to children for chicken pox, meningitis and pneumonia. We will introduce legislation that will make all workplaces and public places in this province smoke-free by 2007.

We know there are illnesses we must prevent. And in the wake of SARS and West Nile disease, we know as well that there may well be other diseases out there that we haven't heard of yet. Therefore, our investment in public health will increase immediately to \$273 million this year, and that will grow to \$469 million by 2007-08.

Today public health costs are equally shared between the province and the municipalities. Our plan increases the province's share of public health funding to 75% by 2007-08.

We will be acting, as well, to ensure we have the doctors and nurses we need. By 2007-08, the number of assessment and training positions for international medical graduates will double. So will the number of clinical education spaces for nurse practitioners. Over the next four years, we will create 8,000 new full-time nursing positions. To protect nurses on the job today from injury, we will purchase 12,000 bed lifts for hospitals and long-term-care facilities in this very year. But most import-

antly, we will treat our nurses and all health care practitioners with respect.

These initiatives signal a substantial reorientation of health care toward a patient-focused, results-driven system that is sustainable. There will be more hospital beds available sooner for important procedures because more patients will be treated in home and community care. Changing the system will shorten wait times. So will the investments I have announced for those procedures Ontarians want and need the most: more doctors and nurses, better primary care, shorter wait times. That adds up to a healthier Ontario, but getting there won't be easy.

Today 45% of the province's program spending goes to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. For the past five years, health care budgets in Ontario have grown by an average of 8% per year. We must begin to bring these costs under control. To improve cancer care, cardiac care, home care and long-term care, we have had to delist less critical services. Beginning this fall, the province will no longer cover the cost of routine optometry examinations, except for seniors and Ontarians under the age of 20. We will no longer cover chiropractic and physiotherapy services, although seniors will continue to receive physiotherapy through home care and long-term-care facilities. These were not easy choices, but we believe they are the responsible choices.

Et, monsieur le Président, le choix le plus difficile mais le plus responsable est de demander aux Ontariennes et Ontariens de payer une contribution-santé.

Mr Speaker, the most difficult, and most responsible, choice is to ask Ontarians to pay the Ontario health premium.

Sir, you know, I know and we know that this is something we promised not to do.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): You've lied. You've lied. Call a referendum.

The Speaker: Order. I'm going to ask the member from Nepean-Carleton to control his language.

Hon Mr Sorbara: Mr Speaker, as I said, you know and I know that this is something we promised not to do. But in the context of the deficit, to keep our promise to improve health care, to serve a growing and aging population, when wait times are too long and the pressure on public health is greater than ever, it is the right thing to do. It's the fairest way to fund the necessary investments we need.

The premium would be based on income. People with the lowest incomes would pay nothing at all. Our highest earners would pay \$900 a month.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): A year.

Hon Mr Sorbara: That's \$900 a year. Thank you for that correction. That tax almost got very big indeed.

A family with two children and a combined income of \$60,000 would pay \$50 per month.

Mr Baird: Shame. Shame on you.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I say to my friend from Nepean-Carleton, he is embarrassing himself, his party and this Parliament.

Mr Baird: At least I don't lie.

Hon Mr Sorbara: That does represent—
Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I have warned the member from Nepean-Carleton, and he insists on using a word that he knows is unparliamentary. I'm going to have to name the member, and those who would like to go could also go.

Mr Baird was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon Mr Sorbara: As I was saying, a family with two children and a combined income of \$60,000 would pay about \$50 a month.

That does represent an additional cost for Ontario families, who work hard to make ends meet. We do not minimize that in the least. But when we weighed it against the greater burden caused by longer waits for cardiac care or cancer care, the endless search for a family doctor and the incredible burden that would be placed on our children if we do not act today to make medicare sustainable, the choice was clear.

1630

Ontarians would begin to pay the premium on July 1. For this fiscal year, it would generate \$1.6 billion. That would partially offset the \$2.4-billion increase that we're spending on health in this year. In short, every single cent from this premium will be invested in health care. Every cent of this premium will be used to provide better results in our health care system.

When Ontarians chose change, they certainly had public education in mind. Today, too many of our sons and daughters are struggling to succeed in school, and far too many are dropping out of high school or failing to continue their education in a college or university, a job placement or an apprenticeship program. We don't consider that remotely acceptable. The budget that I am presenting today includes historic new investments in education within our four-year plan. These investments are being directed with one overriding result in mind, and that is better student achievement.

Judging from the results of province-wide tests given in grades 3 and 6, only about half of our students are meeting the provincial standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Our plan for public education sets a very ambitious new standard, moving to 75% in our first mandate. How are we going to get there? We'll start with smaller class sizes in the all-important early years. We'll phase in a cap of 20 children per class from junior kindergarten to grade 3 over the first four years of our mandate.

Smaller class sizes will translate into more teachers. I'm announcing today that we are providing funding for training spaces for 1,000 additional new teachers in 2005-06. We will place a lead teacher in literacy and one for numeracy in every elementary school in the province to encourage the use of effective teaching technology. This will require the training of 4,000 new lead teachers, and that will double to 8,000 the number of specialists trained in best practices.

We will establish a literacy and numeracy secretariat to ensure that schools, teachers and most importantly,

students, get the supports they need when they need them. We will send turnaround teams of experts into struggling schools, increasing from 42 to more than 100 the number of schools that receive this extra support.

We'll be investing substantially in school repairs, in textbooks and in other resources. My colleague Gerard Kennedy, the Minister of Education, will be making more detailed announcements of these initiatives in the very near future, but the Premier has three new Rs for education in Ontario. The first is results, and we're going to deliver those results. The second is respect; our partners in education deserve nothing less. The third is responsibility, and I'm referring to our responsibility as a government to provide the necessary resources to achieve better results. That's why we will be investing an additional \$2.1 billion over the next four years in our schools and their students.

By 2007-08, we will have increased per student funding by more than \$1,100. Over the course of the next four years, our plan will make public education in Ontario the best education, helping our students to achieve their true potential. We believe this is the most important thing that we can do to ensure Ontario achieves its full potential.

The strength of our province depends on the strength of our communities, from our smallest rural communities to our biggest cities. Never before have our municipalities faced so many challenges, from gridlock to the soaring cost of public health. Our four-year plan will help them meet these challenges, improving the quality of life for Ontarians wherever they live.

I want to start with the gas tax, sir. Starting in October of this year, we will begin to deliver on our commitment to make two cents of the existing provincial gas tax available for public transit. We're going to begin this October with one cent, increasing to 1.5 cents in October 2005, and to the full two cents in October 2006.

Our biggest cities play a critical role in our economy, and no city plays a bigger role in our shared prosperity than Toronto. That's why Premier McGuinty recently signed an historic agreement with the government of Canada and the city of Toronto to invest more than \$1 billion in transit expansion and renewal over the course of the next five years. That includes an environmental assessment for a possible new subway line to York University.

This government is also proud to be working with the federal government and the greater Toronto area municipalities to invest \$1 billion in improving GO Transit.

We will introduce legislation later this year to create the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, and that would ensure a more seamless transportation system right across this area.

We've already announced plans with the federal government and the city of Ottawa to provide a total of \$600 million in support of the O-Train in Ottawa.

Nous avons annoncé un projet conjoint avec le gouvernement fédéral et la ville d'Ottawa qui signifiera un investissement total de 600 \$ millions dans le service O-Train à Ottawa.

As well, we have announced plans with the federal government and the region of Waterloo for a light rapid transit project in that area.

This year, we will release the first-ever growth management plan for the Golden Horseshoe. It is designed to encourage development that makes sense while stopping sprawl that cannot be sustained in our area. The Premier will soon announce a provincial facilitator to assist the industry and stakeholders on issues that arise as we implement this growth management plan.

As well, I have already mentioned that we are increasing the province's share of public health from 50% to 75% over the course of the next three years, and that will involve uploading \$127 million from the budgets of municipalities to our own budget.

Premier McGuinty has asked my colleague John Gerretsen, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to build on these initiatives through a dialogue with municipalities, taking into account their various needs and capacities. What will emerge is a new and even stronger partnership, one that will provide municipalities with the tools that they need to give Ontarians the quality of life they deserve.

We must never forget the men and women who work Ontario's farms, who spend their days producing much of the food that feeds us and helps fuel our economy.

1640

Late last year, we signed an agreement with the federal government to implement the agricultural policy framework, securing long-term funding to help Ontario's farmers.

Last month, my colleague Steve Peters, the Minister of Agriculture and Food, announced an exemption from the land transfer tax for farmers who transfer ownership between members of the same family. This removes an obstacle to passing on the family farm from generation to generation. This tradition has been a vital part of this province's heritage.

As well, we will be introducing legislation to simplify the process for farmers to obtain retail sales tax exemptions on farm-related supplies and equipment.

To improve food safety and to boost business and consumer confidence, we have hired 118 meat inspectors and commissioned a review of the province's meat inspection system.

I am also announcing today that this government will provide farmers with \$20 million over the next two years to help them implement the first phase of our nutrient management initiative.

Finally, our government will consult with rural residents and stakeholders to better understand the unique priorities of rural communities across the province. We have a responsibility to make the changes that are needed to ensure that these communities enjoy improved prosperity, environmental well-being and a greater quality of life.

Ours is a vast province, and 90% of that province is northern Ontario. My northern caucus colleagues are fond of reminding me that it is the top 90%. Unfor-

tunately, the extraordinary potential of the north remains largely untapped.

Our government is committed to enacting a northern prosperity program. It will help northern communities attract and retain important investment and jobs.

We will move forward this year to establish a northern Ontario grow bonds program that would help new and expanding businesses in northern communities.

But I am particularly excited about our Go North initiative. It is designed to market the north's inherent strengths across the continent and around the world.

Je suis particulièrement enthousiaste à l'égard de notre initiative InvestiNord-Go, qui fera mieux connaître les forces inhérentes de la région sous le continent et dans le monde entier.

Finally, recognizing the importance of maintaining tax support for northern resource companies, we propose not to parallel federal changes to the resource allowance.

Northern Ontario is a region of boundless potential. The people who live there ask no more than to be given the opportunity to realize that potential. Our government will help make that happen.

I want to tell you that during the course of our pre-budget consultations, Ontarians sent us some very compelling messages. One of the most compelling was this: Whatever challenges the province faces, we must not forget the challenges faced by Ontarians who are most vulnerable. I heard that message loud and clear. It was a message that was also heard by every single member of this Liberal caucus. Today, I am pleased to make an overdue announcement.

Social assistance recipients will receive an additional \$106 million annually. This will reflect a 3% increase in the basic allowance and maximum shelter allowance for recipients of the Ontario disability support program and Ontario Works. My colleague Sandra Pupatello, the Minister of Community and Social Services, is going to be providing details of this increase in the very near future, but I want to say that this is the first increase for these vulnerable people in the last 11 years.

I am also announcing that social assistance benefits will not be reduced this year to take into account the federal government's July 1 increase in the national child benefit supplement. This will mean that this fiscal year there will be an extra \$7 million for parents who need it the most.

Housing is a basic human need, and the need is greatest among those who are most vulnerable. We will work with the federal government and municipalities to increase the number of affordable housing units in Ontario. We will put particular focus on appropriate housing for persons suffering from mental illness, victims of domestic violence and the working poor.

We've already committed \$8 million in support for victims of domestic violence, and \$28 million over the next three years will be provided to create new housing spaces for people with developmental disabilities.

I am announcing today an additional \$25 million for children's mental health programs for this fiscal year, and

that will be growing to \$38 million in 2005-06. This funding will help an additional 7,000 children every year.

Children's treatment centres help parents obtain and coordinate a range of services for children with disabilities. A \$24-million capital investment over four years will allow them to better focus on this critically important work.

The government is also certainly committed to giving children in Ontario the best possible start in life by increasing the quality and the quantity of child care in Ontario. I am announcing today that we will work with our municipal partners to create an additional 4,000 subsidized daycare spaces in the province.

I would like to speak about our seniors. Thousands of Ontario seniors struggle to make ends meet, particularly those who live on fixed incomes with no easy way to adjust to even a small increase in the cost of living. Well, we're going to help. We're providing an increase in the property tax credit for seniors with low and moderate incomes by \$125. This is the first increase for those seniors since 1992.

None of the results we hope to achieve in this budget will be possible unless we lay the foundation for new economic growth in Ontario. This is the primary objective of every budget. Our goals are very lofty indeed. We are determined to make Ontario the North American leader in economic growth and innovation.

We're going to do that with a fiscal policy agenda designed to eliminate the deficit over our first mandate. We're going to do it with a competitive tax system that provides the revenues necessary to fund sustainable public services. We're going to do it with a well-managed and efficient government. And we're going to do it by revitalizing our infrastructure, rebuilding our electricity sector, and maintaining a very high standard of public services.

1650

Our plans for health care and education are as important to the economy as they are for the men and women and children who benefit directly from them. We don't always think of health care as an economic driver, but I can tell you that our auto manufacturers do. Their labour costs here are 30% lower than those of their competitors south of the border, and it is our public health care system that is a big part of that.

And just as our health care system gives our businesses a competitive advantage, so too does public education give our workers a critical edge.

Notre plan en matière d'éducation publique créera un système qui enseignera à nos enfants les compétences dont ils auront besoin dans un monde où la prospérité et la croissance sont tributaires du savoir.

But building a high-skill, high-wage economy requires more than excellent public schools; it requires higher learning that is second to none. To that end, I am pleased to announce that former Premier Bob Rae has agreed to conduct a comprehensive review of post-secondary education in Ontario. I can still hear his eloquent voice ringing in these halls. His mandate will be to recommend how we can best provide Ontarians with a high-quality,

accountable, affordable system of post-secondary education, one that gives Ontarians the opportunity to achieve their full potential, regardless of their income.

But while we await the results of Mr Rae's review, we will push ahead with a number of initiatives to improve our system. We recently announced a two-year freeze on tuitions. I am delighted today to announce that we are providing funding for colleges and universities to make up revenue shortfalls for both of those years. More than 5,000 students will have greater access to student loans because of reforms and because of a \$20.9-million enhancement we are making to the Ontario student assistance program.

Our province faces a shortage of workers in skilled trades and other technical occupations. In recognition of the critical role our colleges play in tackling that challenge, I'm announcing today a \$20-million fund to update technology and equipment in our colleges, and a \$25-million, one-time college stabilization fund, which will be targeted primarily at smaller rural and northern colleges.

It is a fact that about half of our Ontario high school students, whether by choice or by circumstance, do not go on to pursue a post-secondary education. Our government is committed to giving these young people an opportunity to benefit from and contribute to Ontario's economic growth.

It is the apprenticeship system that is key to encouraging growth, as well as providing an important career path for so many young people who choose not to attend college or university. So I am announcing today several initiatives that would increase the number of apprenticeships in the province, helping to ensure we have the skilled workers in the construction, industrial and manufacturing sectors in the years to come.

There will be a new apprenticeship training tax credit which would encourage employers to hire and train apprentices in skilled trades. We will increase funding to classroom training for the apprenticeship program. By 2007-08, 26,000 young people will be entering apprenticeships every year because they had an opportunity to keep learning after leaving school.

There will also be new programs for young people who drop out or are at risk of dropping out of high school.

Every year about 125,000 people arrive from around the world to make Ontario their home. They enrich our province both culturally and economically. Indeed, Ontario was built on immigration; and you know, sir, that without it, our economy would grind to a halt. We owe it to new Ontarians and we owe it to ourselves to speed up their integration into our workforce.

As I mentioned earlier, we are more than doubling the number of assessment and training positions for international medical school graduates. But we will also start to tear down the barriers that immigrants face trying to enter their trades and their professions. We are going to introduce close to \$10 million this year, and it will grow to \$12.5 million in 2005-06, to improve foreign-trained workers' access to the jobs they are trained to perform.

The strongest societies and the strongest economies are rooted in modern, reliable, efficient and affordable infrastructure. Almost every area of business and government activity is dependent to some extent on infrastructure. Infrastructure provides the foundation, literally and figuratively, for cities that are liveable, water that is drinkable and power that's reliable.

But Ontario's infrastructure foundation has been eroding. We face a serious deficit in this regard. That is why we created the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal. This year, we will invest about \$3.3 billion in improvements to Ontario's infrastructure. At the same time, my colleague David Caplan, the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, is developing a 10-year infrastructure plan, and it will establish our investment priorities for the 21st century.

I am also announcing today that we are supporting that plan by creating the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority, as well as infrastructure renewal bonds. I should tell you that the authority will provide affordable financing to meet municipal, health, education, post-secondary and housing priorities. Funding for the authority and its loan program will come from the sale of the infrastructure renewal bonds. We're going to invite the federal government to affirm its commitment to infrastructure renewal by joining us in that new initiative.

But we're already moving ahead with our innovative policies in key infrastructure areas. I have mentioned the historic investment in transit—a commitment that will be expanded on in announcements over the course of the next several months.

At the same time, we are investing nearly \$1 billion this year to keep our roads safe—and to support the movement of goods on which our economy depends.

As my colleague Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of the Environment, has reminded this House on many occasions, governments have a duty to protect the quality of public drinking water. So we reaffirm our commitment to implementing all of the recommendations of the O'Connor report.

And this year, we will provide more than \$400 million to support source-to-tap drinking water initiatives. Most of this funding will be used to help municipalities bring their water treatment facilities up to the world standards that are set out in Ontario's Safe Drinking Water Act.

1700

On energy: You know that our people and our economy depend on safe, affordable and reliable energy and, in particular, electrical energy. The work of rebuilding our electricity sector, which we began within days of taking office, will mark every single day of our mandate.

In June, the Minister of Energy, my colleague Dwight Duncan, will introduce legislation to reform our energy sector. Under that legislation, we would see a combination of regulated and competitive electricity market that would provide more stable prices that reflect the true cost of electricity. We would see the encouragement of new investment. We'll see an aggressive conservation strategy that would make Ontario a leader in energy efficiency. We will see, as well, action to meet the critical need for

new supply, and finally, the creation of an independent body, the Ontario Power Authority, to ensure long-term supply of electrical energy.

Job creation is the most important measure of a growing economy. This government understands that small business makes a very big contribution to job creation and the economic growth of the province.

Notre gouvernement est bien conscient du fait que les petites entreprises contribuent de manière importante à la création d'emplois et à la croissance économique en Ontario.

That's why we held the line on small business corporate taxes last year when the corporate income tax rates were raised. We also accelerated the increase in the small business threshold, and we are continuing to exempt the first \$400,000 of private sector payroll and all self-employment income from the employer health tax.

I am announcing today that we are moving forward in creating a one-stop Web business portal, a resource that will simplify registration and change-of-business information for small business.

To better meet the needs of small businesses, we will meet our commitment to convert the Red Tape Commission into a small business agency.

Finally, we are supporting Ontario's domestic film industry by proposing to parallel the federal government's 2003 film tax credit changes.

This budget contains two new initiatives affecting business, positive changes that will make us more competitive and promote investment.

First, we're proposing to eliminate Ontario's capital tax. That tax, one that businesses must pay whether or not they're profitable, is, in effect, a tax on investment and job creation. This change would be phased in starting January 1, 2005, and it would mean that in 2005, some 6,000 more businesses would no longer pay capital tax. By 2012, this tax would be completely eliminated.

Second, we are proposing to change capital tax allowances to allow faster write-offs on computer and data network infrastructure equipment. This is a measure that would parallel changes introduced in the federal budget, and it's good news for business.

When we consulted Ontarians, they told us they wanted a government that would be accountable and transparent and well-managed. That is why we've based this budget on a prudent four-year plan. It's the result of some six months of rigorous review of every ministry in the government. The directive to each ministry was clear: Programs are to be designed to meet Ontario's priorities, and they must yield measurable results.

In the fall, we will be releasing four-year results-based spending plans for every single ministry. Going forward, our government will report at least twice a year on the progress being made toward meeting our plan.

All of this is part of a new approach. It's called budgeting for results. It means that we will be judged by the results we deliver to the people of Ontario, because they know, and we understand as well, that increased spending alone doesn't guarantee better results. That's

why we will be constantly reviewing the programs we fund against the results they deliver.

If a given program doesn't reflect the priority of Ontarians, delivering satisfactory results for the money being spent, we will either find a better way to do it or we'll stop doing it altogether. And we will be reporting regularly on our progress toward achieving those expected results.

Achieving better results from public services will require a transformation in how we deliver these services. The transformation will require some investment upfront. For example, community-based health care will require an investment in new technologies and facilities.

To that end, our government is establishing a \$1-billion change fund. We asked all ministries to submit proposals for ways in which the fund could be used to implement one-time changes that will increase efficiency and ensure sustainability. Most of these plans have been approved and form part of this budget. The remainder will be assessed in the coming months. Only projects with a sound business case to reduce long-term costs and mitigate the demand for services over the long term will be funded. Any money that is not spent this year will be used to pay down the deficit.

The clear focus of our plan, reflecting the priority of Ontarians, is health care and education. In order to ensure that we can fund these core services while balancing our budget, we have to hold the line on other spending. Between 2004-05 and 2007-08, we will restrict program spending to an average growth rate of just under 1.9 per cent per year. This is less than the rate of growth of our revenues and less than the rate of growth of the economy. Over the same period, the budgets of 15 ministries will either be flat-lined or they will decrease.

As of tomorrow, my colleague Gerry Phillips, the Chair of Management Board, will begin the process of finding further savings and efficiencies across all our ministries. He has clear targets: \$200 million in 2005-06; \$400 million in 2006-07; and \$750 million in 2007-08.

This budget also proposes to eliminate several tax expenditures coming out of our review of the effectiveness of these measures. In addition, we are raising certain fees and charges across a range of services to ensure that they better reflect the true cost of delivering those services.

We are also increasing revenues from tobacco taxes as of midnight tonight, and alcohol levies as of January 1 of this year—I'm sorry, June 21. Let's get the date right. I want to repeat that: alcohol levies will go up as of June 21 of this year.

Our four-year plan is based on a prudent, realistic economic forecast. Ontario's economy is expected to gain momentum over the course of the next few years, continuing to rebound from last year's slowdown. The growth rate will bring with it strong job creation and higher incomes. We're predicting that the economy will grow by 2.3 per cent in 2004, and an average of 3.3 per cent annually from 2005 to 2007.

The private sector consensus forecast is even more optimistic, calling for a faster rate of growth and predicting that by 2005, Ontario will have one of the strong-

est economies in the advanced industrialized world. We're being somewhat more cautious in our assumptions, not because we are less optimistic but because we carry an important responsibility to the people of Ontario. We have to be certain that our four-year plan is based on assumptions that are realistic and achievable.

1710

Helped by a growing economy and a skilled labour force, Ontario is expected to create some 104,000 jobs in 2004. This is an increase of 1.7% over last year. Over the course of the next four years, the unemployment rate is projected to fall from 7% in 2003 to 5.9% in 2007. Personal incomes are expected to increase by 3.4% this year and will continue to reflect economic growth, rising by 4.5% in 2005, 4.8% in 2006 and 4.9% in 2007.

It's within this context of steady economic growth and prudent management that we've laid out our plan for steady deficit reduction.

In short, the government of Ontario must balance its books. However, trying to force a balanced budget in the short term would require deep spending cuts, and those would threaten the very viability of basic public services.

By transforming services and by holding program spending growth to less than the rate of growth in tax revenues, we will eliminate Ontario's structural deficit without putting our priorities and the priorities of the people of Ontario at risk.

Based on our prudent assumptions, and after enacting the measures I am outlining in this budget, we project a deficit in 2004-05 of \$2.2 billion, down from \$6.2 billion in 2003-04. This includes a one-time elimination of the liability from power purchase contracts entered into by the old Ontario Hydro. Those costs would be included in consumer bills over the life of those contracts.

As we continue to work through our four-year plan, the deficit will be reduced to \$2.1 billion in 2005-06 and \$1.5 billion in 2006-07. Ontario's books will be balanced in 2007-08.

In doing that budget, we have provided for very substantial reserves: in this year, a reserve of \$1 billion, and in each of the next three years, a reserve of \$1.5 billion.

Over the course of our four-year plan, the accumulated deficit as a percentage of GDP is projected to decrease steadily, from 25.3% in 2003-04 to 21.9% in 2007-08.

In the months leading up to the budget, there has been ample and colourful speculation about the sale of public assets. The advice I have received has certainly been helpful. I want to take this opportunity to make the policy of this government crystal clear: We will not sell assets in order to pay for the ongoing operations of government. We will not use asset sales to hide deficits. What we are going to do is bring the highest of standards to the strategic management of all our public assets. We're going to undertake a thorough review of major provincial assets to evaluate the appropriate role of each asset and to ensure effective and efficient management. That will include a review of the LCBO. Our purpose will be to determine if Ontarians are receiving the maximum benefit from this very significant crown asset. But let me be clear: We will not sell the LCBO, we will not sell

TVOntario, to pay down the ongoing operations of government. We are not looking to sell anything.

It is possible that our review may identify assets that are not providing enough ongoing value to Ontarians but would, if sold, generate substantial revenues that could be used to increase efficiencies and promote economic growth. In that case, we would explore a potential sale on the basis that those revenues generated would be used for our change fund.

In 1999, the previous Parliament passed the Balanced Budget Act. It is an act with laudable objectives but mechanics that are seriously flawed. It does not prevent a government from hiding a deficit from voters.

I am introducing a replacement: the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act. If passed, the FTAA would set a more responsible framework and would require an independent review of government books before an election. It will enhance, I believe, both the quality and the credibility of our democracy. We will also be proposing legislation to amend the Taxpayer Protection Act in order to allow the revenue measures contained in this budget.

Under the terms of the FTAA, there would be no penalty for running a deficit beyond that which the people of Ontario might choose to impose on election day. However, the law as it currently stands does impose a fine of more than \$9,000, to be paid by all cabinet ministers in any government that runs a deficit. As I have made clear, we have chosen to run a deficit in the short term because it is the right thing to do. We stand by that decision, and we will pay the fine this year, beginning on June 1. The money will be used to pay down the deficit.

As I conclude, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the many people who have helped make this plan a reality. I want to thank the Premier for his inspiration and his direction. I want to thank my parliamentary assistant, Mike Colle. I want to thank my cabinet colleagues. I want to thank the men and women of Ontario's public service and particularly my deputy minister, Colin Andersen, and the hard-working staff at the Ministry of Finance. I want to tell you, sir, I have never seen such hard work.

I want to thank my own family. In particular, I want to thank my wife, Kate, who joins us in the Speaker's gallery. Every one of us who has a partner knows the tensions that arise when one member of the partnership takes on a major project like helping to create an Ontario budget. I want to thank her for her patience. More importantly, you should know that in the 35 years we have lived together, if any good has come from the work that I do, it is really her spirit working through this flesh and blood, and I thank her for that.

1720

Most of all, I want to thank the people of Ontario for their advice, for their commitment to one another and to this province. Je veux remercier les Ontariennes et Ontariens pour leurs conseils, leur engagement les uns envers les autres et leur engagement envers l'Ontario.

We're a Liberal government. Nous sommes un gouvernement libéral. As Liberals, we understand that society comes together around a core set of needs and

goals. It is through government that those goals are reflected, and it is with the help of government that those needs are met. In meeting those needs, we create a civil society.

The people in Ontario told us that what they need is fundamental change. Today, I have laid out a four-year plan to deliver that change.

In education, the people of Ontario will be able to look to smaller class sizes and increased student achievement. There will be more doctors and nurses in this province. Waiting times will be reduced. There will be more focus on high-quality, around-the-clock, community-based health care. Our roads and highways will be in better shape, and improved public transit in urban areas will have reduced gridlock.

Four years from now, Ontario's public services will be sustainable. Four years from now, the people of Ontario will be able to judge our plan based on the results that it has achieved. I have every confidence—je suis tout à fait confiant—that they will agree that this plan for change is the right plan for Ontario.

Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I move adjournment of the debate, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: Mr Runciman has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Hon Mr Sorbara: I ask for leave to revert to introduction of bills, and in so doing, I move that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to—

The Speaker: We'll call the order first. Introduction of bills?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004

SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES

Mr Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 83, An Act to implement Budget measures / Projet de loi 83, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures budgétaires.

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

FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE ET LA RESPONSABILITÉ FINANCIÈRES

Mr Sorbara moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to provide for fiscal transparency and accountability / Projet de loi 84, Loi prévoyant la transparence et la responsabilité financières.

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

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

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

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1726.

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