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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 17 May 2004

Lundi 17 mai 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 17 May 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 17 mai 2004

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

REQUEST TO INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a request by the member for Nepean-Carleton to the Honourable Coulter A. Osborne, Integrity Commissioner, for an opinion pursuant to section 30 of the Members' Integrity Act, 1994, on whether the Honourable Greg Sorbara, Minister of Finance, has contravened the act or Ontario parliamentary convention.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Many have heard in the media about the stand taken in Simcoe by 71-year-old Terry Blake, the former owner of one of my favourite gas stations in Port Dover. Frustrated and tired of getting gosed by rising gas prices and the requisite rise in provincial and federal taxes, Mr Blake took matters into his own hands by paying \$20 for a \$25 fill-up.

Motorists across the province are feeling anger and despair, especially in rural Ontario, where public transportation is not an option. People are sick of being gouged while Liberal governments in both Ontario and Ottawa sit on their laurels ignoring pleas for action. Since the government took power, Ontarians have been overwhelmed by a series of higher taxes, rescinded tax cuts, user fees and a barrage of trial balloons that would see them paying more for the services they all deserve.

As the Liberals get set to unleash a budget beast that will attack wage earners' wallets, we hear no word of any possible relief at the pumps. Instead, we heard of a possible merging of the PST with the GST, adding another 6.2 cents a litre, even a potential increase in the 14.7-cent-a-litre provincial fuel tax. Ontario's coffers are already sucking \$3 billion in gas taxes annually. The lack of action by this government is a slap in the face to people like Mr Blake and every other motorist facing sky-high prices at the pumps.

CHRIS GARRETT

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It's with extreme sadness that I rise in the House today to announce the passing of Cobourg police constable Chris Garrett. Our community is struggling with the tragic loss of a loving husband, father, cherished friend, neighbour and a devoted police officer.

I would like to take this time to offer condolences to the family. Constable Garrett is remembered as a devoted husband and father, leaving behind his loving wife, Denise, and children, Ben and Britany.

Constable Garrett was slain in the line of duty early on Saturday morning, May 15, 2004, while responding to a 911 call. Constable Garrett is honoured as an 18-year veteran of the police services, serving 13 years with the Cobourg police force and five years with the Peel regional force.

I know I speak on behalf of all members of the House when I say that our thoughts and prayers are with the family and the community of Constable Garrett as they mourn the loss of this admirable man.

CANADIAN TAXPAYERS FEDERATION PETITION

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I rise in the House to note the overwhelming response to the on-line petition by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that reminds the Ontario Liberal government to keep its promises. At noon, an announcement was made and thousands of petitions were presented. The numbers are growing to well over 10,000. These Ontario citizens are worried that tomorrow's budget will launch a new era of tax-and-spend policies in the province of Ontario.

The petition, addressed to Premier McGuinty, stated in part:

"On the 11th of September 2003 you signed a pledge to uphold the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act if your party formed the next government of Ontario. You specifically promised to:

"Not raise taxes or implement new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters; and

"Not run deficits."

You have now broken the mother of all election promises. You have also threatened that certain tax credits may be repealed, thus increasing the tax burdens for Ontario. You have further stated that you will not likely balance the budget in this fiscal year.

Let me quote an article from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation on the topic "Let's Talk Taxes," and it's entitled "McGuinty's Waterloo." It notes that, as the Hamilton East by-election proved last Thursday, "Broken promises don't sit well with the voters." This article is a reminder that there's still time for this government to do the right thing. I doubt it.

In the final days before the first Liberal budget, the federation calls for the alternative, such as eliminating waste, spending smarter, and reducing regulations. Look at your own house.

The article concludes, "If Premier McGuinty spent as much time finding ways to save money as he did finding new tax sources," he would break still another promise. Tomorrow I expect tax increases all around.

SCOTT CLARK

Ms Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): It was a very busy weekend in Nipissing. I rise today to speak about an important person in our community who was honoured over the weekend. The Rotary Club of North Bay awarded Scott Clark a Paul Harris Fellow for all of his community service. For the past 14 years, Scott Clark has been the morning man on our local radio station and has been an integral part of the life of our community.

On Saturday, 150 members of our community gathered with Scott's family—his mother, brother, sister-in-law, and wife, Cheryl—to celebrate Scott and to thank him for all of that service. The Paul Harris Fellow, as you know, is the highest honour bestowed by the Rotary Club.

In his presentation, president Chris Mayne estimated that through his various charitable activities in the community over the years, Scott Clark had helped to raise nearly half a million dollars, as co-host of our mayor's gala in support of our hospital; during his 52 Hours of Radio marathon with his co-anchors in support of disabled children in our community; emceeding at the Relay for Life in support of cancer and in support of our children's treatment centre; and supporting a variety of charitable activities and events by volunteering as a DJ, a master of ceremonies or a celebrity guest. He has also entertained through Nipissing Stage. Through it all, Scott has brought his enthusiasm, his charm, his quick wit, his sense of humour, and his smile.

On Friday, he announced that he would be leaving the radio station, but the community sighed a collective sigh of relief when we found out he was staying in our community. He will have more time to spend with his wife, Cheryl, and his children, Ben and Micheala.

While we'll miss him in the morning, we are very thankful for all that he's done, and we appreciate the Rotary Club saluting him with the Paul Harris Fellow.

1340

BY-ELECTION IN HAMILTON EAST

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): Thursday, May 13 was a new day for Hamilton, a new day for

Ontario and a new day for New Democrats. Voters in the Hamilton East by-election spoke loud and clear. They delivered a huge vote of non-confidence to the Liberal government and they gave an official vote of confidence to the NDP. They embraced a strong New Democrat voice for Hamilton, Andrea Horwath. She's in the public gallery today. Let me be the first to congratulate her publicly in this Legislature.

They sent Dalton McGuinty a message: "You've broken your trust with the people. No more excuses. No more weak leadership. No more broken promises. It's time to keep your promises and deliver real change, for a change."

Andrea is not just another Liberal voice for Queen's Park in Hamilton. She'll be a strong voice for Hamilton at Queen's Park. You can count on her to hold an out-of-touch government's feet to the fire. She'll fight for better health care and education and for a cleaner environment. She'll fight to keep the Liberals from ripping off low- and middle-income families. She'll stand up for our most vulnerable citizens and she'll stand shoulder to shoulder with workers to fight for good jobs, safe workplaces and secure pensions.

Andrea will make a huge difference not just for Hamilton but for the entire province. If a hotly contested by-election gets Hamilton \$60 million over four weeks, imagine the difference Andrea and a recharged, re-energized NDP will make over the next four years.

MISSISSAUGA MARATHON

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): It's with great pleasure that I share with you today an incredible event that occurred in Mississauga yesterday, Sunday, May 16.

For many years of my life I dedicated myself to running marathons in countless cities around the globe. It was with great pride that I encouraged 6,000 participants in the first annual Mississauga Marathon.

The organizers put on a truly world-class event on a beautiful course and on a wonderful day. Along with the full marathon, which is a distance of 42 kilometres, other events were included, like a two-kilometre family fun run which saw Mayor Hazel McCallion as a participant.

The small-town roots of Mississauga, albeit the sixth-largest community in our country, were evident throughout the event's commitment to involve people from all walks of life. Young and old alike were active, as some simply ran to have fun and others raced for sport. Many, from Mark Colliss, who ran the race while pushing his daughter, Amanda, who has cerebral palsy, to Mississaugan Earl Fee, who is well into his 80s and still running marathons, displayed outstanding efforts.

Although we've all travelled numerous 42-kilometre routes in our lifetimes, it takes a certain commitment and drive to do it on foot. Yes, I know this from personal experience. I bring up the point in recognition of all those who committed themselves to completing the challenge on Sunday morning in the beautiful city of Mississauga.

BY-ELECTION IN HAMILTON EAST

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to rise to discuss the realities of the by-election of last Thursday, May 13, in Hamilton East. On behalf of the PC caucus, I'd like to congratulate the new member for Hamilton East, Ms Horwath, who has joined us here today. We look forward to her joining us on the opposition side of the House and to finally bumping the rump back to the corner, where they belong.

I've got to tell you, what a gargantuan setback for Dalton McGuinty and his Liberals, falling from some 52% to 26%. It's so rare that you can use the word "gargantuan." I've got to take advantage of this gargantuan loss—a devastating verdict on the weak leadership and broken promises of Premier McGuinty. But I know it was not the member for Sudbury who came up with this election plan, I know it was not the member for Brant who came up with this election plan to call the date before the budget, to appoint a candidate, to fix a nomination, to run such a weak campaign. Clearly it was Dalton McGuinty and his backroom advisers like Matt Maychak or Don Guy or Sheila James. It's got to be one of them. It can't be their Liberal caucus. Was it Warren Kinsella, Gerald Butts? I know it wasn't Lopinski. Lopinski is a good Port Colborne guy. He'd listen to caucus. Evidently the backroom advisers have taken over the Liberal caucus big time. Tell them to get lost and start taking control of the Liberal caucus.

CYSTIC FIBROSIS MONTH

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): May 1 marked the beginning of Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month. Cystic fibrosis is the leading genetic cause of death in Canadian children, and Canadians have been at the forefront of the fight to cure CF for over 40 years. The Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation is the world's second-largest non-governmental granting agency in the field of CF research. They have developed a strong core research program to search for a cure or control. In 1989, a team of Ontario researchers at the Hospital for Sick Children identified the gene responsible for CF. This historic discovery furthered global understanding of the disease and brought us closer to finding a cure.

Just last month, researchers at Yale University and at the Hospital for Sick Children announced another breakthrough: turmeric. A spice that most, if not all, of us have in our kitchens has been used to correct characteristic CF defects in a mouse model of the disease. After receiving the treatment, mice with the genetic defect that causes CF survived at a rate almost equal to mice without the defective gene. With these developments in research and treatment, young Canadians with CF are living longer, healthier lives.

As an honoured recipient of both CF's national award and the Queen's Golden Jubilee medal, it's my pleasure to introduce to the House and to all members, from the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Cathleen Morrison,

Doug Summerhayes, Kelly Gorman and Josée Chiarot. Also joining us today—and I ask all members to welcome them—are the Orr family from Stratford: Adele, who is seven, Celia, who is three, and their mom and dad, Josee and Dan. Welcome to the Legislature.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Today I rise to talk about ethics and integrity in government. The most important promise that Dalton McGuinty made in the last election campaign was to run an open and honest administration.

There's another story. Last December, the Minister of Finance was informed of an investigation into a company that he directed for 10 years, including time as chair of the audit committee. The investigation was being conducted by an agency of his own ministry. What did he do? Did he pick up the phone and tell the Premier? No. Did he consult with the Integrity Commissioner? No. Did he consult legal counsel? No. He kept quiet for 66 days while his own agency was investigating their boss. Only when he got caught did he go public.

But it's not just the Ontario Securities Commission conducting an investigation. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is conducting a criminal probe. Revenue Canada is conducting a tax fraud investigation. Virtually every commentator in the book, including Ian Urquhart in the Toronto Star just this weekend, said that had any other minister done this, they would have been out, as they properly should have, but not for the Premier's best friend, Greg Sorbara. Now the Integrity Commissioner will be able to consider both sides of the story with a formal complaint going forward.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I would like to draw your attention to the Speaker's gallery. We have with us today a parliamentary delegation from Japan, from the National Association of Chairpersons of the Prefectural Assemblies. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to standing order 109(b).

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Mrs Jeffrey has presented a report from the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly. Pursuant to standing order 109(b), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

WEARING OF PINS

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Given that this is Cystic Fibrosis Month, I would ask for unanimous consent that members be allowed to wear the cystic fibrosis pin.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): The member for Perth-Middlesex has asked for unanimous consent. Is it agreed? Agreed.

1350

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I rise in the Legislature today to inform all honourable members and the people of Ontario about important new capital investments in transit infrastructure in the city of Ottawa and the region of Waterloo, which will serve future generations. These investments will improve air quality and stimulate economic growth so that people can find jobs close to where they live.

Overall, these investments will improve the quality of life for millions of Ontarians. The investments are yet another example of the way the McGuinty government is delivering real, positive change to the people of Ontario. All of this is possible because we now have a new era of co-operation with other levels of government. Small-minded partisan bickering in the past has been replaced by a new era of co-operation among all levels of government, which puts the needs of our constituents first and foremost by improving and expanding critical public services.

On Friday, I was pleased to be in Ottawa, along with the Premier and my colleagues from this House, with representatives of the federal and municipal governments to announce long-term support for Ottawa's public transit system. The very next day, I was again joined by provincial colleagues and by federal and municipal government representatives to announce support for another important transit project in Kitchener-Waterloo.

I want to acknowledge my colleague the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Harinder Takhar, for his leadership and his contribution in making these announcements with the federal government a reality. I am pleased to report that the funding from the provincial and federal governments, along with the contributions from Ottawa's municipal government, will provide up to \$600 million in support of light rail expansion from downtown Ottawa to Barrhaven. This represents the largest intergovernmental infrastructure investment in the city of Ottawa's history.

We've also announced, together with our federal and region of Waterloo partners, further studies toward a proposed 14-kilometre light rail transit project that will ensure that Waterloo region will be served by a modern,

efficient public transit system that supports the region's growth management strategy. These investments, along with others, recognize that if we do not provide adequate transportation and transit facilities in this province, we will choke on our own growth. We will strangle the economy that allows us to maintain strong, safe communities and ensure our continued prosperity.

These investments in transit that we have announced over the past few weeks with our federal and municipal funding partners total almost \$2.5 billion. These investments will help meet the challenges of this unprecedented growth in several regions across this great province of ours. They will help to get more people out of their cars and on to trains and buses, and that means less traffic congestion, cleaner air and easier movement of goods and people in Ontario.

These investments are part of our larger policies to create an effective and efficient transit and transportation system for Ontario. They complement the commitments we've made previously to substantial investments in the Toronto Transit Commission, GO Transit, York region transit, the Ontario border crossings and our plan to create a Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. These investments will help us to improve transit and road services in regions that are growing more rapidly than any other urban area in Canada. They will help deliver real, positive change that is our government's most important commitment.

The McGuinty government is prepared to meet the challenge posed by expansion and growth in Ontario. We were chosen by the people of Ontario to improve the way government works, to change this province for the better. By investing in a better transit and transportation system in Ontario and by securing similar investments from partners at the federal and municipal levels, we are delivering the real, positive change our people need, demand and deserve—change that is going to make Ontario strong, healthy and prosperous once again.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Responses?

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to respond to my colleague the Minister for Public Infrastructure Renewal's statement. The member from Lanark-Carleton will have some comments as well about the Ottawa project in particular.

I'm pleased to have him making the announcement here in the Legislature today. I know Friday was the day he did the announcement; otherwise, he would have done it first in the Legislature. I think that's the style of this particular minister, but has not always been the case with the announcements to date.

I know the minister has been consulting as well on infrastructure renewal, which I think is important. We look forward to the outcomes of that consultation.

But what I'd suggest as one of the first investments to make is some way of breaking the gridlock we've seen so far in the Dalton McGuinty government. We've seen the weak leadership resulting in the by-election loss this past Thursday by gargantuan sums. We need these investments in public infrastructure. We'd like to see more

public investments in our infrastructure throughout Ontario, and I know the minister is working very hard to get them through the system.

Aside from today, what we have seen to date have been basically reannouncements of projects announced by my colleague the member for Oak Ridges when he was Minister of Transportation, like the border infrastructure funds, GO Transit and P3 hospitals.

We all know the P3 hospitals in Brampton and Ottawa are an example of a broken Dalton McGuinty promise, basically the same package we put together, just with a red ribbon on top of it instead of a blue ribbon. I guess it's a campaign promise. I hate to encourage that sort of behaviour, but I'm pleased that they did flip-flop on that. We all know P3s—private sector partnerships with the public sector—are essential to our infrastructure renewal.

While I think we need to attract private sector dollars, I do worry about some of the decisions to date of this government in its legislation and public policy decisions, which will probably put a premium on the returns to the private sector. Witness their strange handling of the Oak Ridges moraine situation and their flip-flop in that policy area; the war they're having with the 407; the retroactive legislation surrounding the Adams mine; the rebirth of the politicization—the NIMBYism—that will take place through Bill 26 and Bill 27. These set a worrisome trend that is going to discourage private sector partnerships. I hope the government recognizes that and does more to encourage these partnerships besides beating up the private sector, as they have tended to do since the campaign.

We welcome the transit. There's concentration in big cities. We cannot lose sight, though, of mid-sized communities and rural Ontario—similar transportation needs. We've got to invest in that blacktop as well. I stand proudly by our record of the largest investments in our highways in Ontario, including four-laning, not tolling, Highways 69 and 11. I look forward to the blacktop announcements from this government, including rapid movement on the mid-peninsula corridor.

I'm pleased to allow time for my colleague from Lanark-Carleton.

1400

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): Finally, the provincial Liberals came to town, but what did they come to town to support? As one noted Liberal MPP across the floor called it, they're going to support the kooky choo-choo. Another Liberal councillor, Gord Hunter, who ran for the Liberals, said it just proves they are idiots.

This particular project is really questionable in terms of the outcomes it will have for our rapid transit system. We have an excellent bus rapid transit system. The mayor of that town, Bob Chiarelli, insists on putting money into a train. Well, the technical studies for this particular project showed there would be no net increase in passenger traffic as a result of putting an O-Train on this particular track. So what do we have? We have an investment by this provincial government into something

that isn't going to carry any more people from Barrhaven to downtown Ottawa. But I must say that at least they showed up in town.

We invested \$300 million in public transit from 1995 to 2003. We don't know when we're going to expect the \$200 million from the province of Ontario. I certainly hope they can keep up to the pace that we set during our period of government.

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): It is always a pleasure to rise and to talk about these very issues. But I have been here in this House for almost three years now, and what we are hearing again and again are re-announcements of similar policies, reannouncements by this minister and other ministers of policies that have been said before.

What we must contend is new and what we admit is new is that the federal government is finally on board. Were it not for the election being called this week, I am not sure they would be at the table, quite frankly. Just like the Liberals across the House here were able to come up with \$650 million leading up to the by-election in Hamilton, the Liberals in Ottawa are able to come up with all of this money just prior to the federal election country-wide.

What is being said here is not a bad thing. I don't want to be quoted in your next campaign literature, but light rapid transit is a good thing, and if you can put that in in Ottawa and Waterloo—I will tell you that it is hugely successful in Toronto. The light rapid transit that goes from Kennedy station out to McCowan and beyond that to the Scarborough Town Centre is used every single day. It carries thousands and thousands of people. It is a template for what can be used elsewhere. I certainly have traveled on similar systems elsewhere in the world, like the great one in Sydney, Australia, that takes you on a tour of that great city if you're a tourist.

I want to tell you, though, that we are very nervous here in the New Democratic Party about where this money is coming from. Although we know that the federal government has oceans of money and is starting to spend it and we know that this government is trying to spend as much as they can—I don't know where you're getting it from, but we'll find out tomorrow—we don't know where the municipalities are going to find the monies to pay their share. These are enormous amounts of money for municipalities that basically have one source of revenue, and that is to tax the homes and the businesses and the properties in their respective municipalities. We are very nervous about that.

We also have to tell you that we are not pleased if this is going to end up being a privatized scheme like York region's is. We do not believe a public transportation scheme should be privatized so that people can make a profit and, in making that profit, cost a lot more money for the people, particularly the poor, the students and the old, who use that system more often than those who have monied means.

We want to tell you as well that we think the whole story will come down in the budget tomorrow. It will be

telling whether or not the monies are contained in the budget for the announcements that are being made today. We have to know that, because if the money isn't there tomorrow, the statement being made here today is really quite meaningless.

We also have to talk about the entire problem of gridlock. Gridlock is affecting our cities hugely. We welcome that the money is being spent on public transportation; that's where it should be spent.

I remember sitting on a television program during the election with then-Minister Klees, the transportation minister, who was talking on an open telephone interview with the people of Toronto. He thought the greatest thing that had ever gone wrong in the city was that we had not built the Spadina Expressway. Quite frankly, I'm glad you are not talking about spending money on the Spadina Expressway.

We need to stop the smog and pollution, but we need to know as well where Liberals stand on toll roads. Are you going to increase toll roads for those people who will continue to drive into the cities of Ottawa and Waterloo? There are a great many people who choose to commute.

We need to know from the Liberals tomorrow whether or not you're going to honour your commitment of two cents a litre on the gasoline tax. If you're not willing to do that for the cities, I'm not sure where they are going to come up with their portion of the money. Even if that's where they're going to get their portion of the money, they need that money for simple maintenance and in order that buses keep running.

I just want to ask one last thing in the few seconds left to me. There is nothing in your announcement for First Nations in this province; there's absolutely nothing. I don't know where they fit in all these transportation schemes, but some of them want to run bus companies and some want to get involved in the infrastructure and in roads, and they have not been included to date. I am hoping, when this finally sees the light of day, the First Nations communities will be included. They were not included in electricity, and they have to go to general welfare to get the money. I want to make sure, Minister, that you will include them in future announcements. First Nations people have a right.

DEFERRED VOTES

HEALTH INFORMATION PROTECTION ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RENSEIGNEMENTS SUR LA SANTÉ

Deferred vote on the motion for third reading of Bill 31, An Act to enact and amend various Acts with respect to the protection of health information / Projet de loi 31, Loi édictant et modifiant diverses lois en ce qui a trait à la protection des renseignements sur la santé.

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

The division bells rang from 1407 to 1412.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Fonseca, Peter	Oraziotti, David
Arthurs, Wayne	Gerretsen, John	Patten, Richard
Baird, John R.	Hardeman, Ernie	Peters, Steve
Barrett, Toby	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Bartolucci, Rick	Hudak, Tim	Prue, Michael
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kular, Kuldip	Ramal, Khalil
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Runciman, Robert W.
Broten, Laurel C.	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Michael A.	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Caplan, David	Marchese, Rosario	Smith, Monique
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Marsales, Judy	Smitherman, George
Churley, Marilyn	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
Colle, Mike	Martiniuk, Gerry	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	Matthews, Deborah	Tascona, Joseph N.
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Van Bommel, Maria
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Watson, Jim
Di Cocco, Caroline	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth
Duguid, Brad	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Dunlop, Garfield	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Eves, Ernie	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Yakabuski, John
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	O'Toole, John	Zimmer, David

The Speaker: All opposed, please rise.

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): On a point of order, Speaker: I was standing up but it's not clear to me whether or not the Clerk did see and I was counted. I was standing in favour of this bill, just to make that clear.

The Speaker: So you're voting in favour? OK.

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 72; the nays are 0.

The Speaker: The ayes are 72; the nays are 0.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

CHRIS GARRETT

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent that each party speak for up to five minutes in respect to Constable Chris Garrett, who was killed in the line of duty, and that this be followed by a moment of silence.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent for each party to respond for five minutes? Agreed.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): Mr Speaker, I rise in the House today with a heavy heart. Today we mourn the death of a fine and respected police officer and a devoted husband and father.

Constable Chris Garrett was an 18-year veteran of policing, having spent five years with Peel Regional Police and then 13 years with the Cobourg police. Cobourg Police Chief Garry Clement described Constable Garrett as "the most dedicated, loyal police officer I've

worked with in 31 years.” Constable Garrett died in the line of duty in the early morning hours of last Saturday, investigating what he thought was a routine call. Unfortunately, it turned out to be much more than that and resulted in Constable Garrett’s death. Chief Clement called it a “devastating blow” to Constable Garrett’s family, his police family and the entire town, and I would add the entire province of Ontario.

Mr Speaker, early Saturday morning I was able to personally express my heartfelt condolences and those of the Premier and the entire Legislature to Constable Garrett’s widow, Denise, children Ben and Britany, and his parents, Gordon and Evelyn Garrett. Constable Garrett was greatly loved by his family and by his fellow officers.

Every police officer knows and accepts the risks involved with his or her job. They put their lives on the line every time they report for duty. They are constantly facing new, difficult and sometimes dangerous challenges, often attending a crime scene not knowing what to expect. Constable Garrett was a role model for young officers in the Cobourg Police Service. He served as a mentor and was respected by his fellow officers and the community. Constable Garrett was proud to be a police officer, and the town of Cobourg—indeed the entire province—was proud of him.

Just two weeks ago, the Premier and I attended the annual Ontario Police Memorial Foundation wall of honour ceremony here at Queen’s Park. At that time, we added the names of two Ontario Provincial Police officers to that wall. They, like too many others before them, had died in the line of duty last year. At next year’s wall of honour ceremony, we will sadly add Constable Garrett’s name. In this way, we will never forget those who have given their lives to make our communities safer.

Mr Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent today for all members of the Legislature to wear the Ontario Police Memorial pin. The pin replicates the Ontario Police Memorial’s wall of honour. The badge represents the police officer’s authority. Family members of honour roll officers have a white trillium on their pin. The pin is to be worn from the day of a fallen officer’s death until sundown on the day of his funeral. I ask that all members show their support for the more than 20,000 dedicated police officers in Ontario by wearing this pin until Thursday evening after Constable Garrett’s funeral.

Again, Mr Speaker, I would like to express the province’s deepest condolences to the Garrett family, the members of the Cobourg Police Service and the residents of Cobourg. Our thoughts are with them. As the words on the police memorial say, police officers are “Heroes in Life, not Death.”

1420

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I’m pleased to respond. At this time of the year, and on beautiful spring days like today, we are reminded of the very nice things that our society has, like the trilliums blooming in our forests, the leaves sprouting on shrubs and trees, farm animals giving birth to their young.

Also each spring, on the first Sunday of May, at 11 o’clock in the morning, we also pay tribute here at Queen’s Park at the police memorial to the men and women of Ontario’s police services who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. Many of the members present today were here just two weeks ago to pay tribute to those who have served our great province. Sadly, next year we will add another name to that wall.

Constable Chris Garrett, proud husband and father of two, was violently, insensibly murdered on Saturday morning. Chris, a 13-year veteran of the Cobourg police service, was responding to a 911 call. At 3 am, when most people in communities across the province like Cobourg are asleep, men and women like Chris patrol our communities. They patrol them so we can live in a safe and secure environment.

I can’t help but recall an incident that happened in the winter of 1981. A service station attendant was murdered in a robbery in northern Ontario on Saturday evening. Later that evening, the murderers were pulled over by Huntsville OPP Constable Richard Verdecchia. He was violently shot to death. By early Sunday morning, Constable Neil Hurtubise of the Orillia OPP had come into contact with the murderous villains. He too was shot and left to die on the side of the highway. The Orillia area was in shock. Constable Hurtubise was respected by everyone, especially the young people, including myself, because at one time or another he had lectured us about our driving or our behaving skills.

When we learned of the serious injuries, we all had a sick feeling. A cop, a friend, was fighting for his life. Constable Hurtubise miraculously managed to survive. However, his colleague Constable Richard Verdecchia lost his life, and his name today is on the wall of honour outside.

Like Neil Hurtubise and Richard Verdecchia, Chris Garrett was only doing his job on Friday night when he left his family for work. Who knows what the family had planned to do over the weekend? Possibly gardening, watching sports such as NHL or NBA playoffs, going to the driving range, or maybe just taking time to relax.

The town of Cobourg is a proud and beautiful community. People know their police service. Members of the police service volunteer on community organizations, act as baseball, soccer and hockey coaches, and are members of the local church congregations.

The police community of Ontario has lost a hero. Police services across North America feel the loss.

As Ontarians, we are thankful that day in and day out, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, we can and do live in a safe, secure society. We thank our police services for allowing us to do so. We thank people like Constable Chris Garrett. In a 911 response for his community, he has paid the supreme sacrifice. On behalf of our caucus, we want to extend our condolences to Chris’s wife, Denise, and their children, Britany and Ben. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Constable Chris Garrett’s death is a loss for us all. We remind ourselves, with Chris’s death, of the inscription

on the Ontario police memorial: “Heroes in Life, not Death.”

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): On behalf of New Democrats, I too want to recognize the contribution and the sacrifice of Chris Garrett.

Today, the community of Cobourg and the entire province mourn the passing of Constable Garrett. His death reminds us all of the incredible risk police officers take every day and the debt we all owe to them.

Constable Garrett is remembered as an extraordinarily vigilant police officer, someone whom fellow officers described as a cop’s cop. A 13-year veteran of the Cobourg Police Service, Constable Garrett was the sort of officer who could be counted on to train new recruits because he was the consummate professional.

Constable Garrett was also a son, a father and a husband, and our condolences go to his wife, Denise, his stepdaughter, Britany, his son, Ben, parents-in-law Bill and Anita Nichols and parents Gord and Eve.

Every time police officers and other emergency workers go to work, they take an incredible risk, and there is no way we can repay the debt we owe to an officer who is killed on the job. We will, however, note the legacy he will leave. It is a legacy of service to his community, service to the province, service to his colleagues, to his fellow officers and to his family.

Once again, we extend our condolences to his son, his stepdaughter, his wife, his family, his friends, his neighbours and his fellow police officers. We can never repay the debt. We can never make up for what has happened. But we must acknowledge this incredible record of service.

The Speaker: Would all members and guests please rise to observe a moment of silence in honour of Police Constable Chris Garrett.

The House observed a moment’s silence.

The Speaker: Mr Kwinter has asked for consent for all members to wear the police memorial pin. Is there consent? Agreed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is to the acting Premier. During the election campaign your party and your leader promised that you would not raise taxes and promised that you would hold the line on taxes. Then you were elected and one of the first acts was to implement the single greatest tax hike in the history of the province of Ontario: \$4.3 billion. The people of Ontario know that you did not waste much time breaking those promises not to increase taxes and to hold the line on taxes in this province. But there was another fundamental promise, and that was to balance the budget during the first year in office. Now, we know that the Liberals opposite anticipated a deficit; the Chair of Man-

agement Board was in Hansard talking about that. We know also that once they were elected, they went on a spending spree of in excess of \$3 billion.

I ask the government, represented by the acting Premier now, when you made the promise, will you admit that you never intended to keep it, and by your conduct—the spending spree post-election—you’ve made it impossible to balance the budget in Ontario?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): If there’s one thing in this Parliament that’s made it impossible to deal in the manner that the honourable member asked, it’s the work of his party while in government to seriously cause challenge in the budgets of this province, to be so out of proportion that the member has a lot of gall to stand and ask a question like he just did. By the numbers: \$5.6 billion in-year deficit; \$2.2 billion in further pressures in places like Ontario hospitals, and an enormously big deficit associated with infrastructure, both social and capital. That member stands there and asks a question like that. He should be ashamed after what his party did in their budget little more than one year ago.

Tomorrow in this place at 4 o’clock the people of the province of Ontario will see a government moving forward to restore confidence in essential public services like health care and education and the communities across our province. We’re a party that is proud of what we’re bringing forward and I urge the honourable member to be here tomorrow.

Mr Flaherty: It’s clear that the Liberal government doesn’t take promises seriously. Let’s see if they take voting seriously.

Some years ago, our government introduced the taxpayer protection bill in this House. Acting on behalf of our constituents, we voted for it. A large number of Liberals in this House—in fact, as I recall, every Liberal in this House—voted for the provisions of the Taxpayer Protection Act, which require, as you know, that the express consent of the people of Ontario be obtained for a tax hike.

My question to the acting Premier is whether his Liberal colleagues who voted for the Taxpayer Protection Act intend to change their vote on behalf of their constituents.

1430

Hon Mr Smitherman: My friend from Whitby-Ajax is clearly suffering from a little amnesia here. What are we going to do about his party that, while in government, didn’t bring a referendum, even though they changed that law, because they were raising taxes? Are you going to have a retroactive referendum now? No, you’re not. What about the party that, while in government, pretended to have the books in balance? What about the provisions of the same law the member speaks of, which would see funds paid to cabinet ministers docked if they didn’t balance the budget? Will those members who now occupy the front bench pay that money back? Will they? No, they won’t.

In this place tomorrow at 4 o’clock, you will see a government move forward to re-establish quality health

care in this province with meaningful primary health care that gives people doctors in the communities in which they live, with shorter waiting times, with more nurses, with public health that restores confidence in the services it provides, with immunization. There hasn't been enough care in our long-term-care facilities. These are the priorities Ontarians want and voted for, and that's what they're going to get tomorrow.

Mr Flaherty: Now we have confirmation of the broken promises with respect to taxes and a balanced budget. We have confirmation that the Liberals don't care about how they vote in this place with respect to their own constituents.

Now we have the pledge, that is, the taxpayer protection promise, to "Not raise taxes, or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters—and not run deficits," signed by Mr McGuinty on September 11, 2003. Would the acting Premier please assure the people of Ontario, on behalf of the Liberal government, that they will not dishonour the Premier's word to the people of Ontario?

Hon Mr Smitherman: Tomorrow's budget will be about fulfilling our commitment to the people of the province of Ontario. We were the party sent here to bring in positive change. Tomorrow we build on the work we've begun to restore confidence in our essential public services, like health care and education.

Where for eight years they ran roughshod over these programs, tomorrow we begin to restore the confidence that Ontarians have, with more care in our long-term-care facilities, with home care that works for people to keep them independent in their home and to help them if they've been in the hospital, and by dealing with primary health care in a way that provides interdisciplinary teams of medical professionals working together to make sure people get the care when they require it, where they require it.

We believe that the best-quality health care is the care found closest to home. Tomorrow at 4 o'clock, I urge the honourable member to be here and he will see a party moving forward to do what Ontarians want, which is to restore quality public services in this province, that for over eight years—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

TAXATION

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is to the man who is supposed to keep his eye on the public purse, the Chair of Management Board. The Taxpayer Protection Act is a law that you voted for. It's a law that every Liberal MPP voted for. On September 11, you stood over the shoulder of the Premier, of the leader of your party, the Premier of Ontario, and applauded his recommitment to it. You're also the man who in June said there was a \$5-billion risk to the finances of Ontario.

I have a copy of a lawyer's letter, dated September 24, that was submitted to John Hollins, the chief election officer, which says, "Dalton McGuinty's commitment" is

"to hold the line on taxes." It goes on to say, "No individual or small business will pay any more in tax." Will you stand in your place and say that you won't break the law, that you will obey the law in the province of Ontario?

Hon Gerry Phillips (Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Again I say to the people of Ontario who watch this: Recognize what's happened. The previous government left the province of Ontario with a deficit of \$5.6 billion. They also put on the books of hospitals, children's aid societies and colleges billions of dollars of debt—operating debt; this wasn't for capital. So what did we inherit on October 2? A fiscal mess of the first order from a government that simply did not manage the finances well.

I will say to the people of Ontario, tomorrow at 4 o'clock, the Minister of Finance will get up and deliver a budget that will begin to permanently restore the quality of our public services, get Ontario on a sound long-term fiscal basis and begin to repair the enormous damage that was done by eight years of a Conservative government that did not manage the finances and left our public service in a shambles.

Mr Baird: This is question period. I asked you whether you were going to obey the law or whether you were going to break the law, and I didn't get an answer.

Your front bench in the Liberal Party under Dalton McGuinty is becoming a breeding ground for cynicism against politicians. A day after your lawyer's letter in which you promised not a single penny more of taxes for working families and small businesses in Ontario, you put out a press release, dated September 25. You put out this press release because Conservatives were saying the Liberals really had a secret plan to raise taxes. Your press release said, "We will keep personal income tax rates and the Ernie Eves Fair Share health levy exactly where they are today." Earlier that week, Dalton McGuinty promised in the leadership debate that "Ontario families will not pay one single cent more in income tax." Do you stand by those promises? Can we go to the bank on your word?

Hon Mr Phillips: What we will stand by is that we are committed to restoring the quality of our health care system, the quality of our education system, and we are committed to supporting our hard-pressed communities. And we are going to do that. We will deliver what we said we would deliver.

What people find cynical is a government, the Conservative government, that said the books were balanced, a government that said there was a balanced budget in Ontario, which simply was not true—saying that hours before the election.

What we will do tomorrow is begin to restore the quality of our health care system and the quality of the education system and get Ontario on to a solid, sensible, sustainable long-term fiscal basis, unlike what we inherited from the Conservative government.

Mr Baird: This is the same member who, in the finance committee, warned of a \$5-billion risk to the finances of the province of Ontario. In opposition he

knew about it, but somehow between June and October 2 he forgot.

I have two things in my hand. One is a statement from the 1989 budget, which reads, “Therefore, it is a pleasure for me”—Robert Nixon—“to announce to the House that OHIP premiums will be eliminated as of January 1, 1990.” I have the Sault Star from May 18, 1989, which reads, “David Ramsay, Ontario’s Minister of Correctional Services, feels the high point of Wednesday’s budget was the elimination of health care premiums.”

Acting Premier, if you’re proud of your budget, if you have nothing to hide, will you live up to your promise? Will you live up to the law of Ontario and allow the people to vote by referendum on your big tax grab? Will you do that?

Hon Mr Phillips: I am very proud of the budget that will be presented tomorrow. What the people of Ontario elected us to do—Mr Baird may not like to hear this, but the reason you were defeated was because you decimated the quality of our health care system, the quality of our education system, and you left Ontario in a fiscal mess.

We are going to fix that. We are going to fix that beginning tomorrow in our first budget, get Ontario on a long-term, sustainable fiscal basis, fix our health care system, fix our education system and begin the repair of the damage you did for eight years. I find it really unusual that you would get up today and proudly defend your record of decimating our public services and leaving Ontario with a fiscal mess. I’m very proud we will begin to correct that tomorrow.

1440

HEALTH CARE

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the acting Premier. Ontarians are shocked at the news that the Liberal government will force us to pay for essential health services by re-imposing health insurance premiums in Ontario. Even more shocking is the news that when the Conservatives proposed the re-imposition of OHIP premiums in 2002, you said it was a bad idea: “Ontario Liberals oppose the return of OHIP premiums because they are a tax hike on working families, says leader Dalton McGuinty.”

Acting Premier, can you tell us how, only seven months after an election when Liberals said, “Choose change,” the people of Ontario are once again getting Conservative policies from the Liberal government?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I’m not going to be involved in the speculation the honourable member is involved in, and that’s the position I’ve taken since last week, but here’s what I can tell him. I’m very excited about tomorrow’s budget, in particular as it relates to my role as Minister of Health. What Ontarians elected us to do was improve the quality of public services in Ontario. Our budget and our government’s work with respect to health care and education will lie in very sharp contrast to the early moves that party made while in government, which was that they slashed services to support their tax habits.

Tomorrow will be a day when Ontarians get the message very clearly that this is a government that’s going to deliver on its commitment to enhance the quality of essential public services by restoring confidence in long-term care, by giving more resources to home care and other services. That’s what tomorrow is about, and I encourage the honourable member to be here.

Mr Hampton: If I’m wrong in saying you’re going to reimpose OHIP premiums, then just stand up and say it isn’t so. Stand up and say you’re going to follow the policy tomorrow that you enunciated before the election.

Do you know what else Dalton McGuinty said? “Tory leadership candidates Ernie Eves and Chris Stockwell may want to raise taxes by charging families an additional \$1,000 a year for health care. I do not,” McGuinty said today.”

What we’ve been treated to is that Dalton McGuinty says one thing before the election—he said he was going to do away with private hospitals; we still have those P3 hospitals. He said he was going to do away with private CAT scan and MRI clinics; we still have those.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Question.

Mr Hampton: Now what do we have? The very regressive policy you were opposed to. You said it was a tax hike on working people, and you’re now in favour. Can you tell us when this Conservative policy became so attractive to you: the day after the election?

Hon Mr Smitherman: What I’m pleased to be able to confirm is that tomorrow at 4 o’clock in this place we’re going to deliver on the commitments we made to the people of Ontario. We asked them to vote for change in favour of restoring confidence. With respect to health care, as an example, we’re going to give kids the immunization they need, we’re going to deliver more care in our long-term-care facilities, we’re going to improve our capacity to deliver home care. These are services the people of Ontario told us they wanted to see improvement on.

Therefore, along with our commitments to enhance the quality of public education and give a little more life back to our communities, these are the commitments this party will deliver on in government. Those are the things we asked Ontarians to support us for, and that’s the promise we’ll fulfill tomorrow.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr Hampton: To the acting Premier again—it was a very simple question—if you’re not going to reimpose the Conservative idea of OHIP premiums on the working families of Ontario, just say it isn’t so.

Let me give you another quote from Dalton McGuinty: “Families are already paying for health care with their taxes. Pay more for health care, pay twice for health care, but get less health care—that’s the Tory plan. It’s certainly not the Liberal plan.”

But here we have Dalton McGuinty Liberals once again implementing the same Conservative program they used to be so critical of. I ask you again, what happened to the “Choose change” that was promised? Why are we once again seeing Conservative policies implemented by the Liberal government?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I can confirm to the honourable member that tomorrow we are going to bring more access to quality health care in Ontario. We're going to deliver on the promise we made.

We committed to enhance the quality of essential public services in this province, and we're going to do that. We know Ontarians want to see progress on particular wait-time challenges in our health care system. Tomorrow the people of Ontario will see progress on that point. Tomorrow is about choosing change. Tomorrow is about positive change.

Health care, education and commitment to our community will all be there as key elements of our budget, and our priorities will be delivered upon. This lies in sharp contrast to that party while in government. In their first budget, what did they do? They diminished the quality of our essential public services. We know that is what Ontarians count on government for, and this is a government that Ontarians can count on. The evidence of that will be clear tomorrow.

Mr Hampton: This is exactly the response we got from the Conservatives. They said, by introducing private P3 hospitals, there would be better health care. They said, by introducing private CAT scan and MRI clinics, there would be better health care. They said, by bringing back OHIP premiums, there would be better health care. Now what do we have? The "Choose change" Liberals saying the same thing—exactly the same thing.

Don't you realize, Acting Premier, this takes us back to the bad old days when, in order to access the health care system, individuals paid \$350 in premiums, families paid over \$700, and if you didn't pay your premiums, you couldn't access health care? Don't you understand that this is a strike against universality? Tell me and tell the people of Ontario, how is it that everything the Conservatives stood for in health care that you said was bad, you're now adopting and you're trying to tell the people of Ontario it's good for them? Where is the change in that?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I always find it interesting when the caucus mate sitting beside the leader of that party, the one who squealed out of the Victoria Harbour meeting of his party where they had decided to capitulate on their sacred promise to the people of Ontario to bring in a system of public automobile insurance, stands and talks as if we don't know that the whole Agenda for People that was the premise of their election in 1990 was thrown away. We ran—

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): Don't answer the question, George.

Hon Mr Smitherman: Could you give the member for Nepean-Carleton another question, Bob?

We ran on a commitment to improve the quality of public health care in this province, and tomorrow you'll see ample evidence of the progress that we intend to make to give people primary health care in the communities where they need it by building family health teams. You talked about access in your question and access will be the answer tomorrow. We're going to address wait time challenges.

BUDGET SECURITY

Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax): My question is for the acting Premier. Does the government believe in the principle of budget confidentiality and secrecy?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think that the honourable member well knows that we're involved in a process whereby tomorrow at 4 o'clock in this place the Minister of Finance will stand in his place and present to the people of Ontario the critically important way forward for our province. We know there's lots of speculation about what will be in the budget tomorrow. What I can assure the honourable member is that Ontarians will find a plan, a way forward for public services like health care and education that are so essential, to deliver on the needs of the people of this province. That's what tomorrow is about.

Mr Flaherty: Acting Premier, it's apparent there's been a serious breach of secrecy and confidentiality with respect to the budget. The media are full of stories over the weekend and including today, quoting sources from the Liberal government about matters that are of relevance to the people of Ontario, including their financial planning. There's a reason for secrecy with respect to a budget, which we honour. The reason is that people will not take advantage of knowledge in advance. When you have government sources, including so-called senior government sources, referring to changes in the land transfer tax in advance of the budget and other economic measures to be taken in the budget, the Minister of Finance should resign and the OPP should conduct an investigation and report back about why we are having these breaches in budget secrecy, contrary to the traditions in this province.

Hon Mr Smitherman: It comes as no surprise to those of us on this side of the House that the member would get to that point. The only surprise is that it took him 22 and a half minutes. Why? The Tory strategy for the pre-emptive strike to take out of play a finance minister who, as a result of the fine work he'll bring forward in this House tomorrow, will become enormously more popular.

Tomorrow is not about all the speculation that's been fuelled in this place, not the dreamscape scenarios of the member from Oak Ridges or the wild fascinations of the members opposite. Tomorrow is about delivering on the commitments we made to the people of Ontario, to restore the essential quality of the public services we cherish, like health care and education. At 4 o'clock tomorrow, I know that the honourable member will feel so pleased to have attended to see the plan forward.

1450

YOUTH CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. An issue of concern regarding youth detention centres recently has been brought to my attention. It's my understanding that

rumours, concerns and fears are floating around the province suggesting that youth correctional facilities such as Sprucedale will be privatized. Now that your ministry has become responsible for overseeing youth, including youth corrections, could you please alleviate these rumours and concerns by assuring this House and the province today that publicly operated correctional facilities such as Sprucedale will not be privatized.

Hon Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I'd like to thank the member for his question and reassure him and the youth justice sector that we will not be privatizing our youth correctional facilities. The dedicated men and women who work in these facilities help hold the young offenders accountable and put their lives back on track. I had the chance to see for myself at the Brookside facility this past winter and was incredibly impressed by both the correctional and educational programs offered in these facilities.

Mr Levac: I and a lot of people thank you for those assurances. Youth corrections is undergoing a radical overhaul by removing young offenders aged 13 to 15 from the Ministry of Community and Social Services and youth aged 16 to 17 from corrections. Perhaps the transition from these ministries into your own has raised questions that have led to some of these rumours and concerns. Minister, could you please update the House on how this simultaneous transition of phase one and phase two is developing and how this will enhance youth justice in Ontario.

Hon Mrs Bountrogianni: This will bring Ontario into line with all the other provinces, so youth phase one and phase two will go under one ministry. By integrating our system, we will hold young offenders more accountable to uniform standards and policies, better manage our tracking system, enhance public safety and capitalize on best practices.

POLICE SERVICES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. I was really excited to hear that last answer, providing the best results in a youth facility in the province was Project Turnaround, and he has closed that down.

Minister, I'm sure you'll agree that police today are being asked to do more with less. Their resources are being stretched beyond core functions to increasing services like court security, prisoner transportation, monitoring sex offenders and fighting gang crime.

Tomorrow's budget is a chance for your government to show that you appreciate how police go beyond the call of duty, time and time again. It's a chance for your government to keep its election promise to provide funding to hire 1,000 new police officers. The last government elected in 1999 did keep their promise to hire 1,000 new police officers.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Your question is?

Mr Dunlop: Tomorrow, police services, officers and organizations will be watching and hoping you won't let them down. I know you won't provide specifics on the budget, but surely you can answer this one question: Should police even bother to watch tomorrow's budget? Tell them right now, because if you don't intend to act on this promise—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): The member asked a question and provided his own answer. He said that he knew I would not tell him anything about the budget. You're just going to have to wait until tomorrow to see what the budget is. I'm sure that you and everyone else in Ontario will be quite pleased to see it. I stand by what we are going to deliver tomorrow.

Mr Dunlop: A new survey was just posted on the Police Association of Ontario's Web site. It was conducted between March 8 and March 14 of this year. As part of the survey, participants were asked to comment on the following statement: "Regardless of any deficit situation, one area that should not be cut back is funding for police services." An overwhelming 82% agreed with this statement.

Your leader never said anything about cutting back police services during the campaign, but he did promise to hire 1,000 new police officers. And, I repeat, the previous government, the Harris-Eves government, fulfilled their promise of hiring 1,000 police officers. Is Dalton McGuinty going to at least make a down payment on this promise in tomorrow's budget?

Hon Mr Kwinter: I don't know how I can state it to you more clearly. We have made a commitment that we will put 1,000 new police officers into the forces in Ontario. We will do that over the length of our mandate. There is no suggestion other than in his mind that there are going to be any cuts to front-line police officers, and you will find the answer when you see the budget tomorrow.

WATER QUALITY

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is for the Minister of the Environment. I stand in this Legislature today with a very heavy heart as I remind all members and the people of Ontario that four years ago today we learned about a tragedy that cost the lives of seven innocent people in the town of Walkerton. Dozens of other Walkerton residents must now endure lifelong health disorders as a result of drinking water that they had little or no reason to believe would be contaminated. Sadly, it took news of these seven deaths and the illnesses suffered by dozens more before Ontarians realized that protecting water quality must be a priority.

Since the Walkerton tragedy, it has been difficult for people in many Ontario communities to continue to believe that whoever is running the local water treatment plant is capable of protecting their health. The Walkerton inquiry found that there is considerable room for improvement in terms of ensuring that operators of water

systems are fully knowledgeable and capable of carrying out the tasks required to provide safe drinking water to the people in the communities they serve. Minister, can you please tell the members in this Legislature and the people of Ontario what this government is doing to restore public faith in the operators of our water systems?

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I want to thank the honourable member for the very important reminder she has provided to the House this afternoon. I'm also very happy to report to the Legislature as well that today, as a matter of fact, I was able to make an announcement that demonstrates this government's commitment to implementing the Walkerton inquiry recommendations and to ensuring that water in Ontario is safe.

I have announced the toughest training and certification requirements in North America for water system operators. The changes we are bringing in will ensure that the water system operators will continue to improve their knowledge and skills. This applies to both small system operators and large system operators. They will be required, each year, to undergo in-service to ensure that they are on top of the latest in science and technology so the people in those communities can be sure that their water systems are operated safely.

Mrs Mitchell: Hearing that this government is implementing the toughest training requirements in North America for water system operators will hopefully boost the confidence that the people of Ontario have in the operators of their local water systems. But the Walkerton inquiry also highlighted that tenure has afforded some long-serving operators of drinking water systems the ability to avoid certification. I read in the newspaper earlier today that roughly one fifth of water system operators in Ontario may have enjoyed this privilege to date. Notwithstanding that experience is a valuable teacher, I am certain the people of Ontario will want to know what, if anything, is being done about this unsettling practice.

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: I believe the honourable member is accurate. It is unsettling to understand that there may be people who have responsibility for operating our water systems who would not have undergone formal training. There are some folks—approximately 1,600, as a matter of fact—who are termed “grandparented.” As of today, I am happy to inform this Legislature that the regulations that we've changed will require the so-called grandparented operators to get re-certification through examination. There will be a period of 16 months when those people who have experience in the system but not certification will have to meet those new requirements, but indeed, after 16 months, all people who operate a water treatment system in Ontario will have been certified and must also undergo the annual in-service as well.

1500

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I have a question for the Minister of Education. In December

2002, Dr Rozanski gave us a blueprint for fixing the state of education in this province. As a reminder, this is what he said: put in \$675 million in catch-up money, increase funds for ESL, add \$50 million so that small schools can get a principal, a secretary and maintenance staff, put in \$5 million to adjust for declining enrolment, and put in \$375 million to repair our crumbling schools.

The recommendations are clear, and as of October of last year, you supported them wholeheartedly. Minister, will we see a commitment from Father Tuesday to these specific programs and new investments in your budget?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): Thank you to the honourable member for the question. Certainly the Rozanski report, in the dying days of the previous government, articulated well that there are long-standing deficiencies in the system in terms of basic funding going out to support student success in this province. They need to be rectified. We have a Premier who stood in this place a number of days ago and said that this is one of our highest priorities, which will be reflected in what comes forward in terms of both numbers and programs that will be spoken to in the budget. We appreciate the member opposite helping people anticipate what is long overdue: a remedy for our education system in this province.

Mr Marchese: What schools and students need, Minister—and I guess you know it, because you're defining it—is over \$1 billion in new funds and a long-term funding commitment. That's what they needed under the Conservatives and that's what they need under your government. That way, special education programs won't face extinction every September, classrooms will have educational assistants, and ESL programs will not be too full to be effective.

My question to you is this: When the province tunes in tomorrow, will they see the Rozanski plan implemented or will they hear more excuses for broken Liberal promises?

Hon Mr Kennedy: The member opposite has two choices on offer. I think we can satisfy him that the Rozanski plan has always been part of this government's outlook. We have some differences; for example, we think urban areas require more attention than Dr Rozanski was able to give. But I will note that the third party put forward its education plan before the Rozanski report, as did we. Ours matched the Rozanski report in terms of commitment, in fact exceeded it. Theirs did not. In fact, they were in the position of having to revise their plans before the election to catch up to what Dr Rozanski required. But that commitment was obtained in a matter of a few days. Our commitment is more long-standing.

We've been in this House since March 2001 with a plan, assiduously working with the people in the education system, understanding and respecting our teachers, understanding the upset and turmoil affecting our students and taking responsibility for an education system that prepares students as good as anywhere in the world. You will see that start tomorrow.

NORTHERN TAX INCENTIVE ZONE

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Two weeks ago I attended the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities conference in Mindemoya on Manitoulin Island, as I know you did. This year's conference marked the one-year anniversary of Premier Eves's announcement of the establishment of a tax incentive zone for the north. This was a very positive step for the north. The regulations were to be enacted on January 1 of this year. So far, we see no action on this issue. Your leader previously agreed that a northern tax incentive zone is a good idea and that he would be studying it. Can you inform me and the people of the north what the status of the northern tax incentive zone is?

Hon Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): The member did attend the FONOM conference. It was a very successful conference, attended by not only the member, the critic on the opposition side, but also by five ministers from the government side, five ministers who were extremely well received and who were greeted with the message, "Finally, there is an opportunity to grow and prosper in a partnership together."

Do you know what? If the FONOM conference told us one thing, it told us that the municipalities in northeastern Ontario have every confidence that not only the budget coming out tomorrow but our relationship with the municipalities will always be in their best interest, and they look forward to working with us as equal partners.

Mr Miller: I would like to repeat that a northern tax incentive zone was to be established on January 1 of this year. The people of the north are very eager to see that happen. In fact, at this year's FONOM conference, two resolutions were passed pertaining to this very issue. I'll quote from one of them: "Therefore be it resolved that the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities hereby petitions the government of Ontario to immediately establish the regulations for a tax-free zone for all of northern Ontario."

The people of the north are waiting. When will you enact the regulations for the northern tax incentive zone? When can the people of the north expect to see the benefits of a northern tax incentive zone?

Hon Mr Bartolucci: I believe that in tomorrow's budget the people of northern Ontario will see a government that's firmly committed to our part of Ontario. They will see a government and a budget that firmly understands the importance of northern Ontario. They will see a government that wants Ontario to grow. They will see a government that is willing to work with them to realize the dreams that northern Ontarians have for our part of Ontario, unlike the previous eight years, where northern Ontarians were by and large ignored by the previous government.

There is a new era in Ontario. It is an era where governments get along with each other, because at the end of the day, we understand that the people of Ontario want growth and opportunity.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is for the Minister of Consumer and Business Services. As cottage season approaches, many people coming to Peterborough and Kawartha Lakes are performing routine maintenance on their vehicles. I've heard stories from some of my constituents, particularly seniors, about overcharges and poor quality work at some auto repair shops. What are you doing to protect Ontario's car owners from these unfair, rip-off business practices in the province of Ontario?

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): I'm glad the junior member from Nepean-Carleton took his seat. Since October 2 he hasn't had use of a government car, so he might find this answer quite helpful.

The vast majority of car dealers and repair shops in the province of Ontario are in fact good business people, but there are some who take advantage of individuals. Last year, my ministry received almost 2,100 complaints. These involved things like being overcharged, performing unauthorized or poor quality work, or failing to provide appropriate warranties.

Under Ontario's Motor Vehicle Repair Act, consumers have a variety of rights to protect them in the marketplace. For example, they must receive a written estimate before any work is started, and all repairs completed are protected under a 90-day or 5,000-kilometre warranty.

Mr Leal: After buying a house, possibly the major purchase you and I make is acquiring an automobile. I understand the minister has plans to strengthen the rights of consumers with regard to car purchases. How will these proposed changes differ from the existing legislation currently in place in Ontario?

Hon Mr Watson: Shortly we're going to be going out to the marketplace with draft regulations for the new Motor Vehicle Dealers Act. Let me give members of the House and the public of Ontario three examples of changes to the Motor Vehicle Dealers Act: (1) offering better protection to the consumers who lease their personal vehicle by providing more information on the final cost of leases; (2) helping consumers make informed purchase decisions by providing more disclosure during a transaction; (3) helping to stop so-called curbsiders—unlicensed car dealers—from victimizing buyers, through proposed new penalties.

I'm committed to seeking broad public input in this process. I encourage members to get involved, to talk to motor vehicle dealers and sellers in their communities and ask them to comment through our Web site, which is cbs.gov.on.ca.

1510

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Back in December, when you met with over 1,800 tobacco farmers in

Tillsonburg in my riding, you led those farm families to believe that you were going to fight on their behalf. Nearly two years ago, you stood in this House and said to then-Minister Helen Johns, "There's a tradition in this country of cost sharing...."

It's become obvious that there will be an increase in tobacco taxes in tomorrow's budget. Will you be using those dollars to fund your government's 40-cent share of transition funding, to match the federal money, as you promised during the election and since?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): As the member knows full well, I'm not going to comment on any uninformed speculation about the budget, but I will throw back to the honourable member, what did he do when proposals were put forward to the government in December 2002 and March 2003? His government just sat on those proposals.

Let me make it perfectly clear that we take the needs of all Ontarians very seriously. We take the health concerns of Ontario citizens very seriously as well. We will continue to be there, working for all farmers, including tobacco farmers. We're going to be putting forth a comprehensive, holistic approach with our Ontario tobacco strategy.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Supplementary?

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): To follow the member for Oxford, I'll use some of the same language you used on my colleague Helen Johns just two years ago: "It doesn't take a rocket scientist.... There's a tradition in this country of cost sharing, a 40-60 split. I know you have some difficulties with it." Minister, those are your words.

I remind you again that back in December you paid lip service to tobacco farmers, claiming you were behind them, claiming you would fight for them. What has changed? Have you been influenced by your urban colleagues sitting around the cabinet table? Will your government's 40% share for tobacco farmers show up in tomorrow's budget? That's the question.

Hon Mr Peters: I'm very proud of the members of this caucus and of this cabinet for the recognition and support they have given to the agricultural industry in this province. I'm extremely proud of our record to date of meeting the needs of all Ontarians, including the farmers.

This government has moved forward with eliminating the land transfer tax on farmer-to-farmer sales. We've invested new dollars in plum pox virus. We've invested \$10 million in the mature animal program. As well, we've flowed over \$64 million in the agricultural policy framework funding. This government is committed to all citizens of Ontario, be they urban or rural.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

M. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Ma question s'adresse à la ministre déléguée aux Affaires

francophones. Madame la ministre, les Européens francophones ont été les premiers explorateurs à fouler le sol ontarien. Aujourd'hui, l'Ontario compte plus de 540 000 francophones et plus de 1,1 million de francophiles. Nous savons que le gouvernement précédent était souvent porté à ignorer l'importance de la prestation des services aux francophones de l'Ontario. Nous savons aussi que la défense des intérêts des francophones n'était certainement pas une priorité pour les conservateurs. Pouvez-vous nous dire ce que vous avez mis en œuvre pour empêcher qu'une telle situation ne se reproduise sous le gouvernement McGuinty?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur (ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones): Je veux remercier mon collègue de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell pour sa question.

Yes, he's right: The francophones of this province have been ignored for too long. This government has already launched several initiatives to correct this long-standing problem. Just this past week the Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy, released the report from the French-language education strategy task force. I wanted to thank him for doing so.

For the first time in Ontario, the unique needs of French-language schools have been clearly identified. My government wants to guarantee high-quality French language services in Ontario's public service. We have submitted a proposal to create a French-language advisory committee. We will also submit a proposal to appoint an ombudsman who will ensure that linguistic rights are respected.

M. Lalonde: Pouvez-vous me dire quand ce plan ambitieux sera mis en place?

Hon Mrs Meilleur: Since my appointment to cabinet, I have met with francophones in many parts of the province, including Windsor, Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, Penetang and Sudbury. I intend to continue my visits during the summer.

Prospective members of the advisory committee have been approached. Its members are being chosen from the vast pool of talented francophones who have a keen interest in providing French-language services in this province. Once the order in council creating the committee is approved, members will get to work. They will draft guidelines that will help us measure how well we are delivering quality French-language services guaranteed under the province's French Language Services Act. Francophones in this province are anxious to see this happen. So am I, and this government too.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the acting Premier. We saw gas prices go up yet again last weekend. They're going through the roof. People who need to buy gas to operate their cars or trucks are being squeezed harder—higher in this case. My question to you is simply, will you pass the legislation we introduced in this House, which basically is the

Mr Bartolucci “Keep your promises at the pumps” act to freeze the price of gas?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): On a matter that’s important to all of us and that obviously has pretty significant implications around the world, I’d encourage the member to abide by the rules of the House. He has the opportunity to bring forward a bill for debate in private members’ hour, and members will have the opportunity to vote on it at the appropriate time. I encourage the honourable member to take advantage of that opportunity.

Mr Bisson: The problem is, the price of gas is now going through the roof. You guys introduced a bill when you were in opposition. In fact, you didn’t introduce one. Mr Bradley introduced one, Mr Bartolucci introduced one, almost every member in your caucus introduced bills to freeze the price of gas while you were in opposition. You debated it in your caucus, it was debated in this House, you voted for it and we voted for it. We’re saying that today we’re going to call for unanimous consent. Will you support our call for unanimous consent to pass Mr Bartolucci’s act to freeze the price of gas at the gas pumps? Will you do that today?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think Ontarians would be interested to know that the member is from the party that had the last increase in gasoline taxes of some 13% while they were the government in this province.

I give the member the same answer that I gave to the earlier question, which is that we have rules and regulations in this place. He can bring that bill forward for debate and discussion, and all members will have the freedom of their own conscience to support or not support the legislation. I encourage the member to do that.

LAND TRANSFER TAX

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): My question is for the minister responsible for housing. What have you done to date to encourage private home ownership in Ontario?

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I appreciate the question from my colleague. I think what we in this government have done is bring good government to the people of Ontario to try to build strong communities in this province that everyone can benefit from, rather than the kind of government that your government was involved in, which left this province a \$5.6-billion deficit.

We are building strong communities, and we’re doing it in a number of different ways: through our greenbelt legislation and through bringing changes to the Planning Act. All those changes will benefit the consumer of Ontario as well as builders in this province.

Mr Hudak: What a bunch of pap. That’s another superficial response from the minister. I think he well knows that Bill 26 and Bill 27 together are causing a significant spike in vacant land and housing prices in the GTA and the affected areas; as my friend from Durham reminds me, a 40% increase in his area, causing housing

to become unaffordable for increasing numbers of people. I don’t see how the minister’s policy of increasing taxes in Ontario—potentially over \$1,000 per family in health tax in tomorrow’s budget or even a land transfer tax increase. Minister, young families want to achieve that Canadian dream. We, as Conservatives, support that Canadian dream of private home ownership. We brought in the land transfer tax rebate that has helped over 60,000 people move into their own homes and create jobs in the construction sector.

Minister, at the very least, please tell me today that you’re going to defend the land transfer tax rebate and, in fact, expand it for young families buying their first home in Ontario.

1520

Hon Mr Gerretsen: Again, I thank the member for his supplementary. What this government is doing is making sure there’s health care and education available for young people in this province, so that we can prosper in this province for many generations to come.

The real thing that the member opposite should have been concerned about for the last eight years, rather than decimating public health care, which you’ve done, rather than decimating the education system in general, was to build this province up.

The member well knows that Bill 26 and Bill 27 are all about good development in this province so that we can have a province where prosperity will grow and where people can really be proud of their children and their future. That’s what Bills 26 and 27 are all about. It’s all about the better quality of life that we hope to provide for the people of this province through the enactment of these two pieces of legislation.

EDUCATION FUNDING FOR THE DEAF

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): My question today is to the Minister of Education. Minister, Sir James Whitney Provincial School for the Deaf in Belleville has, for years and years, delivered an absolutely quality education to thousands of deaf students in this province. However, for the past eight years the deaf community in Belleville has expressed concern to me that the previous government planned to very quietly close Sir James Whitney and move the students from there to Milton. It is important for the students, the staff and the parents of Sir James Whitney that they make everyone aware of the superb and significant role they play in Ontario in educating the deaf.

I would ask, Minister, if you could, at your earliest convenience, spend some time at Sir James Whitney and see the jewel of education that we have in Prince Edward-Hastings.

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): First, I appreciate the member’s advocacy on behalf of the students of Sir James Whitney. This is a member who stands in this House with experience in education second to no one, as the chair of his school board, and an advocate for these special students in a special circumstance

and in a special place. We understand very much the value that school brings, and I'm very glad to rise in the House and confirm officially that I will take him up on his invitation to visit the facility, to meet with the parents, the students and the staff, who are doing a terrific job on behalf of the aspirations of all of us in this House.

Mr Parsons: Minister, graduates of Sir James Whitney and other Ontario schools for the deaf have a particular challenge when pursuing post-secondary education. There is no post-secondary college or university exclusively for the deaf anywhere in Canada. Our graduates have to attend in the US for a deaf education. I would ask if you would be prepared to review the current situation and examine the possibilities and options available to provide post-secondary education opportunities to our students.

Hon Mr Kennedy: Mr Speaker, I would defer to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I'd like to thank the member for Prince Edward-Hastings for his question. Most certainly, the guiding principles of accessibility, affordability and high-quality education extend to and include deaf students. I would like you to know that we do provide funding for interpreters, for intervenors and also for computerized note-takers. We also provide bursaries to help deaf students study here in Ontario, in Canada, and in the US, and we provide funding through an annual grant to the Canadian Hearing Society to recruit and pay for interpreters, note-takers and amplification devices for part-time college and university students who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

I would be very willing to meet with you, to speak with you, and to meet with your constituents to discuss how we can be more helpful.

RETAIL SALES TAX EXEMPTION

Mr Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My question is for the acting Premier, the Minister of Health. It concerns the government's recent announcement that children's booster seats will be made mandatory for children travelling in a motor vehicle who are between 40 and 80 pounds, who are under five feet, 10 inches tall, up to a maximum age of eight.

We all support the principle of enhanced road safety, especially as it helps to protect children. But currently there is a retail sales tax exemption for children's car seats for younger children. This means that when parents buy a car seat, as we call them, they get a tax break and pay no 8% provincial retail sales tax on the purchase. However, booster seats for larger kids are fully taxable, subject to the 8% provincial tax.

My question is this: How can the government justify forcing tens of thousands of Ontario families to buy these booster seats for their older children but deny them a retail sales tax exemption, which is available for car seats for younger children?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I appreciate the member's question,

especially because he spent some time to reiterate how important it is that we take every step possible to protect the youngest children in this province. On the matter at hand, which relates to taxation, I'm going to say what I've said pretty clearly: that matters related to the budget are for tomorrow at 4 o'clock. I encourage the member to be in a position to ask subsequent questions following that important event taking place here, and not at Magna.

Mr Arnott: I didn't mention the budget. I'll be here tomorrow; you'll see me here.

My private member's Bill 77, An Act to amend the Retail Sales Tax Act, would extend the existing retail sales tax exemption to include booster seats. It's a very simple, straightforward, one-page bill. Since the minister is unable to give the House a satisfactory explanation of why parents pay retail sales tax on booster seats but not car seats, and given the fact that the government plans to compel tens of thousands of Ontario parents to buy these new booster seats, will he at least express support for Bill 77 and tell the Minister of Finance not to tax booster seats?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm proud to say that we're part of a party that brought in legislation that's going to save lives in this province. On the matter the member asked about, he clearly acknowledged in his earlier question that this kind of initiative is designed to protect those who are most vulnerable in society, including kids.

I recognize that the honourable member's interest in the sales tax issue has been brought forward. I believe—I couldn't quite hear with all the noise—he spoke about a piece of private members' legislation. With respect to information about private members' time, I would offer that, like other parties, he bring forward items like that that we can debate in this House on Thursday. We look forward to the opportunity to exercise our democratic right as members to vote in favour of or against these matters. I advise you to continue to speak with my colleague the Minister of Finance on a matter related to retail sales tax.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That brings us to the end of oral questions.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker, actually two points, very quickly: Members would like to know that today is a very special day in this Legislature. It's a special day in the Hampton family as well, because it's Mr Hampton's birthday. We should take this opportunity to congratulate him on his birthday and also for welcoming his birthday gift into the Legislature today.

On the second point of order, I would ask for unanimous consent to pass, at second and third reading, legislation called Keep Your Promises at the Pump Act, Mr Bartolucci.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

PETITIONS

DISABLED PERSONS PARKING PERMIT PROGRAM

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

“Whereas a disabled person parking permit can only be issued to qualified individuals who are unable to walk unassisted for more than 200 metres in eight minutes or less without causing serious difficulty or danger to safety or health; and

“Whereas the inability to walk unassisted as defined by the Ministry of Transportation is not always determined by a visible disability; and

“Whereas invisible disabilities can often result in difficulty or danger to safety or health when walking; and

“Whereas fines and revoked privileges resulting from misuse of disabled person parking permits are not always enforced;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to further extend the disabled person parking permit program to include invisible disabilities and ensure that enforcement is emphasized and carried out to a greater degree.”

I support the petition and affix my signature.

1530

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have the following petition which was given to me in Rockton, Ontario, this weekend. It contains some 160 names and reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in the interest of true democracy the Minister of Municipal Affairs put the following question to the voters of the city of Kawartha Lakes: ‘Are you in favour of a return to the previous municipal model of government with an upper-tier and 16 lower-tier municipalities?’; and

“Whereas the voters, by a clear majority on a provincially mandated ballot, answered in the affirmative;

“The undersigned demand that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario act to respect the will of the people as expressed in a democratic vote and restore the former municipal structure as stated in the minister’s question.”

I’m in agreement and sign my name thereto.

OPTOMETRISTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I sign this petition with pleasure, and pass it to Christina.

MOTORCYCLE INSURANCE

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from my constituents of Parry Sound-Muskoka, a petition to protect Ontario motorcyclists.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas tens of thousands of responsible motorcyclists are being hit with huge increases in insurance or are being denied coverage because of the type of vehicle they ride; and

“Whereas the premiums for the mandatory insurance coverage for motorcyclists have increased on average over 40% in the past two years; and

“Whereas many responsible riders can no longer afford to insure their motorcycles due to high insurance costs; and

“Whereas sales of motorcycles in Ontario have dropped over 7% year-to-date this year, a figure attributed directly to higher insurance rates; and

“Whereas many businesses and individuals in the motorcycle industry are suffering due to the loss of sales and decreased employment that high insurance rates are causing;

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

“That the McGuinty government take steps to make motorcycle insurance more affordable and ensure that motorcyclists are treated fairly and equitably by the insurance industry.”

I support this petition and sign my signature to it.

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 Deborah Walden of Thorold, who presented this to me, along with thousands of others.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of the member for York North, Julia Munro, who I'm sure would prefer to be here to present it.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Liberal government has said in their election platform that they were committed to improving

the Ontario drug benefit program for seniors and are now considering delisting drugs” or “imposing user fees on seniors;

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

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

I am pleased to sign this, and I endorse it on behalf of the member for York North.

ONTARIO BUDGET

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

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

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

“Whereas the 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 sign this petition as I agree with it.

CHIROPRACTIC HEALTH CARE

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): “Whereas over 1.2 million people use chiropractic services every year in the province of Ontario; and

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

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

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

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

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

I sign this petition.

TILLSONBURG DISTRICT
MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here signed by almost 6,000 residents from Oxford and surrounding area.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

I affix my signature to this petition as I wholeheartedly agree with it.

GO TRANSIT SERVICE

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have another petition from a group of commuters in Meadowvale which I'll read.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

As one of those occasional commuters, I affix my signature and ask William to carry it.

1540

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I'm pleased to present, on the eve of the budget, the last batch of seniors' petitions from Niagara, bringing the total to 1,300. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

In support, I affix my signature.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): “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 will sign my name to this.

WATER QUALITY

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

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government is implementing regulation 170/03, and in doing so will affect town halls, churches and private property owners including small businesses, local community centres and campgrounds; and

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

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

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

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

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

“We, the undersigned, support the attached petition.”
I do as well.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): “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 affix my signature to this petition.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from my constituents in Parry Sound-Muskoka.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AUDIT STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA VÉRIFICATION DES COMPTES PUBLICS

Resuming the debate, adjourned on May 10, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor / Projet de loi 18, Loi concernant le vérificateur provincial.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I understand that it's on the opposition side.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm pleased again to rise to address Bill 18 here in this chamber, as I did last week before we moved on to other business.

The first thing I'd like to do is congratulate Andrea Horwath for winning the Hamilton East by-election. It's a big win for the NDP. I think it's a big win for Ontario. The Liberals went to Hamilton with the wallet open. They were going to buy the by-election. But the people have repudiated their platform in spades—or maybe not their platform; maybe the fact that they just can't live up to their platform—by sending an NDP member to the House here. I do congratulate Andrea for being successful.

We had a very good candidate, a very fine candidate ourselves in Tara Crugnale. We were very pleased with the campaign we had. However, it wasn't our time in Hamilton East.

I think what has been demonstrated clearly is that the people of Hamilton East—and they're representative of the people of Ontario—have had it. They've had it with the broken promises of this government and they're only seven months into their mandate. So they've sent a clear message to the government, and we're hoping that the government is hearing that, because tomorrow, as you know, is budget day.

I'm going to get back to that a little early because we are talking about Bill 18, respecting the Provincial Auditor. While we're substantively in agreement with this bill, we do have concerns about it as well. One of the things I started to talk about was the lack of retroactivity in this bill, which goes against the grain of this government because it is a government of retroactivity. It likes to go back on everything, including private school tax credits, the seniors' education property tax credit and a number of other things, but it doesn't want to give the auditor the power to go backward if there's a problem that should be looked into.

One of the other things we're concerned about is, is this just a smokescreen on the part of the government to try to convince people that they're actually doing something concrete and solid about making sure the auditor has the necessary powers and ability to bring down a report that will be clear in its judgment when it

comes to misdeeds on the part of the government and spending your money, or are they just trying to cover up the fact that they haven't really done a whole lot as of yet and they're trying to convince us that they're really concerned about the money? The way that this government has been spending money should be a concern to everybody. It should be a concern to all Ontarians, the way this government is spending money.

It goes back to what really is the Liberal principle and the Liberal way. They don't have the ability to manage money. They just have the ability to take more of it. They just want to take more of your money. That was clearly the way they governed between 1985 and 1990. They had the biggest tax increases in Ontario's history at that time, but they're outstripping them in this government.

What this government fails to understand, but the people of Ontario understand, is that there's a lot of concern about what's going to happen tomorrow with this budget. The auditor should be worried about that too. They've already broken promise after promise, and tomorrow, watch out. If you've got zippers on your pockets, you might want to do them up, because tomorrow is going to be a tough day for Ontarians. They're going to be digging in there, and they're going to be digging in there deep.

What the average Ontarian can't do is say, "I want to buy this or buy that," or "I want to get a new this or a new that. All I have to do is go to my employer tomorrow and say, 'By the way, my wages have just gone up 20%. I'm just raising my wages.'" You see, you can't do that as an employee in Ontario, or anywhere else in the free world that I know of, because you have an agreement with your employer. You're paid so much for the work that you do.

But what the Ontario government wants to do now—they're going to need more money. They say, "We need more money." They shouldn't be saying, "We need more money"; they should be saying, "We've got a situation where we promised we were going to balance the budget, so we're now going to do that." But no, what do they do? They go to people and say, "We need more money. We're just going to you and we're telling you that you'll be paying more." You can't do that as an employee, but they're doing that to the people of Ontario in spite of the fact there was an ironclad promise on the part of the Premier that said, "I will not raise your taxes."

1550

What else is going to happen tomorrow? A myriad of user fees could be coming our way. The people of Ontario are going to take a hit tomorrow like Sonny Liston is coming back from the grave. It's going to be like one of his left hooks; it's going to be the knockout blow. I'm really concerned about what's going to happen tomorrow.

But I want to get back to this auditor's act. The bill respecting the auditor should certainly be dealing with regulation 170/03 as well. I'm looking at the impact of that on people in my community and all across rural Ontario. It's going to be devastating.

Last week the minister, under intense pressure from the people of Ontario, rural people, the Progressive Conservative and New Democratic Party caucuses, backed off a bit and announced a moratorium. Well, that's not good enough. We've got to know what's actually going to happen out there, because they're just buying six months of grace. The Liberal Party is just buying six months of grace so that six months from now when the summer is past, when the campgrounds have had their summer, "We're just going to slide it under."

The minister has the nerve to get up here and say, and say to the press, "This is a flawed piece of legislation. That's the problem. The problem was the previous government." I'll tell you, the minister had no problem putting this ad in the newspaper back in the spring. She was all sold on 170/03. Had she herself not read the regulation? Did she not know the impact that was going to have on people across rural Ontario? Did she not have any idea?

This has come back now in spades. People in my riding and in rural ridings like those of my friend from Simcoe North, my colleague from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka and other rural ridings have brought this issue back, and the minister is getting nervous. Do you know why? She's a little worried about what's going to happen in Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington as well because it's a serious oversight on the part of bureaucrats that they have allowed this regulation to get this far. There have got to be some substantive changes made. A six-month moratorium won't do. There have got to be some changes and we should be made aware of them as soon as possible.

Of course, we are talking about Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor. As I said, substantively we want to see a tough act that gives auditors strong powers, because the auditor is going to have a heck of a job on his or her hands over the next 10 years, looking after the mess this government is going to be creating with the financial situation and the money they'll be taking out of the pockets of people in Ontario.

There's no doubt that the tax burden on the people of Ontario—I don't know exactly when tax freedom day is in the province today, but under the previous government it continued to get earlier and earlier in the year because they ran the province without having to take all your money. They increased health care spending to a record over \$28 billion in this province and lowered your taxes at the same time. This new government is going to raise your taxes, empty your pockets, empty your bank account, and you're going to be left with nothing.

The Speaker: Questions and comments.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): While I agree with the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke on some matters, I have to express some reservations about the previous Conservative government. John, if you could create a deficit—let's say it isn't \$5.6 billion; let's just say it's \$4 billion—in good economic times, it worries me.

People understand that you might create a deficit in difficult times—some people might, if they want to be

frank, although Liberals always want it both ways. They often say of the NDP, about when we were in power, "You didn't spend enough." For example, tuition fees: "You increased tuition fees by whatever percent," they would say.

In the same breath, paradoxically, they would say, "Yes, but you created the deficit. We would never create such a deficit." You understand the dichotomy of Liberal politics. If you create a deficit, they say, "Ha, only New Democrats do that. Liberals wouldn't do that." If you don't spend on some programs in that recessionary period, Liberals accuse you of not spending enough and cutting back. You understand the point I'm making, don't you?

Mr David Zimmer (Willowdale): Explain it to me.

Mr Marchese: Only Liberals can do that. See, you understand, I've got my own problems—to which I will speak, whenever I have an opportunity—with Liberals. Don't misunderstand me. I've got a lot of concerns about that. They refuse, for example, to tax the highest-income individuals in Ontario because they made a taxpayers pledge. I know you have disagreement with that, too, in different ways, but I believe that's the fair way to go in terms of where you get your money. So because they don't want to break that promise, they're going to go after everyone tomorrow with marriage certificates, licences, birth certificates, death certificates. You name it, tomorrow you're going to get whacked.

Ms Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I'm very happy to respond to the statements of the member of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

First of all, I hope the Tories also listen to the voters in Hamilton East, because they got so few votes in that election they didn't even get a blip on the graph. You weren't even on the radar screen in this thing. I hope you listen to the message that those people sent to you.

They're telling you, "We know what you did when you were in power. We know the mess you left, we know the damage that you did, and we know the mismanagement. We know that is why there is no money. You didn't leave us any money to do anything with. You spent it all, and then you spent some more. Then you tried to hide the fact that you spent it all, and then you spent some more." That's why I am supporting this bill, because we don't want people trying to hide the things that they do, when they give untendered contracts to their friends and they create extra layers of bureaucracy and keep the money out of the grass roots programs.

So yes, it is going to take us a little while to clean up the mess, but we are rolling up our sleeves, we have consulted the people of Ontario, and I'm telling you that next time we go to the polls in Hamilton East and all across this province, you will find a very different result, because we will have done the work. We will have cleaned up the mess.

Your result will not change; I'll tell you that. You'll still be down there, just a bare little blip on the graph down there with your votes, because people won't forget

too soon your legacy, and we won't let them forget too soon the legacy that you left.

This is a very, very important initiative. This is a very important bill and initiative. We have to have accountability. We have to have accountability all throughout government and crown corporations, in every corner. We cannot leave any stone unturned when we look at how the taxpayers' dollars are being spent. It's coming out of my pockets, it's coming out of your pockets. It's coming out of everybody's pockets, and we have to be accountable and responsible, and we will be.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm pleased to rise to make a few comments on my colleague the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke's statement today in the House. As you can tell, he's a very knowledgeable person. He understands exactly what's happened here in the past and where we're going in the future. He makes a very valuable new member, and we're very proud to have him in our caucus.

I listened with interest to some of the comments. I think we've got a real issue. Tomorrow is a very special day, of course, in any government, and for the Premier and for the Minister of Finance, it's their opportunity to try to showcase their platform and to showcase where the government will be going in the future.

I think, of course, they've got some very, very severe problems, and the severe problems really account for the billions of dollars that you made in promises during the election campaign and throughout the previous two years leading up to the campaign. They all weren't made in the 30 days of the election campaign. I have people coming into my office on a regular basis showing me letters from Mr McGuinty about what he promised in a certain segment or a certain issue. Of course, those people are back now, wondering: "This is what he showed me. Here's a copy of the e-mail. Here's a copy of the letter. It looks like he's not going to fulfill his promise." And we say yes. Of course that all relates back to that 60-page cabinet document that you refused to release to our party. That document, we understand, basically shows the spending promises, the cost of your election platform. That would have been in the tens of billions of dollars. They're trying to dilly-dally with this \$5.8 billion, which is really peanuts when you compare it to the tens of billions of dollars in election promises that you promised to the citizens of Ontario. Of course you'll pay for that tomorrow, with Mr McGuinty's and Mr Sorbara's first budget.

1600

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm honoured to rise to talk about this issue, which I spoke about last week. It's very important to all of us. As we've detailed in the past, it's important to our government and it's important to the taxpayers of this province.

I was astonished when I heard the member from Simcoe North say \$8 billion is not important for our budget and not important for our economy. I don't know what he's talking about. That's why, I guess, there was mismanagement by the past government, spending

money left and right regardless of any issues. They have no respect for taxpayers' money. They call it peanuts. Eight billion dollars should be spent on health care, education and social programs. The member has no respect for the money, no respect for any issues. He has no respect for taxpayers' money. He called \$8 billion peanuts—nothing, not important. No wonder, after eight years of mismanagement, that government put us in the hole. That's why we have a lot of problems in health care, problems with education, problems with our social programs. Those people have no respect for the value of money and no respect for taxpayers' money. That's why we're in a mess.

I guess if we pass this bill it's going to be important to all of us. At least we're going to have an auditor to monitor every penny that goes out of this government, used and invested wisely in our infrastructure, in our health care, in our education. I recommend that all members of this House support this bill, because it's important to every one of us, regardless of party. Regardless of the party we come from, we have to remember one thing: We are here to protect the people of this province; we are here to protect the taxpayers' money.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): That concludes questions and comments. The member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has two minutes to reply.

Mr Yakabuski: I want to thank the members from Trinity-Spadina, Stoney Creek, Simcoe North and London-Fanshawe for their comments. I hoped I would be responding to their comments on Bill 18, but they hardly addressed it. They've gone all around the bill. Anyhow, I do want to comment on some of their comments, particularly the member for Stoney Creek, who wanted to talk about the deficit.

You know, every home has a budget. In our house, we plan to buy a certain number of things during the year, and we have a budget. If we get partway through that year and things aren't turning out the way we expected, we have to make some changes. My wife and I sit down and we say, "You know, we can't afford that. We're going to have to make some adjustments on the expenditure side or try to make some adjustments on our income side."

Do you know what? That's the way you run a budget in the province of Ontario too, except now that the Liberals got elected. They got elected in October, half-way through the budgetary period, and they did nothing. They did nothing. They were well aware of the terrible year 2003 was, with respect to unbelievable events—SARS, mad cow, West Nile, the hydro blackout—that made such a tremendous impact on the budgetary situation of the province. It was up to them to sit down and say immediately, "We've got some issues here. We've got to address them." How did they address them? They spent six months whining and crying about the last government, how it ruined the province, how it left them in such a bad state. But they didn't do a thing to mitigate the financial situation. Now we're at budget day tomorrow, and it's going to come back to haunt them.

The Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Marchese: I'm happy to have the opportunity to speak to this bill, or indeed any bill that comes before this House. Without having consulted all the other New Democrats, I suspect the majority would support this bill. It's really not offensive to anyone that I am aware of. I think it will do some good things, and in this regard I will be supporting it.

The couple of things it does do: First, this auditor is going to have a new name. Rather than the Provincial Auditor, we'll have the Auditor General, something that will strike fear in the hearts of many individuals and institutions in the same way that Sheila Fraser has struck at the heart of so many Liberals at the federal level. In this regard, it can do nothing but good, because wherever there is malfeasance it should be found, and who better than the Auditor General? Who better? The other thing it does, of course, is that the Auditor General will now do audits of hospitals, school boards, universities, colleges and crown corporations such as Hydro One, OPG—no problemo. This is good.

People should enjoy today, particularly as it relates to this bill we're debating, because come tomorrow, a whole lot of people are going to get whacked. They're not going to be happy. Come Mr Tuesday mañana, a whole lot of people are going to be coming after the Liberals like you've never seen.

Mr Ramal: How do you know?

Mr Marchese: I'm going to tell you. The Liberals refuse to tax the fat cats, those who have money. You wouldn't dare touch people with money. The Tories wouldn't do it, certainly, because they continued with their tax cuts on the fat cats. What will Liberals do? What will they do? What will they say? What did they say they would do? They have a pledge that they're not going to increase taxes. I understand the Tories, but the Liberals signing that dumb pledge that Monsieur McGuinty signed? I don't know. It was not one of the greatest acts in a lucid moment of a Premier, in my humble opinion. It was a serious mistake.

In refusing as Liberals to tax those who have—fat cats, let us say—what are the options for tomorrow's budget? The options are that they're probably—well, they've gotten away from taxing fat, I understand, which is good, because they were about to do the stupidest thing, David, of taxing hamburgers under four bucks, you know, that kind of stuff, fatty foods. They were going to try to get away with it by explaining that this is for the betterment of people's lives, that this would be better for their health if they taxed sandwiches at \$4 and less.

Mr Ramal: It was a rumour, sir. It was a rumour.

Mr Marchese: They were about to do stupid things like that because they failed to take on the fat cats, those who have money to give, those who have been the biggest beneficiaries of the Tory tax cuts. Liberals are going to leave them alone, because the Liberals, McGuinty, signed the pledge: No new taxes. So tomorrow, good citizens, get ready for a shellacking, a whacking, because they need money.

What are they going to tax? Alcohol. It's easy to tax alcohol. Tobacco. It's easy to attack tobacco. They're going to increase fees on marriage licenses, birth certificates, death certificates. By the way, on the birth certificate stuff, I've got to tell you, I was waiting for my marriage certificate for about seven months, and they're going to increase the fee to get it. Maybe you won't have to wait seven months, maybe it'll be six, but I have a suspicion that it will be probably 10 months or a year from now if you're applying for a marriage certificate. It ain't coming. Imagine this: I waited seven months, and people are waiting for birth certificates for six, seven months to a year. David, can you believe that? You might say you'd understand it if the Tories did it, but under a Liberal jurisdiction, you would think it would be fixed today. People in need of a birth certificate are still waiting. So you're going to get whacked tomorrow with higher fees for birth certificates that you've got to wait a year to get—not a pretty thing.

1610

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: “Where would you get the money?” I just explained, David. You want me to explain it again? If you tax income, it's fair, it's just, because under the progressive income tax system we have in Canada, those who have a little more pay a little more. Unfortunately, there are so many gaps and loopholes that rich guys, people who know how to get around the laws, are able to save money. But income taxes are the fairest way to get the money. That's what I was saying to David. That's how you should get it. But he and his colleagues refuse to do that.

Wait for tomorrow; good news is coming. I'm waiting, George. George says, “Be here.” I'll be here, George. I hope to be closer to you. We'll have to wait for yet another week and a half or two, but we'll be closer to you soon, George. By the way, George, I wouldn't miss that budget announcement tomorrow for the world. In fact, I'm drooling at the prospect of what the finance minister might deliver tomorrow.

Fat cats, you're OK under the Liberals. Poor folk, wait for a shellacking tomorrow. It's sad, for Liberals who often gesture thusly, as a way of expressing that they have a heart. There's no heart there. It's gone. It's dead as a rock, as solid as a rock. There is no heart. Tomorrow you'll see it.

Instead of reinvesting, they're simply reinventing themselves. They are going to reinvent government in the same way the Tories tried to do it. This is another way of reinventing government, by saying, “We'll be more efficient. We'll dig out the extra dollars somewhere.” I don't disagree with that. If there are dollars to be had in terms of how money is invested or how it is not invested properly, if this does it, I say, God bless; this is a good thing. But it's about reinventing yourselves, not reinvesting.

You've broken every promise. The only promise you should have broken is that you will increase income taxes on the wealthy as a way of recovering lost revenue,

approximately 16 billion bucks by that previous government. If you don't recover that lost revenue, you are operating under the same box. You understand that, Doctor? It's the same box. If you are operating under those tight guidelines, you've got to squeeze rocks for the extra money. You just can't do it. It's not going to work. That's why I say that I drool at the prospect of what it is that you might offer tomorrow.

Michael, you guys are about to whack families with a health care fee that McGuinty in opposition said was bad, was wrong. Now, this is rumour, says my friend from London-Fanshawe. He says, “It's only rumour,” the way George and others are saying, “It's only rumour. Everyone's speculating about rumours.” I've got no problem with floating ideas, getting some feedback, and if they're bad, you throw them out—no problemo. I think it's OK, but if this rumour were to be true, that tomorrow you're going to announce a health care levy, one that McGuinty opposed, it's bad.

This is not to say that McGuinty hasn't broken any other promise. God knows the list is long. Why review those lists? It's irrelevant, really. Everyone knows. As Leonard Cohen sings, “Everybody knows.” Isn't that a good song? I love that song. But everybody knows, so why enumerate the litany of broken promises?

I'm telling you, good citizens, keep an eye on the budget. Keep George accountable. Greg Sorbara—Mr Tuesday, Father Tuesday, Reverend Tuesday—tomorrow, he'll fix things. He'll fix things, all right. That's why I'll be here.

Speaking to this bill, it is a good bill. But David, I hope you're amused by everything else I'm saying.

Mr Zimmer: I'm paying careful attention.

Mr Marchese: That's good.

Speaking to this particular bill, there is never any mention of extra pecunia to do this work. You understand that these are expanded powers we're giving to the new Auditor General, expanded powers to do more, because now you're going to go after colleges etc. So you need more money, right?

Ms Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia-Lambton): You have to be here at 4 tomorrow.

Mr Marchese: You got it. You knew where I was going. See, the Liberal rump here and others knew where I was going. I wasn't even so subtle, I suppose. I don't know. But if you've got more work, the Auditor General says, “Give me the money. Show me the money.” Remember, the Auditor General—

Ms Mossop: We'd show you the money if they had left us any.

Mr Marchese: Now, you can blame the Tories all you want, but when you introduce a new bill, it becomes your bill—not theirs, yours. So the problemo around this bill, as I was trying to express before you were just interjecting, is that you need some money. Do you agree?

Ms Mossop: I agree.

Mr Marchese: OK. The rump here agrees that we need more money for the Auditor General to do this job. Has anyone heard any Liberal, minister or otherwise, say, “We need more money?”

Mr Dave Levac (Brant): No.

Mr Marchese: No. Exactly. I haven't heard one Liberal say, "Don't you worry, Marchese. The money is coming."

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): I told you last week.

Mr Marchese: Michael, you indicated as a gesture to me—"Where's the pecunia?" That's what I said. "Where's the pecunia?" Right? When I did my two-minute—

Mr Colle: Health and education.

Mr Marchese: No, I'm talking about this bill. Forget health and education at the moment, although I could go on on that. But let's stick to the bill, right? The Auditor General says we need more. I say it's only obvious that if you expand his powers, you'll need more. Michael Colle agrees with me that, yes, you need the bucks. Hopefully, it will flow. What more can I say? I'm assuming, because you like this bill, there will be hearings, and I suspect there will be lots of people saying what I am saying: Where's the money?

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Give it to the NDP.

Mr Marchese: The Minister of Transportation says, "Give it to the NDP." Please, I wasn't asking that. God, it's not for me to have the money. It's for the Auditor General to have the money, because if the Auditor General has the money, that individual, man or woman, can independently do the job that Bill 18 wants him or her to do. The money is connected to the independence of that position so that you're not begging the government constantly for money. I understand this. If the Auditor General doesn't get the money, one could become somewhat soft and vulnerable in one's ability to independently criticize the government, because if the money is not there and the money is to flow based on the kinds of decisions the Auditor General makes—you understand—the Auditor General could potentially lose his or her independence. You will agree with that, as a lawyer?

I think he agrees—passive agreement. I believe it's connected. Give the person the money so they can do the independent job that you, I suspect, want them to do. So I suspect the money will flow.

Yes, there will be some people out there—institutions no less, like hospitals, universities, colleges, school boards—who will argue, "We're already doing this. Please, we don't need an Auditor General's review, because we're already doing it." They will argue perhaps that this is redundant. They will say, "Why would you spend money to do something that we're doing?" I'm sorry. I say to those institutions or to individuals in those institutions, what our Auditor General will do is to look for value for money.

Yes, we agree with the concept, and why wouldn't we? Yes, let's review processes and procedures to make sure that we, as funders of these institutions, agree with the direction they're going in. I've got no problem with the fact that some people will object, and I disagree with the objectors, should there be any—I suspect there are—

if they argue that, or argued it or will argue it in the future. I think this is OK, and I think the Auditor General, whoever that person will be, if they are like Mr Peters—remember him? You guys hired him for a while. He was a good man. I liked Mr Peters. I liked him because he played no favourites with any political party. That's what you want in an Auditor General.

You want an Auditor General like Mr Peters, who was equally scathing of New Democrats, equally scathing of Tories and, I suspect, would have been, had he been here, equally scathing of Liberals, because I think he's a very ethical person. He wants to do the job, and he wants to do it right.

1620

So my hope is that we will have someone like Mr Peters or a Sheila Fraser type at the federal level who will dig deep into the annals—

Mr Zimmer: The bowels.

Mr Marchese: —the annals, bowels of malfeasance, possibly, and fix the problems, wherever they might be.

Mr Zimmer: The Tories' malfeasance.

Mr Marchese: The Tories were bad, and he would have found something equally bad in the Liberal administration, had he remained. But not to worry, because whomever you hire will do the job as effectively and objectively as Mr Peters. Some people describe Mr Peters as an equal opportunity scathing officer. I think that's true. I always liked him. I dealt with him in committee, and I found him always to be a very fair man.

This bill proposes a 10-year term. I think a 10-year term is good. I think it's good to put in the legislation. Clearly, it wasn't in previous legislation that you had a defined term. I think that's a problem, because people in such a position, under the way it was written in the bill, could be there for life. I don't think it's right.

I don't think it's right for people to be there for five years and then assume or pretend that the job is theirs, should they say, "Yes, I'm willing and interested in remaining as the privacy and information person." With all due respect, I believe she's a very able person. But I hear tell from a number of sources clearly that she might have resigned if she didn't get the appointment, and I don't agree with that. If a person is able and competent, they should have the confidence to reapply for the job and not ask the government that it be given to them without that process of interviews, where you go before peers and you're judged on merit and your experience. So I disagree profoundly with what you did in not re-hiring and having all three political parties being part of that, but re-hiring based on what principle I can't define, can't explain and can't defend.

So I'm happy that Bill 18 puts into place a 10-year term. After that, I presume that person is gone—"Sayonara. Thank you very much for the work you've done"—and we move on with another person. I prefer that kind of scenario, where things are very clear. The old process wasn't clear, and the process the Liberals selected for the re-hiring of the privacy and information officer was, in my view, mistaken and wrong.

So the leader's been stood down. I suspect our colleague will speak to it. My suspicion is that they will support the bill too, but I don't want to speak for her.

Coming back to the comments I made in the beginning, I get awfully tired when the Liberals complain about New Democrats: "God, they didn't spend enough," and "God, they spent too much." It's tiring. It really is tiring. You would think, after a while, Liberals would learn something and say, "We're in charge now. We've got the limousine. We've got the wheels. We've got some extra money. Yes, we're going to get a reduction because we can't balance the budget"—it's not a big deal, I suppose; a couple of bucks less. But you're in charge now, and you've got to move on.

I've got to tell you, some of your ministers look bad when they constantly say, "Oh, but you did this," and "Oh, the Tories did that." After a while, it gets so tiring. Just do the job. Do what you want to do. Do what you can do. Talk about what you're doing to deal with the problems you've got. Defend what you're doing, and hope for the best. At the end of it, you just hope for the best. I would prefer that. But to attack New Democrats in the 1990-95 period, when we are accused of creating a deficit and not spending enough, is inconsistent, you understand—paradoxically not smart to say.

I'm happy to say I'll be supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Levac: I appreciate the opportunity to comment. The member from Trinity-Spadina did me a good favour; that is, he actually spoke about the bill and indicated that he and, without putting words in his mouth or assuming anything, I suspect the NDP are on side with this, on the understanding that Bill 18, the Audit Statute Law Amendment Act, is something that is good for the province and good for the people of Ontario.

One of the things I've said from the very beginning is that I wanted to bring the message and concerns of the people of my riding—110,000 voices—to Queen's Park and have Queen's Park assist us with what we need to do for our hopes, dreams and aspirations, particularly with the money they give and loan to the government to spend back out and not have Queen's Park tell them what it's going to do to them.

I think that's exactly what this bill is about. It's taking the action the member was talking about. What action are we going to take? Well, we're going to take this action because we've seen years and years of the way we put money over here and it disappears, and put money over there and it disappears and doesn't get fed this way. This is accountability and clarity. It's very clear and it's going to be transparent. It's opening it up.

Eighty per cent of the money spent by government agencies is spent outside the realm of this Legislature and the auditor. We're going to bring that in and say, "We should be accounting for all the money that's being spent." Disclosure of where that money is going is what the people of Ontario want. They want to know that the money being spent on all those institutions that are supported by provincial money is accountable and transparent—we can see and it's clear.

I want to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina. That's what he was talking about, and I think he supports that. That's the good news about this.

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): It's always my pleasure to listen to the member for Trinity-Spadina. He has always entertained me, but on those occasions when I listen closely, he has a great deal to say, a great deal of wisdom, in my opinion. It was interesting that he varied from the bill somewhat, in that he had to instruct some of the hecklers from the Liberal benches as to their responsibilities in this House.

Responsible government is what we have in the parliamentary system. It's not representative government; it's supposed to be responsible government. We have a bill before us that is presented by the government, and they are responsible. But I can't help but think that the viewers get confused at times, because I certainly do.

I recall meeting with a group of Japanese students travelling through Cambridge, who told me about their form of government. They have a single, unitary government and one for their municipality—two little governments. Then it was my turn. I had to explain to them what government was like in Cambridge. First of all, we had a city, which they had. They recognized that. Then we had a school board, which was way over here. They were elected representatives. Then we had a regional government. So we're up to three levels of government already. Then I had to explain to them that we had a provincial government for the province of Ontario and a federal government. By the time I had finished explaining, and perhaps I didn't do a good job, they were somewhat confused. We get calls from our constituents daily looking for information, and they also get confused as to who is responsible for what.

1630

Mr Colle: I wanted to comment on the debate by the member from Trinity-Spadina. I think he made some good points. Bill 18 is bringing forth additional powers to the office of the Provincial Auditor. There's no doubt that he will take on more varied and challenging tasks, because now he will be going into the whole area of hospitals and universities and looking at their various accounting practices and making sure they adhere to accepted accounting principles, as he's done here in the Legislature.

I think Mr Erik Peters, who was here for the eight years I've been here, certainly gave credit to the office of Provincial Auditor. He was impeccable, extremely fair and tough. Sometimes the public doesn't appreciate that officers of the Legislature are doing an amazing amount of work for the public, protecting not only the public purse but also the public interest, making sure institutions are being run fairly and in a very efficient manner and that they are following accepted practices. That's what Bill 18 is about, and we think this is a step forward in ensuring there is more accountability in government.

I would like to correct my friend from Cambridge: Yes, this government is responsible, but since 1837, from William Lyon Mackenzie, we have responsible and rep-

representative government—you can have both. So having representative government doesn't preclude being responsible.

Anyway, this is good legislation. It does a lot of good for the public interest, and that's why I think all sides are supporting it.

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments in this debate on Bill 18, which encompasses various aspects of the Provincial Auditor. The role of Provincial Auditor in this province is to be cherished by the people of Ontario. The Provincial Auditor ensures that monies that are collected by not only this government but governments in the past and most assuredly into the years ahead are spent well. We want to make sure the monies are spent to the benefit of those persons who have entrusted governments with their hard-earned tax dollars.

In the past, the auditor has made reports on all governments and keeps governments in check, making sure that further recommendations put forward by the Provincial Auditor are acted upon, so that indeed those monies are well spent and the accountability of elected officials remains paramount. The Provincial Auditor's main role, in my mind, is to ensure that we who are entrusted with those dollars spend them wisely and to the benefit of all. This is indeed a step forward in that regard.

The bill talks about the term of office of the Provincial Auditor. I think it's important that there be continuity in that occupation. I think, too, that the person who holds that office must continue to have the trust of both sides of this House, not only the government but also the opposition side, so that the people of Ontario are served very well through the initiatives of not only our government but governments of the past and governments that will be here for many years to come.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes questions and comments. The member for Trinity-Spadina has two minutes to reply.

Mr Marchese: I thank the respondents and have a reaction to some of them.

First of all, I'm supporting this particular bill. My suspicion is that some others in our caucus will too, but I can't speak for them. Secondly, the members from Brant, Eglinton-Lawrence and Chatham-Kent Essex spoke about the need to expand the responsibility of the Auditor General into other fields. I understand that. I wasn't disputing it. No one is. We don't have to explain to the public, each and every one of us each and every time, why we are doing it. I think we understand it. It's for that reason that I said we need the money to be there to support the functions of the Auditor General. But no one spoke to that. Not the member for Brant, the member for Eglinton-Lawrence or the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex spoke to the issue, the recognition that the responsibility is heavier and, therefore, "We agree with Mr Marchese when he says we're going to have to put some more money in." Not one cent. Maybe other speakers will, as they speak—possibly next. But if you assure us and the public that the money is coming, people

will feel a little better, because no one is arguing that the position you're creating with expanded powers is bad. I suspect most speakers are saying it's good. But if not accompanied by money, it's a problem. That's mostly what I spoke to. There are other things I spoke to, but I hope other Liberals will address that when they speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I will be sharing my time with the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

I'm pleased to rise in this House to address Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor, an act that would permit the Provincial Auditor to have access to the books and records of schools, school boards, universities, colleges, hospitals, and even OPG and Hydro One. It concerns me that a city the size of Ottawa, with a total budget of \$2 billion, has the scrutiny of 21 councillors and a mayor with considerable budgets at their disposal, and they're moving toward an external auditor right at this time, while health care, under scrutiny of a volunteer board with about the equivalent of \$2 billion in expenditures, same as the city of Ottawa, does not have that scrutiny. We must make sure that taxpayers' money is well spent. Value-for-money audits are needed throughout the organizations where roughly 80% of our government expenditures occur. So the new Provincial Auditor will have the ability to look at that 80% of the dollars and will have the responsibility of making sure the taxpayer is protected.

There's a concern to me as well as a councillor that we heard a lot about how well our city was run but we could never compare the cost of services delivered on a city-to-city basis, or service-to-service basis. We could never get that information. It would seem to me to be a fairly simple task to compare city to city. That should be done so we can select the best practices, to place our city managers in a position where their management can be compared with their peers across the province. City politicians and managers do not want this scrutiny, but it is absolutely essential.

I'm no longer with the city, but I see the same problems now that I've become a provincial member: concerns like the CCAC in Ottawa, where they're able to build their own case management system from scratch while there are dozens CCACs across the province. They should have generic case management systems that are adapted for local conditions. Where was the leadership in this province that allowed one CCAC to spend \$2 million reinventing the wheel? And it'll probably turn out to be less than round when it's completed.

I want to know what the service delivery costs are in each hospitals, and how well-managed hospitals can be rewarded and poorly run institutions can be assisted with the transfer of best practices across the province. This is not about fraud, as far as the main element here. We have to go out and look at value for dollars spent. I think that's what we're interested in and that has to be a big part of the new terms of reference for the Provincial Auditor.

I sat on the committee for the auditor's report for three days and I saw how a small contract for mould removal,

which started with a pre-qualification process for works under \$100,000, was negotiated. It turned into an \$8-million project, then a \$21-million project and finally a \$30-million reconstruction of the courthouse with only \$6 million of that awarded competitively.

1640

I would just like to read from the auditor's report: "The project, then estimated to cost approximately \$8 million, was therefore carried out without a fixed-price contract and without proper competitive acquisition process for a project of this size. In addition, the ministry did not obtain ministerial or Management Board of Cabinet approval for not following competitive selection procedures before awarding a contract of this magnitude." So there's no doubt that we need a lot more effort on behalf of the auditors in here.

On the same project, "Notwithstanding the ministry's and ORC's efforts to deal as quickly as possible with the health concerns at the former courthouse, during the period of more than two years taken to complete the project, large contracts were awarded without following competitive selection procedures, and approvals to deviate from required Management Board of Cabinet directives were not obtained from either ministry senior management or Cabinet." We see that there is a real need to have that.

I think this Liberal government has a different attitude toward responsibility in this way. I also saw how under the last government the FRO, the Family Responsibility Office, would not improve the administration of the case management system, probably because they did not believe in bothering deadbeat dads, but it was costing this province about \$10 million a year in additional social assistance—a figure accepted by the ADM, by the way—because when we these deadbeat dads did not pay up according to the court orders, these moms and these kids across this province went on social assistance. They had to.

Thank goodness Minister Papatello has ordered FRO to move on and acquire a computer system, a case management system that will permit the following of the defaults in a timely manner. Court orders will be enforced in a timely manner and the hard-working parents and their children will be able to look after themselves. They will not have to turn to social assistance because the system failed them, a system that was set up for the parents and children.

We may now branch out and audit where big dollars are being spent. I do not feel the major target is fraud. The major target of the additional audit powers and, I hope, added budget, must be to find and promote the best practices across this province and to have teams available to come in and improve programs that are in trouble.

Our government has taken the protective shield off Hydro One and OPG. This is an obvious extension to be able to audit the billions of dollars spent on health care and education. These extended powers for the Provincial Auditor will permit this province and this House to see the best practices across this province, to see where

service delivery is the lowest cost and more timely. This will focus on attention on achievers and failures in service delivery across the province. Why should the taxpayer not know the cost of a particular surgery, the cost of drugs for patients in certain long-term-care institutions? Why can our systems not scrutinize the service delivery? Why can't we act businesslike and protect the taxpayers' hard-earned dollar? How could a Minister of Energy like the member for Nepean-Carleton permit the rip-offs that went on on their watch? How can a minister permit such dealings which cost this province billions of dollars?

The new powers and duties for the auditor will permit him to review the crown corporations, but that oversight should have been provided by the Minister of Energy, as someone has said before. When this oversight is not done, the Provincial Auditor will be able to pick up the slack and we will not have any more of these major overruns that we have seen. Bill 18 would make sure that we never have this incompetence again running so much of our province's resources.

It has been said that doubling the auditor's office would cost \$9 million. I am not sure of that figure. I never got the budget for it. It would seem to me that scrutinizing a health care budget alone of over \$20 billion would warrant a \$9-million increase just on its own. Consider that provincial policy has mandated that mental health spending was to move from 70% institutional and 30% community. That was 10 years ago. We haven't reached those objectives. Provincially, we have moved from 30% to 58%, but in Ottawa we are still stuck at the 30% in community. The dollars aren't moving out into the community in health care. Why is that? What's different about Ottawa? I think that if we have more of a budget and we have more powers for the Provincial Auditor, we will find out why these things happen, why when decision are made they are not followed through by certain parts of this province.

I would like to see a program from the Auditor General that would present realistic programs and budgets for that office in order to move from a passive review-type program to a proactive program seeking our best practices, praising achievers and directing management teams to improve institutions and programs that do not deliver the required returns. It takes resources to discover the problems and then to monitor the improvements.

I believe that there is a terrible resistance to change within our bureaucracy and the institutions that are funded, that only when programs like CCACs can be compared on an apples-to-apples basis across the province can we, as members of Parliament, provide the oversight to improve our spending, get value for taxpayers' money and bring back confidence to our institutions.

I support this legislation. It is difficult to believe that we have not gone this way long before, and I hope the budget is provided and the approach is well designed with the help of the private sector so that we, as members of Parliament, can do our job, which is spending the money of the taxpayers of this province in a manner that gives each one of us a better return on the tax dollars.

The Acting Speaker: I understand the member is sharing his time. I recognize the member for Sarnia-Lambton.

Ms Di Cocco: I thank the member from Ottawa-Orléans for his comments regarding this legislation. I'm pleased to rise to speak to this legislation because it truly is about accountability to the public, and it's about more transparent and responsible government to Ontarians. That's what the essence of this bill is.

The government under Premier Dalton McGuinty is transforming the way it does business in this province. This is one piece of legislation among others that truly is going to change the way government does business and begin to restore confidence in the public for government and how government does its job.

The role of the Provincial Auditor—and under this legislation the new name is going to be “Auditor General”—in Ontario is going to be expanded. Expanding the purview that the Auditor General will have is going to ensure that we have agencies, transfer partners—80% of our tax dollars are given to these transfer agencies such as school boards, hospitals and many other transfer agencies. What will happen here is that these agencies will now come under the purview of the Auditor General so that he or she is able to track the money, to decide or to look at whether or not we are getting value for money in these agencies.

I watched in the last session of this Legislature when, whatever government did, there was always the notion that government really shouldn't be in people's faces, that we should have small government and that government really didn't have a role. There was a notion that the corporations were all good and that the public sector was wasteful and bad. That was the sort of ideology with which this province was governed at the time.

When the Auditor General, or the then Provincial Auditor, would look at how government was doing its job, he came up with many areas that revealed a lot, revealed a great deal of mismanagement. What was happening too that may or may not be known: The way the Provincial Auditor was dealt with by the government of the day was that they would cut the resources as almost a way of punishing the Provincial Auditor for his comments.

Many times I remember sitting in the committee that the Provincial Auditor sat in and he was actually denied access to the figures and to the paperwork under various ministries at the time, which, by the way, was unprecedented; that had never happened. Not only did the Provincial Auditor not, in my view, have his role expanded; it was actually undermined many, many times. There was a lot of evidence of that in the past four or five years that I was here in opposition.

1650

I want to talk about this legislation and what it would do if passed. This legislation, if it passes, would provide to the Auditor General an expanded power to conduct value-for-money audits in institutions in the broader public sector. I mentioned school boards and hospitals,

but it would also have the oversight for universities, colleges and all crown-controlled corporations, including Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation and their subsidiaries.

Not only were Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation not under the purview of the Provincial Auditor, but in 1997 they were removed from freedom of information. So we had a way of doing business which was about not having transparency, and what we are going to do is restore that transparency and accountability.

What is this value-for-money audit? What is it characterized by? Well, it's about whether or not money is spent in a way that is most efficient; in other words, the best use of dollars. It's value for money. When you go and buy something, you want to make sure that your dollars are buying the best product or you're getting the best value for the dollar that you're investing.

It also looks at—and this is another of these value-for-money audits—whether appropriate procedures are in place to measure and report whether the programs are effective. The member for Ottawa-Orléans certainly gave some examples where there were no procedures, or contracts were given out without any kind of tendering process. What this is going to do is put that kind of scrutiny into our public bodies.

The highlights under the amendments to this Audit Act—and I want to put this on the record again. I'm also glad that the member from Trinity-Spadina is in favour of this bill. He has restored my confidence in his scrutiny of legislation. I have to say that when we look at the proposed amendments, the Auditor General would be able to conduct discretionary, full-scope value-for-money audits of the broader public sector, but they do exclude municipalities.

Why is that important? It's important because the people of Ontario deserve to trust how government is spending their hard-earned tax dollars. The Provincial Auditor—or now, when this act is passed, the Auditor General—will be the checks and balances that are put into place to ensure that the government and the transfer partners of the provincial government are spending their dollars wisely.

Over the years, I believe there has been a lot of mistrust of how government does business and how the corporation of government does business. Right now they're talking all the time about the biggest headline news coming out of Ottawa. It has to do with some issues that bring into question how money was spent. The public expects the government, those who are entrusted with the people's money, to invest in their priorities—in health care, in education—but they go one step further. My constituents tell me it's not enough just to say, “We put more money into a service.” They also want to be able to trust that that money is being well spent and that there is some oversight, that there are checks and balances, because there are billions and billions of dollars that are expended by our transfer agencies. Some 80% of the dollars that are taken in by the provincial government go to transfer agencies. It is being able to have that

oversight, it is those checks and balances, that have been missing for too many years.

Again I say this is part of this new era of truly transforming how the government of Ontario is going to do business, its business of providing needed services in this province. The Audit Statute Law Amendment Act, 2004, Bill 18, is one of the largest steps. It is a single step, but I believe it's one of the biggest steps we are taking to ensure that there is true accountability to the public, to ensure that we have a more transparent and responsible government for Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Marchese: To the member for Sarnia-Lambton, I was hoping I would hear from her and the previous speaker about when the money's coming and whether the money's coming.

Ms Di Cocco: It will.

Mr Marchese: I know you say it will, but I'm a bit cautious on this side. When I don't hear people speaking about the issue, I say, "Hmm, there's a problemo here," right? Because you can't have transparency or accountability unless that individual can do the job, and to do the job, you need the bucks. You know that.

Interjection: Big bucks.

Mr Marchese: I don't know whether it's big bucks or small, but whatever is adequate for the person to do the job, because otherwise it can't be done. You can't expect accountability because you simply say so. Transparency will not happen because you wish it so. If you've got the extra money for the person to be able to send people to do the job, then you get the transparency and accountability you're looking for.

I am convinced that some of you understand this and believe that. I'm also convinced that some of you are lobbying within your own caucus for that to happen. If you all lobby, it will happen, but if it's only one or two or three raising your hand, saying, "We really should do this, otherwise it's a problem; we'll be attacked if we don't do it because the person won't be able to do the job," if it's just a couple of people, it just won't work. The speakers need to convince me that you are on board with pressing the minister and cabinet to release a couple of bucks, whatever that is.

I know you're nodding in agreement, meaning that it might happen, it could happen, you agree, but you have to say it. OK. Then we'll hope that the money will be coming, because, as I hear you in agreement, I'm sure you will be lobbying for it.

Mr Mario Sergio (York West): I wish to comment on the previous speakers, the member from Ottawa-Orléans and the member from Sarnia-Lambton, for bringing to the attention of the House the most important and salient point of this bill.

Let me say quickly that back in December when the minister introduced this particular bill, it was introduced with the full intention of changing some of the ways we do business in this House and throughout Ontario from past usage, if you will. The bill doesn't just change the name for the sake of changing the name from Provincial

Auditor to Auditor General. One of most important aspects—and this is why we believe it has to be done—was a commitment our Premier made during the last campaign. It's so important, and we believe this will indeed indicate the seriousness with which our government intends to present to the people of Ontario how we are doing business, not only ourselves in this House but those people in the various agencies that receive taxpayers' money.

In the past, we have seen that the actions and duties and responsibilities of the Provincial Auditor were hindered by members of the government and the government itself. One important aspect of the proposed new act, under section 11.2, is that the Auditor General will exercise his powers and perform his duties without obstruction from anyone, from any member of the government, from the government or from any member of the staff. This is right in the bill, and I believe it's one of the important points of this bill.

1700

Mr Dunlop: I was out in the back room and I heard the speeches from the two Liberal caucus members on Bill 18. It's a pleasure to respond to them. I'm back to calling this the Sheila Fraser act. Obviously, as far as Liberals are concerned, Sheila Fraser is probably not someone they care an awful lot about. It's very interesting that with all the turmoil going on in Ottawa these days, as we look toward a federal election, the name of Sheila Fraser continually comes forward. Of course, right now, we're going to create the position of Auditor General here in the province of Ontario.

I have another concern that I don't think has been raised during the debate yet, and maybe in your final you can respond to this a little bit. Have you done any kind of analysis yet on what the costing would be to implement what would be the higher roles of the Auditor General? Obviously, he's going to need a lot more staff—he or she, because there will be new Auditor General appointed. But it will be interesting to note the kind of cost it will actually be.

Why I'm concerned about that is that almost all the transfer agencies we refer to, people who receive a lot of money—school boards, hospitals etc—have auditors working for them. They give you an audited statement at the end of each year. I know that the program is for how you spend your money, whether it's being spent properly or not. Most of the organizations I talk to, particularly school boards, insist they're spending their money to the best of their ability. After all I heard about schools and how efficient they were over the last four years, I don't know why you'd even want to tackle a school board, because obviously, the way you were talking to our government, they were spending their money very, very wisely.

I guess my time's up. I appreciate the comments.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I'm pleased to respond to the speeches by my colleagues from Ottawa-Orléans and Sarnia-Lambton. I am very pleased to support this bill that will expand the powers of the

Provincial Auditor. When people think about provincial spending, they tend to think of it in terms of money the provincial government spends directly. In fact, the provincial government spends relatively little of the money directly that it collects from the taxpayers of Ontario. After you discount the money we pay on debts run up by various governments, mortgages and that sort of thing, when you look at the actual operating funds we spend to run this province, 80% of it goes to other agencies.

Some of those are quite large organizations, like school boards or hospitals. Some of them are organizations that seem to be completely out of control, like Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation. Some of them are very small, little local agencies that may provide a few mental health services or a few social services—very small services. So we're looking at agencies that the government transfers billions of dollars to, that range from organizations with a half-billion-dollar budget on their own to maybe just \$50,000.

But the problem with all these agencies is that we have no ability as taxpayers, as the provincial government, to look at whether we are getting value for money. This isn't about, do the books balance? It's about, are the taxpayers of Ontario getting value for money? What we are doing is making sure that the Provincial Auditor will be able to look at each of these institutions and make sure our money is well spent.

The Acting Speaker: One of the government members has two minutes to reply.

Ms Di Cocco: I'm pleased to respond to the members from Guelph-Wellington and Simcoe North. One of the issues that probably has not received a great deal of attention is the fact that we've actually had to put in this bill, under section 11.2, which re-enacts the current prohibition, that it's an act against obstructing the Auditor General and members of his or her office in exercising powers and performing duties under the act when conducting an examination. In other words, this new section also prohibits obstruction with respect to a special audit. We've had to put this in because the Provincial Auditor spoke of the number of times that he was obstructed from doing his job.

In response to the member for Trinity-Spadina, the resources will be enhanced because of course the Auditor General will need more resources. But that money is money well spent because it is going to be able to, on behalf of the people of Ontario, make sure that the money is being used well, wisely and that it is effective, and not that we have a number of the boondoggles, things like the fact that previously—and this comes from the auditor's report. The Tory government at the time had failed to address a serious backlog in the court system, so that the services that were being provided were not better. In other words, we were not getting value for money.

This is a progressive piece of legislation and it's another step toward this new era of transforming the corporation of government doing business.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to join in the debate this afternoon on Bill 18. Bill 18 is an act that enlarges the powers of the Provincial Auditor. The Provincial Auditor under this bill would be renamed Auditor General. I would like to point out there could be some confusion with the Auditor General of Canada in that renaming. So hopefully there would be an Ontario reference added into that.

The bill brings more of the public sector under the control of the Provincial Auditor. It should provide legislators and the people of Ontario with a complete view of the efficiency and effectiveness of government expenditures that occur through grants to major institutions in the broader public sector.

As I mentioned, the title of the Provincial Auditor would be changed to Auditor General. However, the reality is that the person occupying this position will be referred to as the provincial Auditor General, so hopefully that will eliminate any confusion with the federal Auditor General.

The new definitions for grant recipients and reviewable grants are wide enough to include school boards, universities, colleges and hospitals. The province at present has the authority to order special audits of these institutions. Now the Auditor General will be able to carry out such audits without a formal request. So that's an important change.

The term of office for the Auditor General is to be 10 years and it's to be non-renewable. I guess one question we'd have to ask is, does this apply to the present auditor?

There are some concerns we have. We're supporting this bill but we do have some concerns. The new section 9.1 limits the power of the Auditor General to begin work until after April 1, 2005. So certainly a question I have is, why start in 2005? Why not start as soon as the bill receives royal assent? Why wait until April 1, 2005?

The new section 10 gives the Auditor General broad access to information and specifies that disclosure to the Auditor General does not constitute a waiver of solicitor-client privilege, litigation privilege or settlement privilege. This clause will have to be explored in detail to see its effect on the use of the information given to the Auditor General.

The new section 11.2 deals with access of the Auditor General to information and punishment if access is impeded or documents destroyed. Is the punishment outlined sufficiently severe?

New section 12 outlines the content of reports of the Auditor General. I think we should be questioning whether these statements are sufficiently broad, and do they allow for special reports?

New section 27 deals with secrecy on behalf of the Auditor General's employees who receive information.

Section 27.1 deals with the issue of privileged information. How do these clauses affect the use of information given to the Auditor General?

New section 27.2 deals with the protection of personal information which may be given to the Auditor General. Are these protections sufficient?

1710

While this bill may be sufficient as far as it goes, it should be amended to give the Auditor General the power to begin to operate under it immediately. Let's not wait until June 1, 2005.

What is the balance to be achieved between the protection of privacy and the use of information by the Auditor General? This is an important question that needs to be addressed.

What resources will be dedicated to the Auditor General to ensure the ability to carry out the work under this bill? Without dollars to follow it, it isn't worth much.

We are in support of this bill. The bill expands the power of the Provincial Auditor. This bill is about transparency and accountability, terms that are often referred to by the government. But in reality I think voters, or taxpayers, out there have to be able to trust their government. I think we have to look at what has happened in the last seven months. The Liberal government speaks endlessly about addressing voter cynicism, and it is in this mood that this particular bill has been introduced.

Let's look at reality. I think nothing breeds cynicism like breaking promises. There was an election on October 2. The government was elected on many promises—some 231 promises, I think—and very significant promises. We're seeing many of those promises broken—some very significant promises.

One of the most significant, and one that I think made a big difference in the election in terms of winning votes for the government, was the taxpayer protection promise. Dalton McGuinty, then campaigning, with a lot of fanfare signed the taxpayer protection promise. I've actually seen a copy of it: "I, Dalton McGuinty, leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, promise that if my party is elected as the next government, I will not raise taxes or implement any new taxes without the explicit consent of Ontario voters and will not run deficits. I promise to abide by the Taxpayer Protection and Balanced Budget Act."

Interjection: He signed that?

Mr Miller: The Premier signed that, and there was a lot of press on that—very public, I think. I must admit I watched that in the election and thought, "Jeez, I'd consider voting for Dalton, now that he's agreed to be financially responsible." I believed it. I'm sure there were a lot of voters out there who were taken in by that.

But since the election, we've seen the government break several significant promises. They made big promises about Highway 407. They were going to roll back the fees on Highway 407. I don't believe we've seen much action on that front.

We've seen promises to do with auto insurance. I would say the public perception out there, in terms of the promises to do with auto insurance, was that the government was going to freeze auto insurance immediately upon being elected on October 2, and then we were going to see first a 10% reduction and finally a 20% reduction. I think that if you ask the average person on the street, that's what they feel was communicated to them. They

were going to see, effectively, a 20% reduction in their auto insurance. You can duck around the fine print if you want, but I think the average person on the street believed they were going to see a reduction.

Well, they're not seeing a reduction in their auto insurance. In fact, the government delayed a number of recommendations and regulation changes that were going into effect early in the fall, which were agreed to and put in place in the summer, that would have brought about a 20% reduction in auto insurance. They delayed that, and now we're seeing big increases.

I receive letters daily at my constituency office about huge increases. In one case, a 22-year-old up in Sundridge depends on a car for his employment. He was already paying roughly \$3,200 in auto insurance. He has to drive to the garage he works at, and gets paid \$10 an hour. He's facing a real problem: How can he even continue to work now that his insurance is going up to over \$7,000 with his June 6 renewal? What happened to that 20% reduction? These are the sorts of broken promises that breed cynicism amongst voters.

There are many other broken promises, a big one being the 4.3-cent price for hydro. We just saw that that promise has been broken, and hydro rates have effectively gone up some 27%, when you go from 4.3 cents to 5.5 cents. Whether that's right or wrong, the government made a promise in the campaign to hold the line on hydro prices. That's what people believed was going to happen. I think it is important that the government keep its promises.

We just had a by-election in Hamilton.

Mr Yakabuski: Buy: B-U-Y.

Mr Miller: The government went in there and was spending a lot of money on tax breaks for the area of Hamilton. A lot happened around Hamilton in that by-election—or as you say, the buy-election. I congratulate the winner, the NDP candidate, Andrea Horwath, who won that election with quite a substantial margin; I think something like 63% of the vote. I think she won because people are sending a message to the government that it's important that you keep your promises.

The government is blaming all its broken promises on the \$5.6-billion deficit. They keep repeating and repeating it in the hope that if you repeat it enough, somehow it will become the truth. Well, they took over in—

Mr Levac: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I know the member is going to get back to the bill sometime. I just remind him that I'm looking forward to it.

The Acting Speaker: I know all members of the House are aware that they are to keep their remarks pertinent to the topic at hand. I look forward to hearing the further remarks of the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka.

Mr Miller: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I think my points are very much related to the auditor and Bill 18, the auditor's act. I think what I'm talking about, in terms of the government keeping its word—

Mr Yakabuski: They're certainly going to give that auditor lots of work.

Mr Miller: Absolutely. I think this government is going to probably double the workload of the auditor as he goes around and tries to keep track of all the increased money they're spending and that it's being spent fairly for the taxpayers of Ontario.

The government has been laying blame for their broken promises on the fact that they say there's a \$5.6-billion deficit. They brought in the retired Provincial Auditor of Ontario, Erik Peters, shortly after the election to look at the financial situation of the province. They hired him as a consultant. One of the things they said they weren't going to do was hire consultants, but they hired him as a consultant to look at the books, and he came up with the \$5.6-billion figure. You could question how they came to that figure, but I won't do that at this time.

Shortly after that, in November, there was a more accurate prediction of the real numbers for the financial year ending March 31, 2004, and miraculously there was a \$3-billion increase in revenue that didn't show up in the previous audit done by the past Provincial Auditor. Yet, in November, when the financial review was done here, the deficit was still \$5.6 billion, even though there was an increase in revenue of \$3 billion. The government seems bound and determined—tomorrow is budget day, and it will be very interesting to see what happens, what that deficit actually ends up being.

I'd like to point out that the year-end is March 31. So in October, there were still six months. We were halfway through the year. There were still six months to go in the financial year. The first six months of 2003 had been very challenging, with SARS affecting tourism dramatically, with mad cow, with the blackout, with many challenges facing the Ontario government which affect the monies coming in to the Ontario government.

The government was elected on October 2. They still had half the year to go about trying to manage the outflow of money from the provincial government, control spending and make an attempt, at least, to balance the budget before the end of the year. They didn't do that at all. Instead, they went about repeating and repeating "\$5.6 billion" to shift the blame to the past government, instead trying to deal with controlling spending. This past year, we had record revenues in Ontario of over \$70 billion. The problem is, we had an increase of over 10% in spending in Ontario. Hopefully the government, in its budget tomorrow, will start to try to control spending and manage the finances of the province correctly.

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Another point I'd like to talk about is another big point the government was making in the election, talking about democratic renewal. We just went through a by-election. Let's look at the process of that by-election. First of all, they called the by-election very quickly. The campaign was on before I even knew it was going on. I think the idea was to do it so fast that people wouldn't realize a by-election was going on.

They picked the candidate. They didn't allow the normal process to occur. They didn't allow anybody who

wanted to be a candidate for the Liberal Party to run in a nomination meeting, to fight it out fairly and try to get people to support you, to win the nomination. Instead of doing that, they picked a candidate to run and then called a by-election very quickly. The by-election date was four days before the budget, because I suspect the budget may have some bad news and a few further broken promises. So I think they tried to slide that by-election in very quickly so that people wouldn't have time to really think about things. But the people of Hamilton would not be fooled and I think they sent a message that the government should be keeping its promises, that when you say something in an election, you should be delivering on that.

Let's look at the other aspects of acting out of democratic renewal that we've seen under this government. We had the selection of a new Speaker in this place. I know that Mike Brown, the Liberal member for Algoma-Manitoulin, had been the Deputy Speaker in the last session of this Legislature—I would like to say he did an admirable job—and he was looking to get the job of Speaker. I know that because he sent me letter in the mail looking for my support, and I was planning on supporting him. So imagine my surprise when for some reason, just before the election of the Speaker was to take place, suddenly Mike Brown was not running for the office of Speaker. I think what happened was that the Premier decided who was going to be Speaker and didn't allow the normal democratic process to occur. So the member for Algoma-Manitoulin didn't get the opportunity to run in an election in this place to become the Speaker of the Legislature. That's been the real face of democratic renewal here in the last few months.

Let's look at the actions of the general government committee. The NDP member, Ms Churley, made a motion in the general government committee, and I'll read the motion: "The notice of motion to the general government committee is, 'that the standing committee on general government convene to examine the propriety of actions taken, or not taken, by Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, political staff in Mr Sorbara's office, senior ministry staff and various officials at the Ontario Securities Commission on matters related to the OSC investigation of Royal Group Technologies.'" I think Mr Sorbara was even willing to go and testify before the committee, but what happened? The committee took marching orders from someone in the Premier's office, I would suspect, and all Liberal members voted against this motion that would have shed some light on the Royal Group Technologies affair. That is the sort of light we are seeing in these Liberal days. This is the kind of democratic renewal that we're seeing in recent days.

The member sitting beside me has also raised some other issues that are of concern that we're hearing about in the ridings. One of them, of course, is regulation 170/03, the water regulations that are currently being put into place by the government. That is a regulation on which they've just announced a moratorium for six months, and that's good news. This is a regulation that's

really going to affect rural and northern Ontario. It's a regulation that could adversely affect schools, small churches, community centres, resorts, lodges, with some of these new and tougher rules. I'm glad to see the government has put a moratorium on it, but really we probably need longer than six months to deal with some of the concerns of that regulation.

I think another reason that Bill 18 needs to be brought into effect is when we look at what's happening federally. We're just going through the whole sponsorship scandal federally. Hopefully, Bill 18 will make sure that sort of thing doesn't happen here in Ontario. But with all the increased spending the government's been bringing into effect lately, I think it is important that, as he is to be called, the new Auditor General have increased powers to keep an eye on all the increased spending that the current government is doing. I hope the government tomorrow, when it brings down its budget, starts to become responsible, starts looking at balancing its budget and will now start to keep its promises to the people of Ontario as well.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Marchese: I have to say I agree with some of the observations the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka has made, particularly as they relate to the Hamilton East by-election. One of the observations he makes is the point he speaks to in terms of the democratic deficit. You will recall that McGuinty wants to correct the former Conservative government deficit by bringing back his own.

Mr Sergio: Yes.

Mr Marchese: Mario Sergio agrees with that. The observation the member from Parry Sound makes, however, member from York West, is that McGuinty has made a profound mistake in dealing with Hamilton East in an undemocratic sort of way. You see, the Premier has this power to appoint people, a power which he has, by fiat, deciding who runs. That, in my mind, is a serious problem as it relates to democracy. As McGuinty wants to correct the democratic deficit the former government left, he has his own problems to deal with, and the observation the member from Parry Sound makes is a good one. When you appoint by fiat, you create a problem, and he did. McGuinty should have allowed for the democratic process to rule in Hamilton East, where the people of the riding decide who they want. They nominate their candidate and off you go. But the problem the Liberals have both provincially and federally is that they give to themselves this divine power to choose candidates. That's a problem. It certainly is not in keeping with dealing with the democratic deficit. They're got to deal with that.

The question I have for the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka as it relates to Bill 18 is, where is the money? He's got to speak to the issue of where the money is.

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): It's my pleasure to respond to the debate on Bill 18 initiated by the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka. Let me tell the House at the start that this bill does not deal with democratic renewal. What this bill deals with is accountability and transparency. Last year, on October 2,

the people of Ontario gave us a mandate to be accountable, to be prudent with public money. What our government did was ask the Provincial Auditor, Mr Erik Peters, to have a look at the books of the province and he told us that there is a deficit of \$5.6 billion in the books. What Bill 18 deals with is changing the name from Provincial Auditor to Auditor General.

Interjection.

Mr Kular: That's right. I want to thank the honourable member from Parry Sound-Muskoka for supporting this bill because, if passed, it will authorize the Auditor General to conduct special audits of grants, recipients and crown-controlled corporations and their subsidiaries.

1730

This bill deals with accountability and gives us a mandate to be prudent. I support this bill. I also want to thank the member for Trinity-Spadina for supporting it, because this bill will expand the powers of the Auditor General. It's going to be a good accountability bill.

Mr Yakabuski: Thank you to my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka for his input on Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor. He touched on many things. He had a very broad presentation. But he also specifically touched on the need to have control over spending. That essentially is why we have a Provincial Auditor, so that the money the government is collecting is being distributed in a fair, equitable and honest fashion. In that respect I think the bill is going to have some very strong and good points.

But where the bill won't speak is that it's not going to tell the government how to set a budget and it is not going to tell the government how to spend its money. It's going to, after the fact, decide whether it did a good job of it. That is essentially the problem we're going to face tomorrow, when budget day rolls around, because Liberals don't know how to spend money wisely. They really like to get out there and pick your pocket and then go on a shopping spree.

In 1985 to 1990, revenues in Ontario grew at unprecedented rates, the fastest in history. A great economy was flowing and growing and revenue grew. What happened during that time? Expenditures grew faster. At the end of the Liberals' term we were in worse shape than when we came in because they love to spend money. It makes them feel good. They like to go on shopping sprees and buy this and start this and start that, but at the end of the day you are responsible to those people from whom you're taking the money. That's why I'm afraid that this government tomorrow is again going to forget what its real responsibility is and go on another spending spree and take the money out of my pocket and yours.

Mr McNeely: The members for Parry Sound-Muskoka and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke have forgotten something when they start saying that the problem here is the new government. In the good times—this was mentioned by the member from Trinity-Spadina, I believe—by giving back to corporations, by reducing taxes, they let the revenues of this province be reduced. That is why there is a structural deficit of \$4.6 billion in this province.

The Office of the Auditor General would in effect function as a proxy of the taxpayers of Ontario, the 12 million citizens who entrust us with their hard-earned tax dollars, so that we can pay for the services they need and deserve. I would expect that the heightened powers of oversight and review this bill would give the Provincial Auditor may go some way to addressing the serious and justified concerns taxpayers have about how their money is being used and if it is doing what it is meant to do.

It is painful to me and to all of us who come to the Legislature to ultimately serve the public good that the trust of the voters has been eroded by the shameful and flagrant misuse of funds by some politicians, their cronies and other officials. Beyond the inarguably criminal waste of public funds, these individuals are destroying the faith of the public in government.

That is why our government is taking important steps toward democratic renewal, of which this bill is a part. We understand that the public is demanding accountability. They have the right to be at the table. By the creation of the expanded role of the Provincial Auditor, we are ensuring that their concerns are answered.

I support this bill. I'm sure it will give us greater accountability in this province. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Parry Sound-Muskoka has two minutes to reply.

Mr Miller: It's my pleasure to respond and thank those members who made comments: the member from Trinity-Spadina, who talked about the democratic deficit—indeed, I think I heard him say a few times, “Where is the money?”—the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale, the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and the member for Ottawa-Orléans. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke was talking about the fact that what this government really needs to do is control spending. We need an auditor to make sure that the spending is done in a fair, equitable and honest manner.

Before this government was elected, I didn't really believe the rumours when my colleagues would talk to me about tax-and-spend Liberals. I didn't really believe that, but only since this government was elected did I realize that Liberals really do like to spend money. That's why we've seen an increase of \$3 billion just in the last six months. The question is, what's going to happen tomorrow? Are we going to see even more spending without trying to live within our means?

The member from Ottawa-Orléans was talking about the question of revenue. In the last days of the past Conservative government we saw an increased revenue of some \$16 billion while at the same time there was \$16 billion in tax cuts, because the fact of the matter is that we need business to be successful, we need business to prosper and do well, and we have to take into account regulations and the various effects on especially our small businesses that are trying to survive. So we have to look at water regulations, the cost of hydro and all the tax rates and everything that goes into affecting a small business. We need those small and large businesses to be successful because it's those businesses that our govern-

ments live off; it's those businesses they tax. That's where all the revenue comes from.

I'm very pleased to join in the debate today on Bill 18, and we do support that bill.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Zimmer: I'm going to share my time with the member for Perth-Middlesex.

I've given a lot of thought to why I want to speak in favour of Bill 18. What we're trying to do with Bill 18 is open up government and its related organizations so we can bring the voices of Ontarians to Queen's Park and make this entire, massive public sector more transparent and responsible to the people of Ontario. We want to do that because transparency and accountability are the very best safeguards for public services.

We are attempting to expand the authority of the Provincial Auditor by allowing him to conduct value-for-money audits of organizations in the broader public sector. This legislation, if passed, will give the Provincial Auditor the power to scrutinize public organizations, hospitals, school boards, colleges, universities and other public infrastructure organizations. We're doing that so that the people of Ontario can be assured that their hard-earned, hard-paid tax dollars are being spent wisely.

As the public watchdog—and the key here is “public watchdog”—the public auditor should have the right to investigate spending not just by the Ontario government but also by its crown-controlled corporations and indeed its transfer partners. Why should we have a watchdog? Why do we need a watchdog over how the public monies are spent?

I've been privileged to serve on the standing committee on public accounts. I'm new to government, but I can tell you that exercise was an eye-opener. In answer to the question of why the auditor should have a watchdog function, you should keep in mind that the public auditor can't investigate the public sector as things stand right now. This was the most significant demand on the province's financial resources. Fully 80% of total government expenditures—that's excluding the interest on debt—are in the form of transfers to the broader public sector organizations and individuals, and those are not subject to the auditor's report. Bill 18 will make them so.

1740

The best reason to expand the scope of the auditor is contained in his very report. I carefully read over the 2003 report from cover to cover, and it revealed the following. These are some of the incidents in the 2003 report that cry out for investigation. I give them in no particular order:

—The Tory government, it was clear from the report, failed to address a backlog in the court system. The 2003 auditor's report pointed out that the Ontario Court of Justice had the highest backlog of criminal cases in 10 years.

—Some \$60 million in fines were allowed to go unpaid.

—The auditor found 150 types of security risks at Ontario courthouses, including unauthorized weapons, assault, vandalism and theft.

—The auditor revealed that deadbeat parents are \$1.3 billion behind in court-ordered child support payments.

—The Family Responsibility Office caseloads per worker are too high, about 600 to 1,700, versus 400 for Quebec and 300 per worker for Alberta.

—Ninety per cent of calls to the call centre get busy signals and require repeated phone calls.

—Some cases get no follow-up for a year, and it takes an average of three and a half years to complete a case.

The list goes on:

—Ninety-five per cent of inspection resources last year were spent on video retailers, which had a total of only eight complaints. There were only nine inspections of debt collectors, despite 4,100 consumer complaints.

This is the kind of malfeasance the auditor will be able to uncover if we proceed with Bill 18.

—The economic development ministry spent \$4.3 billion without a strategic plan.

—The Strategic Skills Initiative spent 75% of its money on construction equipment instead of skills training.

—The ministry wasted money on untendered contracts and expensive trips.

Again, the Auditor General, if Bill 18 goes through, will be able to dig into this and expose it to public scrutiny. This is a part of what democratic renewal is about.

—The Auditor General found out that the previous government doled out over \$1 billion from the Ontario Innovation Trust without ministry or legislative oversight, a plan or even cabinet approval.

—Twenty-seven percent of waterworks did not submit the minimum number of samples to test for E coli and fecal coliform; 300 non-municipal waterworks were never submitted to any tests at all.

These are the kind of transfer partners that Bill 18 contemplates the auditor's looking into.

—Water inspectors visited 54 of 357 private treatment plants, and 44 of almost 1,200 smaller plants and designated facilities.

—There are eight boards of health without a full-time medical officer of health.

—Public health departments funded 100% by the province received the same amount of funding as they did in 1991.

—The auditor found out in 2003 that none of the province's public health units conduct the necessary inspections of food preparers to avoid food-borne diseases.

—Fourteen per cent of children have not received all of their vaccinations by the age of seven.

That's just an example of what a careful reading of the 2003 auditor's report reveals. Bill 18 will allow the Provincial Auditor to conduct value-for-money audits of institutions and programs in the broader public sector, such as the ones that I have just listed where there are financial abuses, financial malfeasance and misfeasance, including, of course, the notable, famous Ontario Hydro and all its related organizations. The Provincial Auditor

would then be able to do more than just examine the books of broader public organizations. The Provincial Auditor, under this bill, would be able to conduct full-scope value-for-money audits that assess whether organizations spend money with due regard to economy and efficiency, and if they have the procedures in place to measure and report on the effectiveness of the programs they are supposed to deliver.

Let me just briefly refer to what I think are four important sections of Bill 18, because nobody has referred to these sections. I've talked about the philosophy, what we want to do, why we want Bill 18, why we want an empowered Auditor General. I've given a list of abuses that were garnered from a reading of the last report, for 2003. Let me just turn my mind to Bill 18 for a minute or two.

Section 10 is entitled "Duty to furnish information," and this is critical: "Every ministry of the public service, every agency of the Crown, every Crown controlled corporation and every grant recipient shall give the Auditor General the information regarding its powers, duties, activities, organization, financial transactions and methods of business that the Auditor General believes to be necessary to perform his or her duties under this Act." That is a powerful tool.

Subsection 10(2), "Access to records," another hand-in-hand powerful tool along with the duty to furnish information: "The Auditor General is entitled to have free access to all books, accounts, financial records, electronic data processing records ... files and all other papers, things or property belonging to or used by a ministry, agency of the Crown, Crown controlled corporation or grant recipient"—that's the transfer payments—"as the case may be," and any other information "that the Auditor General believes to be necessary to perform" his duties. Another very important tool.

Section 11 is the third tool that the Auditor General has to root out this malfeasance: "The Auditor General may examine any person on oath on any matter pertinent to an audit or examination." That is a powerful tool.

The last, and the overarching authority given to the auditor under Bill 18, is the authority to give an opinion on statements: "In the annual report in respect of each fiscal year, the Auditor General shall express his or her opinion as to whether the consolidated financial statements of Ontario, as reported in the Public Accounts, present fairly information in accordance with appropriate generally accepted accounting principles and the Auditor General shall set out"—and this is important—"any reservations he or she may have."

These are powerful tools to enable the Auditor General under Bill 18 to root out financial mismanagement and to hold all of us here in this Legislature from all parties, and hold the government, accountable to the taxpayers of Ontario. That's why I am proud to support Bill 18.

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I too am proud of Bill 18. I want to follow up on the comments made by my colleague the member for Willowdale, who

actually read out a litany of problems that we found in the Provincial Auditor's report about what was happening in the previous government. I've done a little research. I looked at the second reading debate of this bill. All parties agree to this bill. Who can be against accountability and transparency? Who can be against that? So everyone is supporting the bill. I can tell you that each and every member of our government caucus has stood in his or her place and spoke to the bill and about its need, that this was an election promise we made.

I generally would like to comment that the NDP are also in favour of the bill and spoke to the bill, raising some serious concerns in their own minds—perhaps not in ours, but definitely in their minds—and we've attempted to address those concerns. One of their members, Mr Kormos, did tend to veer during his comments on Bill 18, as I reviewed them.

But I want to address my comments to the members of the official opposition who spoke to this bill in second reading and even here today. I can understand, after the member for Willowdale explained the sorry state of how things are audited and what is revealed, that we had comments made by the member for Simcoe North. Now, we're talking about Bill 18 and creating an Auditor General. What did he discuss in his comments, because he was given 10, 20 minutes? Well, he thought it was very important to talk about federal issues. Then of course he spoke to our bill to ban government-paid partisan advertising. I thought that was a good idea.

1750

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: Yes, he thought that was a good idea.

Then we had Mr Ouellette, the member from Oshawa. He actually spoke to the bill, and we appreciate that.

That, I think you'll find, is rare, because then we went on to the member from Durham, Mr O'Toole. He also decided to speak about federal issues. But Mr O'Toole can wax eloquent with the best of them here. Perhaps he's not always consistent, perhaps there was no clarity or purpose, but he did meander on a number of things. He wanted to talk about new nurses, which we're in favour of. He wanted to talk about a hard cap of 20 students in classrooms from JK to grade 3.

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: I'll get to Norm.

He wanted to talk about our university tuition freeze. He wanted to talk about tolls on the 407. He talked about numeracy and literacy in schools. But that wasn't enough. No, he had to get into that amazing issue of trailer park taxation and the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. I know something about that now, because I was just recently appointed vice-chair of that group.

But there wasn't enough to talk about on Bill 18. He didn't want to talk about their record. He then wanted to talk about Erik Peters, the former Provincial Auditor, who prepared a report for the Minister of Finance that revealed to us and the good people of Ontario the \$5.6-

billion deficit. Not wanting to speak about Bill 18, he then spoke about autism services.

Well, perhaps Mr O'Toole was going to be an exception in his caucus, and the other members would speak to Bill 18. But then his seatmate, Mr Tascona, the member from Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford, decided it was best not to talk about Bill 18 but to talk about the Ontario Municipal Board, the Assessment Review Board and, of course, the issue of birth certificates.

Then, really—and this is a stretch about Bill 18—he wanted to tell us about a multiple sclerosis walk in his riding. Now, MS is a terrible disease, and I applaud that the good people in his riding are raising money for that, but I fail to see the connection to Bill 18.

Now, one of the new lights in the opposition caucus, Ms Scott, the member for Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, spoke to the bill. I thought that was commendable. Perhaps she's new, and maybe she hadn't got the message from everybody else: "We don't want to talk about Bill 18; we're just in support of it. Let's talk about something else, because then we have to talk about our record."

Well, Mr Dunlop got back up. He wanted to talk about the Ontario Trillium program for organ donation. I don't see the connection. Then he wanted to talk about school board and hospital funding and, of course, the Hamilton by-election. I don't know if we're going to audit that or not. I think the results were convincing.

Then he decided also to get into that federal issue. We can always count on the official opposition to get into federal issues when they have nothing else to talk about. He talked about the relationship, or lack thereof, between the former Prime Minister, Mr Chrétien, and the current Prime Minister, Mr Martin—and, I might add, the future Prime Minister, Mr Martin.

Then he wanted to talk about the aging Sea Kings, banning partisan ads and Telehealth. He wanted to talk about flu shots, SARS and tourism marketing in New York, Quebec, Manitoba and Wisconsin. Well, I want to let you know that it's very important in my riding that we also do tourism advertising in Michigan. A lot of people who go to the Stratford Festival come from Michigan.

Well, he wasn't finished whatsoever. We're talking about Bill 18. Then he wanted to talk about the spring bear hunt. What does that have to do with Bill 18? I'm at a loss.

Then there was BSE, mad cow—

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: Oh, that's Simcoe North, Mr Dunlop. Then he wanted to talk about the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

That was April 29. If that wasn't enough about Bill 18, we came back again for second reading on May 10, just a few weeks ago. Mr Dunlop, the government whip, the member for Simcoe North—that wasn't enough for him. He had talked about a lot of other things. He wanted to talk about budget day on May 18. He wanted to go back to speaking about banning partisan government ads.

Then another new member of this House, the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Mr Yakabuski—well,

maybe the caucus had talked to him and said, "You know, John, Ms Scott spoke to the bill, but we're not speaking to the bill. We're in favour of it, so let's talk about other things." Mr Yakabuski, who is quite eloquent, wanted to talk about the Taxpayer Protection Act.

Then Mr Hudak, the member for Erie-Lincoln, following Mr Dunlop's lead, had a great speech about—

Mr Miller: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I think it's customary to refer to members by riding names in this place.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the member for Perth-Middlesex to remember that and refer to all members of the House by their riding names only.

Mr Wilkinson: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I appreciate the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka reminding me of that rule; it's very important.

Then the member for Erie-Lincoln got up and wanted to talk about the former Conservative member for Niagara Falls and about classroom funding. He wanted to talk about his high school days and about hospitals in the Niagara region. He also wanted to talk about Bill 8. That was a big thing for him that day.

Interjection.

Mr Wilkinson: There's Bill 8 and Bill 18, so maybe he was missing the "1." I think he got a little confused about that. Then he got into the university tuition freeze.

Then the member for Nepean-Carleton, always someone to raise federal issues in this House, jumped up and spoke about that and about autistic children.

Then the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke got back up and spoke about Hamilton East—I think I'm almost done—and also wanted to talk about federal issues, and then he wanted to talk about Bill 8.

What do we have today? Every member of the government caucus got up and spoke to Bill 18 because it's important. I want to tell the people of Ontario that Bill 18 is important. It's about how your taxpayers' money is spent. We want to make sure the auditor doesn't just deal with the whether the money was spent and whether all the credits and debits add up. We want to talk about whether you're getting value for your money.

Again today, the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka spoke about regulation 170, the Taxpayer Protection Act and federal issues.

I know that on this side of the House and in our government Bill 18 is something we promised to people. We said to the good people of Ontario that this was important. It was about our effort to reform this place and about democracy. Although the former government may want to talk about everything but accountability and strengthening the position of the auditor, that didn't happen.

I'll be interested to see the day when this bill reaches third reading and we watch the members stand in their places and support this bill.

The Acting Speaker: It being very close to 6 o'clock, I'm going to adjourn the House until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.

The House adjourned at 1758.

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