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**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 1 June 2004

Mardi 1^{er} juin 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

Tuesday 1 June 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 1^{er} juin 2004

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ALMEDA BROWN

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I rise to recognize Almeda Brown, who has joined us here today with family and friends in the members' west gallery. Mrs Brown is here from Port Carling, in my beautiful riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, to receive the Ontario Senior Achievement Award. This award is presented to 20 individuals annually as a way to recognize and honour outstanding seniors who, after age 65, have made significant contributions to their communities. Mrs Brown has done just that.

Since the 1930s, she has been a vital part of her community, dedicating endless time and energy to the service of those around her. Throughout this time, she has volunteered extensively with organizations such as the Royal Canadian Legion, the Port Carling United Church Women's Auxiliary and the Sanford Women's Institute, with which she has been involved for over 65 years. On top of all this, she and her late husband raised nine children, and she is presently a grandmother to 16 and great-grandmother to 22. I had the pleasure of attending her 90th birthday last September.

I'd like to quote from the letter nominating Mrs Brown: "If a person's true wealth is the good she does in the world, then Almeda Brown is a very rich woman indeed."

Therefore, in celebration of today being the first day of Seniors' Month, I would like to congratulate and thank Mrs Almeda Brown for all the service she has volunteered throughout her life. She has helped many, and stands as an example for all of us.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): Well, that's hard to follow. That's a real hard act to follow.

As we all know in this Legislature, we had an opportunity last week to be back home in our ridings, what we call constituency week. It gave us all an opportunity to go back and get connected with the people who voted us in here at Queen's Park.

I know it was a particularly difficult week for Liberals going back home, because I've got to say, did I hear it, as

I was out door-knocking on behalf of our federal campaign and talking to people generally. Boy, oh boy, it's not a popular day to be a Liberal. Between broken promises and that budget, when it comes to the delisting of health care services and a new tax where people are having to pay even more money off their hard-earned paycheques, it's got to be tough being a Liberal. I just want you to know my heart goes out to you. It really does. I want you to know, on behalf of the New Democratic Party of Ontario, we feel for you, but you set up your own problem.

Anyway, the other opportunity we had during the week was to meet with many of the people in the First Nations communities up on James Bay and into Ogoki. I just want to say to the government in passing, and we're going to have an opportunity to talk about this later—it's the whole issue of capital funding. We know that the provincial government is talking about a \$300-million fund, with another \$300 million to be added by the federal government, for municipal infrastructure, but we cannot forget our First Nations communities.

There are desperate needs in our First Nations communities in order to make sure that they build their infrastructure. The federal Liberal government has fallen down on the job. Let not this provincial Liberal government fall down on the job of supporting our First Nations communities.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Today is Injured Workers' Day. Over 300,000 workers are injured every year while on the job, and almost 100,000 of them were injured severely enough that they had to take time off work. They are workers: the people who build our vehicles, grow our food, build our homes and sell us goods and services every day. Without them, the economy would grind to a halt. They are the lifeblood of our economy.

We must continue to do more to ensure the safety of workers in Ontario. So I am happy to see our government renewing its commitment to enforcing the Employment Standards Act. Fair workplaces are safer workplaces. Educating and training workers and cracking down on bad employers through enforcement, and even prosecution where necessary, are important steps on the road to safer workplaces.

There are too many people injured at work. And sadly for some, prevention comes too late. In 2002, traumatic accidents took the lives of 110 workers in Ontario. We

honour those who have been injured at work today. On Thursday, we in this House will have a chance to honour the memory of those who lost their lives at work when we debate my private member's bill to erect a memorial to workers killed on the job.

KIDS' FISHING DAY

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the participants and everyone who volunteered at our fourth annual Kids' Fishing Day event that took place this past weekend at the Heber Down Conservation Area. The event was both rewarding and fun-filled for the children and adults alike and attracted over 1,000 participants to come and enjoy the great outdoors.

The event could not have taken place without tremendous help from numerous organizations, including the South Central Ontario Big Game Association, the Pickering Rod and Gun Club, the Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Toronto Sportsman's Show, Orono Fish and Hunt Club, Ontario Out of Doors Magazine, Eastview Boys and Girls Club, the Bait Association of Ontario, Oshawa Community Health Centre, Metro East Anglers, the YWCA and Simcoe Hall Settlement House, who all contributed time and effort to the great success of the event.

This was a great opportunity for kids who usually don't have the chance to go fishing to learn about fishing and nature and have fun discovering the outdoors at the same time. Rods, reels and bait, as well as lunch, were provided. The children also enjoyed demonstrations by the Ministry of Natural Resources, dog-handling exhibits, fly casting, nature hikes, face painting, as well as a special appearance by Percy the Perch. Buses were arranged to pick up kids at several locations throughout Oshawa.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers, including Norm Monaghan, Vern Mason, Peter Dickson, Dan McWilliams and all the local groups and organizations for their support, along with the dedicated volunteers who made this event so special.

Finally, I'd like to thank all the parents and the kids, who had such a rewarding experience, and invite them all back again next year for the event. I should also say that there are still several hundred one- to four-pound rainbow trout waiting to be caught.

1340

BRAMPTON

Mr Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): "Brampton has an unusually large, attractive and urban core. Brampton makes a deliberate effort to retain its immigrants, attaching them firmly to the community by its quality of life, its schools and its opportunities. Brampton has one of the lowest crime rates in Canada, and it may be one of the country's most cosmopolitan

and economically sophisticated communities." These are the words of this country's most respected urban planner, Jane Jacobs.

I would like to take this opportunity to salute both Ms Jacobs and my home community. As a tireless advocate of community development, Ms Jacobs's recent Toronto Star article singled out Brampton as an example of the beauty that can be found in our suburban communities across the province.

Ms Jacobs's article also serves as a warning that issues like traffic congestion, a lack of green space and the hollowing out of our respective urban cores can threaten the very social fabric that binds us together. I and the people of my riding are pleased with our government's budget commitments to inject much-needed infrastructure and transportation funds into my long-overlooked community, which respects Ms Jacobs's vision of urban development. Brampton is an excellent place to live.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): It has been said that Helen of Troy had the face that launched a thousand ships. On May 18, Dalton McGuinty and Greg Sorbara presented a budget that could sink them—"them" being their federal Liberal cousins. The anger being directed at this government over their exercise in deception is unprecedented in political history. This could well be the first time that a provincial budget brings down a federal government. In Paul Martin's campaign, Dalton McGuinty is about as welcome as a root canal. Dalton McGuinty's own backbenchers are trying to separate themselves from this betrayal of their own election promises. As I travelled last week through my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, the words I heard over and over again were: "Those no-good"—insert a word here that rhymes with tires—"should be booted out of office immediately. They made all of these promises and never intended to keep them."

It's no wonder that people are cynical about politicians and politics. Mr McGuinty himself said that Paul Martin's own election promises are just made in the heat of the battle. Is this where we've gotten to? Say anything just to get elected? Oh, pardon me; that already happened last October 2. The people are seething at the McGuinty Liberals over their litany of broken promises. On June 28, they will take their disgust out on the Martin Liberals, but don't be too smug, Dalton. Your day will come, too.

WILLIAM OSLER HEALTH CENTRE

Mrs Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I rise today to commemorate the hard work of a dedicated group of volunteers: the volunteer board of directors of the William Osler Health Centre. The members of the board have dedicated their time and energy to the construction of a new hospital, all while making tough, necessary decisions in the operation of three separate campuses.

In a speech to the Ontario Hospital Association on November 5, 2003, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, George Smitherman, called on hospitals to open lines of communication with their local MPPs, saying, "If we are to succeed, all MPPs must be better informed on health care issues." The board has embraced this request.

As well, I wish to make special mention of the president and CEO of William Osler, Mr Bob Bell. I'm pleased to report to this House that Mr Bell has gone above and beyond the minister's request. Mr Bell takes time out of his schedule at least once a week to call my office to keep me updated on issues at this hospital. His dedication is beyond question.

When the doors at Brampton's new hospital open, it will be due to the unwavering commitment of this government, Mr Bell, the staff of William Osler and the volunteer board of directors. For this, the people of Brampton Centre are very grateful.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): I'm pleased with Minister Sorbara's first budget, especially the attention given to health, education and public transportation. I believe the increase of \$2.6 billion for education, \$2.2 billion for health and two cents a litre of the existing gas that will be given to municipalities is the first step in the right direction.

Last week, during constituency week, I met with taxpayers and school and hospital officials in my riding of Thornhill who were extremely optimistic about the budget's commitment to health, education and public transportation.

I strongly believe in public transportation, because it will minimize air pollution, which causes respiratory and other health problems. More public transportation means less gridlock. Our economy loses billions of dollars each year due to gridlock.

I am extremely pleased that the budget includes money for an environmental assessment of the Spadina-York subway extension to reach the region of York. A subway to York University will make it more accessible for students so that they can spend more time in the classrooms and libraries and at home. Moreover, a subway extension to York University will create substantial economic stimulus in and around the corridors of the campus. There will be a greater supply of high-density residential and new businesses on the abundant underdeveloped lands that lie there today.

I am excited to be part of a government that addresses the core needs of our citizens and is not afraid of taking the necessary measures to improve the standard of living of our great province.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): The Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre is the

largest hospital in northwestern Ontario. With 375 beds, a regional cancer centre, mental health services and a very busy emergency department, this hospital is critical to delivering quality health care to northern Ontarians. It serves an area larger than all of southern Ontario, with a population of 275,000 people.

That is why my constituents were so pleased yesterday when Premier McGuinty announced that the Ontario government will cover an unprecedented 80% of eligible capital costs for the new Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre.

The McGuinty government is committed to delivering health care results. That means shorter wait times, better access to doctors and nurses, and substantial improvements in long-term care.

The new regional cancer centre in Thunder Bay will provide better access to cancer care for northern Ontarians by doubling the number of annual radiation and chemotherapy treatments provided by 2010. This is great news for residents of Thunder Bay and across northern Ontario.

This, along with the Liberal government's support for our northern medical school, will help build a state-of-the-art health care system in the north, where doctors, nurses and other health care professionals are able to provide the quality of care that people deserve.

Together with our budget commitment to provide free immunizations for our children, expanded home care and improved long-term care for our frail and elderly, this investment will help Ontario become a leader in publicly funded health care once again.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I'd like you all to pay special attention to what I've got to say now. I want you all to join me in welcoming a group of legislative pages to serve in the first session of the 38th Parliament: Meghan Allerton from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound; Jason Andary from Chatham-Kent-Essex; Taisa Dackiw from Etobicoke-Lakeshore; Bradley Emerson from Mississauga South; Jaimie Franks from Mississauga West; Jordana Gilroy from York West; Jessica Guthrie from Niagara Centre; Brendan Hamilton from Thunder Bay-Superior North; Malakai Rose Kirkpatrick from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock; Eric Koehn from Markham; Brandyce-Leigh Little from Kingston and the Islands; Jeongho Peter Lyu from Oak Ridges; Logan Maines from Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington; Jessica Mair from Hamilton East; Ian McKellar from Kitchener-Waterloo; Cameron McMeekin from Hamilton Mountain; Samuel Merrifield from Nickel Belt; Emily Morin from Nipissing; Andrew Naismith from Thornhill; Dylan Robertson from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge; Vivienne Steele from Sault Ste Marie; and Olivia Whetung Cole from Guelph-Wellington.

Let's join in welcoming them to serve our Parliament.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND SOCIAL POLICY

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I beg leave to present a report from the standing committee on justice and social policy and move its adoption.

Clerk at the Table (Mr Todd Decker): Your committee begs to report the following bill as amended:

Bill 8, An Act to establish the Ontario Health Quality Council, to enact new legislation concerning health service accessibility and repeal the Health Care Accessibility Act, to provide for accountability in the health service sector, and to amend the Health Insurance Act / Projet de loi 8, Loi créant le Conseil ontarien de la qualité des services de santé, édictant une nouvelle loi relative à l'accessibilité aux services de santé et abrogeant la Loi sur l'accessibilité aux services de santé, prévoyant l'imputabilité du secteur des services de santé et modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé.

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

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those against, say "nay."

I think the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1351 to 1356.

The Speaker: All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Duncan, Dwight	Oraziotti, David
Bartolucci, Rick	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Peters, Steve
Bentley, Christopher	Fonseca, Peter	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Gerretsen, John	Pupatello, Sandra
Bountrogianni, Marie	Gravelle, Michael	Racco, Mario G.
Brown, Michael A.	Hoy, Pat	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Kular, Kuldip	Ramsay, David
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ruprecht, Tony
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Smith, Monique
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Smitherman, George
Cordiano, Joseph	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Greg
Craitor, Kim	Mauro, Bill	Van Bommel, Maria
Crozier, Bruce	McGuinty, Dalton	Watson, Jim
Delaney, Bob	McMeekin, Ted	Wong, Tony C.
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Zimmer, David
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	

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

Nays

Baird, John R.	Horwath, Andrea	Murdoch, Bill
Chudleigh, Ted	Jackson, Cameron	O'Toole, John
Churley, Marilyn	Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael
Dunlop, Garfield	Marchese, Rosario	Tascona, Joseph N.
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Witmer, Elizabeth

Clerk of the House (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 58; the nays are 15.

The Speaker: The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Mr Bryant moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to amend the Election Act, the Election Finances Act, the Legislative Assembly Act and the Representation Act, 1996 to provide for provincial general elections at intervals of approximately four years, to govern the timing of writs, close of nominations and polling day, to make modifications relating to the electoral readjustment process, and to make technical amendments / Projet de loi 86, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale, la Loi sur le financement des élections, la Loi sur l'Assemblée législative et la Loi de 1996 sur la représentation électorale en vue de prévoir la tenue des élections générales provinciales à intervalles d'environ quatre ans, de régir le calendrier relatif à l'émission des décrets, à la clôture du dépôt des déclarations de candidature et au jour du scrutin, et d'apporter des modifications au processus de révision électorale ainsi que des modifications de forme.

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

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I'll make a statement during ministers' statements.

GARETH RODGERS ACT FOR SPORT PARACHUTING (FREEFALLING REGULATION), 2004

LOI GARETH RODGERS DE 2004 SUR LE PARACHUTISME SPORTIF (RÉGLEMENTATION DU SAUT SANS SOUTIEN)

Mr Tascona moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 87, An Act in memory of Gareth Rodgers to regulate freefalling / Projet de loi 87, Loi à la mémoire de Gareth Rodgers pour réglementer le saut sans soutien.

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

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): The bill enacts and act to regulate persons who participate in free-falling and promote public safety.

PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS
AND SECURITY GUARDS
AMENDMENT ACT, 2004
LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES ENQUÊTEURS PRIVÉS
ET LES GARDIENS

Mr Dunlop moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 88, An Act to amend the Private Investigators and Security Guards Act / Projet de loi 88, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les enquêteurs privés et les gardiens.

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

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): If passed, this legislation will make the most significant changes to the operation of the private security industry since the first bill was introduced over 35 years ago.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

ELECTORAL REFORM
RÉFORME ÉLECTORALE

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): Last fall, our government was elected to deliver real, positive change. Since then, we've taken action on our commitments by introducing a progressive legislative agenda in this House. One of the cornerstones of that agenda is strengthening our democracy, and our government is making progress.

We have introduced legislation that would eliminate the waste of taxpayers' dollars on partisan, self-promotional government advertising.

We have given every government MPP a seat on powerful cabinet committees that help set policy, and we have appointed Ontario's first minister responsible for democratic renewal. But more is needed to restore people's faith in our democracy.

In the first 100 years of Ontario's history, about two thirds of registered voters regularly went to the polls. In the last four elections, that number has declined steadily from 64% in 1990 to 57% last fall.

Près de un Ontarien sur deux ne voit pas l'utilité de se rendre aux urnes. Certains d'entre eux ont perdu toute illusion quant aux processus. D'autres adoptent une attitude cynique. La seule façon d'inverser cette tendance est d'engager nos citoyens. Il faut montrer à ceux qui ont perdu toute illusion et qui font preuve de cynisme que le gouvernement peut changer. Il faut montrer aux jeunes gens en particulier pourquoi il est important de voter.

We need to get more Ontarians to the polls on election day. Voting in an election should be easy so that as many of us as possible can participate, as citizens, in choosing our representatives.

The parliamentary system based on the Westminster model has served us well. We respect this parliamentary

tradition, including the tradition of change that is built into our system. Indeed, the ability to change and adapt is what keeps our system so strong. So it would be foolish to limit ourselves to 19th-century methods to deal with 21st-century challenges. Change is what keeps our democracy vibrant and vital, and change is what we are introducing today.

The decision of when to call an election has always rested with the Premier of this province. It allows the government to call an election when it feels it can win. It serves no one but the governing party. It's a perk of being in power, and it ignores the most important members of any democracy: its citizens. That's why our system needs to change. That's why today we're embracing the change that is central to our democracy by introducing legislation to fix the dates of elections in Ontario.

We're pleased to introduce the Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2004. If passed, it would make election day in this province the first Thursday in October, every four years, starting in 2007. It will mean that the date of the next election will be October 4, 2007.

Les élections sont des événements démocratiques qui appartiennent à nous tous. Elles n'appartiennent pas au parti au pouvoir qui pourrait ainsi les manipuler à son propre avantage.

Elections don't belong to Premiers to use as they see fit for their own political agenda. Elections belong to all of us, as citizens, and we have a right to know when they will be held, so that we can plan effectively and participate fully. Elections belong to all political parties, so that all of us are on an equal footing and can compete for office fairly. They belong to Elections Ontario, so it can plan efficiently for upcoming elections. They belong to public servants, so that the important work they do to deliver and continuously improve public services can proceed efficiently, without the disruption of snap election calls or the delays of calls postponed.

1410

Elections belong to anyone who wants to run for office or work in a campaign, so they can get their personal and professional lives in order, and that way they will be able to more fully participate in our democratic process. Elections belong to each and every one of us as citizens, so that we can put aside some time every four years to think about the direction of our province and its government and to talk to our friends, families, neighbours and co-workers about what needs to be done and who is best suited to do it.

This is how government should work in the 21st century. This is how it will work in Ontario from now on. Never again will a governing party be able to manipulate the date of an election to serve its own interests.

Le premier ministre n'aura plus jamais la capacité de fixer les dates des élections en fonction de leur caractère opportun d'un point de vue politique.

Never again will a Premier have the ability to set election dates when it is politically opportune for the government. I, as Premier, am forever renouncing this right. I am doing it for one reason and one reason only: because it's the right thing to do.

This is an important step toward strengthening democracy in our province. It's part of our government's agenda to modernize Ontario's democratic institutions, to engage the people of this province in the most ambitious democratic renewal process in our history, to get more Ontarians participating in the democratic process, to make government in Ontario work for the people of Ontario.

Hon Michael Bryant (Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): It is my honour to rise today with the Premier of Ontario to introduce this bill and support this historic step in the renewal of democracy in our province.

With the introduction of this bill, our government is continuing the important work of restoring public faith in Ontario's democracy and in its democratic institutions. Governments of all stripes have long played games with election dates, and it's time for that to come to an end. Creating certainty around election timing will bolster economic certainty, public confidence in elections and the ability of government to govern effectively. Setting election dates in a four-year cycle may not be in the political interest of the incumbent governing party, but it is most definitely in the public interest, and it is in the public interest that this government is acting on this important commitment.

There was a time when the sovereign literally and formally determined an election date. Since Confederation, that prerogative vested in a first minister. This first minister is relinquishing that privilege and opportunity. This first minister, this Premier, is saying that forevermore the Legislature will determine the date, fix the date on a four-year cycle, and this Premier has given up that "divine right" to set elections. That is leadership.

Over the coming months, we'll be working to ensure that more people, particularly young people, vote during elections, get engaged in their communities and participate in the democratic process. We'll be leading an open debate on improvements to our electoral process, leading to a referendum on electoral reform. We'll be asking citizens to make recommendations on how we fund political campaigns so that money has less influence on politics. We'll be encouraging more transparency and openness in how and where tax dollars are spent by ensuring that the public interest is front and centre.

This is the most ambitious democratic renewal agenda since Confederation, right here in the province of Ontario, and I'm proud to be a part of it.

PLANNING REFORM

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): This morning at a special Canadian Urban Institute meeting, I had an opportunity to share our government's progress as we move forward on a planning reform agenda.

As you know, our government is committed to making the real, positive change that will lead to a strong and

prosperous Ontario, now and in the future. We are moving ahead in numerous ways to accomplish this goal. Planning reform is one key factor. We all know the importance of good planning. Through it we're able to develop safe, liveable neighbourhoods, reduce urban sprawl and protect our green spaces, target investment in infrastructure, ease the flow of traffic and so much more.

Good planning allows us to meet the needs of a growing population. It helps Ontarians gain opportunities to create a quality of life that is second to none. It is clearly necessary to building the strong communities, competitive economy and healthy environment we all want. Our government's planning reform proposals would ensure balance and fairness as we move forward.

Our agenda for planning reform is in keeping with our government's visionary response to growth management in this province. The need for action is clear. In the last 15 years, the Toronto-Hamilton area has become one of the fastest-growing regions in North America. In the last 10 years, we've added more people and more new jobs than the rest of Ontario combined. This economic growth and opportunity are expected to attract 3.5 million more people by the year 2031.

Our government welcomes this growth. We know it's vital for new business, new jobs and new opportunities, but we also know it will put immense pressure on our land, air and infrastructure. For the sake of our quality of life, our economy, our environment and our children's children, we must put in place a well-thought-out plan to accommodate this growth.

Our government is moving forward on this in a proactive, disciplined way. Spearheaded by my colleague David Caplan, the Golden Horseshoe growth management plan will be a guide to resolving growth issues over the next 30 years. It is currently being developed cooperatively among ministries and with the input of experts and stakeholders.

It will provide direction for provincial and municipal decision-making on growth issues all across the Golden Horseshoe. The growth management plan will identify the areas we need to protect and encourage growth in those areas that can best accommodate it. It will help us support that growth with infrastructure investments, safe management of our drinking water and wastewater, protection of our parklands and more.

It will pay just as much attention to the economy. It will identify areas where new population and economic growth will be encouraged, and will help ensure the efficient movement of goods and services across the region. This bold new plan will pull together all the various strings of growth: planning; infrastructure; transportation and transit; residential and employment lands; farmlands; and every other aspect. Through it, our government will share our overarching vision for a strong Ontario.

We are already moving forward in priority areas. In December, as you know, I introduced legislation that, if passed, would be the first step to creating a permanent greenbelt of protected land stretching from Niagara Falls

to Rice Lake near Cobourg. The Greenbelt Task Force, chaired by Burlington Mayor Rob MacIsaac, is currently consulting on key parts of the study area that should be protected, including agricultural lands.

We have committed to establishing the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority to coordinate both transportation and transit needs. Of course, our proposals for planning reform would discourage sprawl and promote intensification, protect natural heritage features and watersheds, promote mixed-use development that results in real neighbourhoods and give Ontarians a meaningful voice in the way their communities grow and prosper.

This morning I was pleased to announce the launch of an in-depth consultation on planning reform. Starting today, and over the next three months, our government will be consulting on Planning Act reform, which will build on the Strong Communities (Planning Amendment) Act I introduced last December, as well as on revised policies in the provincial policy statement and ideas for reforming the Ontario Municipal Board.

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How do these three pieces fit together? The provincial policy statement sets out the province's overall vision of growth and prosperity. It's where our government will define the priorities that we've all agreed upon, as well as the direction we all want Ontario to go.

Our goal is to have a provincial policy statement that effectively balances the needs of the economy, the environment and our communities. For example, the draft statement recognizes the importance of intensification and brownfields redevelopment, and states that municipalities should permit or facilitate all forms of redevelopment and plan infrastructure to support priority growth areas. Fundamentally, our government wants the new policy statement to lay the groundwork for wise decision-making and to provide the certainty that has been lacking with regard to where development should go and what must be protected.

Our Planning Act legislation is all about implementation. If passed, municipalities will be given the authority to make the changes they need to build their communities within the scope of our vision. You'll recall the legislation would introduce municipal leaders' ability to make the best choices for their constituents. It will also ensure planning decisions have to "be consistent with" the provincial policy statement, and not just "have regard to" it.

The OMB, as you know, is the appeal body. The OMB was created in 1897, and while Ontario is now a very different place, the basic mandate and functions of the board have remained the same for more than a century. This has led to some tough questions from the public and councils over the years, and our government is now working to address them through consultation.

We will look at such diverse issues as the public's ability to participate at OMB hearings. How can the public be better informed about the process at the OMB? Board member qualifications and their length of tenure will be studied. What can the board be doing to promote

greater consistency in its decision-making process? Should the OMB's ability to substitute its decision for that of an elected council be modified or curtailed? We will look into the scope of matters which can be appealed to the OMB. Should the OMB continue to conduct de novo hearings looking at the full merits of a planning matter or be an appeal body based solely on matters that were brought before council at the time that it made its decision? Should we look at the breadth of the OMB mandate, which goes from the most complex development projects to the construction of your neighbour's deck, and whether that mandate is appropriate?

We look forward to receiving the input and opinions of experts, stakeholders and citizens on all of these issues at 13 public information sessions or directly to the ministry by letter or e-mail by August 31, 2004.

Ontarians are recognizing, as our government has also recognized, that the way we live tomorrow depends upon the way in which we plan and grow today. Policies such as growth management, a strong provincial policy statement, Planning Act reform and greenbelt protection will give us the balance we need for a healthy environment and a vibrant economy.

Together, we will build the strong communities that will provide Ontarians, now and in the future, with a quality of life that is second to none.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): To the government members, the Premier and the Attorney General in particular: You talk about real, positive change in the first line of the Premier's statement today. What we've got from this government in seven-plus months is partisan, negative political baffle-gab and spin. And you wonder why voters are cynical and disillusioned.

You promised 231 things that you knew you couldn't possibly deliver on. You might have talked about them today.

You promised a referendum. If you raised taxes for any reason whatsoever, you promised a referendum. I'm surprised the Premier isn't standing in his place today announcing the date of the referendum.

Is it any wonder that 55% of Ontarians do not believe a single word this Premier says, with good reason to be disillusioned over the phony promises they made in last October's election? It's a good thing for you that the next one won't happen for another four years, because if you had the guts to put it on the line before then, you wouldn't be sitting over there.

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I think the government is ahead of itself here today. They are talking about a vote four years down the road, when they should be calling one today.

One measure of political credibility is the extent to which elected leaders keep the commitments they make in seeking public office. The Premier has broken his promise of a referendum before he would raise taxes. He

is out of touch with the people of Ontario, who are saying and feeling, in communities across the province, that they're angry over tax hikes and the delisting of health care services in your budget. They feel betrayed by your repeated broken promises. If you'd only get outside of your bubble, you'd know they want to vote today, not four years down the road.

You promised a referendum. You and your Attorney General have a fundamental responsibility to obey the law of the land. Your legislation is nothing more than tinkering around the edges—a step toward the Americanization of our electoral process. It will do nothing to increase the number of people who vote, and it will do nothing to address the cynicism your government has created as a result of your broken promises. You betrayed the people of Ontario in your budget. You promised to hold the line on taxes and improve health care, but what did you do in the budget? You dramatically raised taxes and reduced access to health care by delisting needed services.

I see that you have adopted the date of October 4, 2007, called for in our critic's Bill 51, the Fixed Dates for Elections Act, 2004. In that bill, the member for Lanark-Carleton also included the need for a double majority before a non-confidence motion will lead to a provincial election. I hope this is something you have included in the bill. The member for Lanark-Carleton put in this bill a clause to ensure that a majority of the Legislature and a majority of the opposition supported any non-confidence motion that led to an election. This is important, because it would prevent a government from playing fast and loose with the rules, engineering a vote with the majority.

But again, the people of Ontario want to vote now. You promised a referendum if you increased taxes. It's a betrayal of the public trust that you are standing here today and not announcing a referendum date. You have failed to find ways to ensure that citizens are satisfied with the politicians they have elected, and you have failed with respect to the process to elect the politicians. Today's announcement won't do anything for democratic renewal. You must make good on your referendum promise. The people of Ontario deserve no less. Call a referendum today.

PLANNING REFORM

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the minister spoke for 10 minutes and said nothing. The minister is insulting every property owner in Ontario. He's insulting anyone who is in the development business. He's insulting every municipality. He's insulting every builder. The fact of the matter is that, through Bill 26, what this minister is really doing is politicizing the planning process. He is politicizing the Ontario Municipal Board. He and his government want to take back into the corridors of Queen's Park and into the cabinet room the decisions that should be made by an arm's-length, quasi-judicial organization such as the Ontario Municipal Board.

No one in this province believes a word that any minister in that government says. People in this province know that they cannot trust one word that comes out of the mouth of this Premier or out of any of the ministers. It is an unfortunate day in Ontario when even statements by ministers are held up as something not to be believed.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the members of the opposition. The reason I'm having difficulty hearing the opposition is that the government side keeps shouting. I'm going to have the third party respond now, and I'd like a bit more co-operation.

ELECTORAL REFORM RÉFORME ÉLECTORALE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): First of all, let me say to the government that New Democrats support the announcement today to moving to fixed election dates. I say to some of my colleagues and friends in the media, no more winning bottles of wine from me on those bets. I always get the date wrong for when the election is going to be called. Now we know what we'll be doing on October 4, 2007.

Having said that, I do have to say to the government today that I've got your democratic renewal document here from the election. Where's the announcement today on your consultation and referendum on how we vote—proportional representation?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It's coming.

Ms Churley: He says it's coming, but we were expecting it today. Tighter spending limits, mandatory public hearings for all legislation—we are looking forward to moving on that agenda, because it's very important. In fact, the archaic system that we have today—first past the post—no longer works for today's global economy and today's society. We need to make those changes.

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But most of all, why did the Liberals increase public cynicism by making promises they knew they couldn't keep? It's going to be that much harder now to pull people back and make this democratic renewal package that you want to bring forward relevant to people. But I'll tell you one promise you're going to inadvertently keep: You will get a higher vote out by at least 10%. People are so mad that they're going to come out in droves to throw you out of office on October 4, 2007. That's how you'll increase the vote by at least 10% or a whole lot more.

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-Baie James): La dernière élection, ce gouvernement libéral nous a dit, « Voyons; choisissez un changement. » Le seul choix que vous avez fait jusqu'à date est de briser vos promesses électorales que vous avez faites à la population ontarienne. Jusqu'à date, vous avez augmenté les taxes des citoyennes et des citoyens de cette province, quelque chose que vous aviez promis de ne pas faire. Vous avez choisi d'ôter du

système de santé les chiropracteurs et les oculistes, quelque chose que vous aviez promis de ne pas faire.

Aujourd'hui, vous venez ici—« On a besoin de la bonne nouvelle. » Comme ma collègue, je dis que oui, on est en faveur de votre proposition. Mais il faut garder très clairement dans l'esprit ce que le gouvernement fait, et regarder d'une manière très concrète comment ils seront capables de contourner l'opinion publique que ce gouvernement a formée jusqu'à date en brisant ses promesses. Je dis à ce point-ci, le seul choix que le public va maintenant avoir avec ce gouvernement est quand on peut chasser ces libéraux de l'office de l'Ontario.

PLANNING REFORM

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): My comments are directed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I looked at this when I got it today; there are three of these papers. There is the Ontario Municipal Board planning reform initiatives, the provincial policy statement draft policies planning reform initiatives, and the Planning Act reform and implementation tools planning reform initiatives, all of which, with the greatest of respect, are consultation papers. They're consultation papers about things you should already know. You should already know what is happening out there, because I have heard many of you talk for so many years, when you sat on this side of the House, about what was wrong with the Ontario Municipal Board and the planning process. Instead, you've issued these, and all they are are open-ended questions. They're open-ended questions that give absolutely no direction to anyone reading them, as to where you are intending to take this province, so that they can intelligently answer those questions.

There are no policy initiatives. There are literally no directions. You should be providing leadership. That is one of the things that government should do: provide leadership and not go out and ask questions to answers you already know. You should be going to the public to say how they will be able to participate. You should be going out to the public to tell them how you can make the decisions of the Ontario Municipal Board consistent, not inconsistent the way they are written now. You have to go out to the public and tell them how you are going to scope the basis of appeal, which you're not doing here. You're merely asking them whether it should be scoped. You should already know the answers to that.

You've even asked the arcane questions of whether or not the appeals should be de novo hearings or whether they should be based on what has already been put there. We're saying that it should be an appeal. It should be an appeal straight out, an appeal on the information that has already been provided. There's no sense starting again. You already know that, and this is a sham.

SENIORS' MONTH

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I

believe we have unanimous consent for each party to speak for up to five minutes in recognition of seniors' awareness month.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Do we have unanimous consent, as requested? Agreed.

Hon John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors): I am very pleased to speak as the minister responsible for seniors because, as you know, June is Seniors' Month, a celebration of this province's more than 1.5 million seniors, and a time to recognize the contributions that older Ontarians make to communities across the province.

This year's theme is, "Active Living: Active in Body, Mind and Spirit," and it is a theme that was clearly embodied by the seniors I met this morning. Earlier today, His Honour Lieutenant Governor John Bartleman and I participated in the Ontario Senior Achievement Award, when 21 outstanding Ontario seniors were recognized. These men and women were recognized for their contributions in the areas of arts and literature; environment and science; preservation of history; community service; fitness, recreation and sport; volunteerism; education; and humanitarian activities.

This year's award winners range in age from 69 to 95. Five are 90 years old or older. Each of the award winners is an excellent example of this year's theme of active living. They are an inspiration not only to other seniors but to all Ontarians. Their actions have enriched their communities and the lives of so many other people.

I encourage all members in the House to participate in as many Seniors' Month activities as possible in their communities. Better yet, I encourage them to organize activities themselves. The theme, "Active Living: Active in Body, Mind and Spirit," reminds us that regardless of one's ability we can all become more active in our communities with encouragement and support. When a person is active physically, emotionally, intellectually or spiritually, he or she is engaged and involved.

This year's theme also reminds us that when community members are healthy it has a positive impact on our community. Active living promotes good health, making for healthier Ontarians in a healthier Ontario.

Ontario seniors deserve to live safely, with dignity and as independently as possible with the supports they need. They have given their best to our province, and they deserve the best we can give back to them. This government's recently announced budget proposed a number of initiatives that will benefit seniors. They include an investment of \$88 million in this year alone to expand home care, allowing individuals to remain in their own home environment as long as possible, and this will rise to \$448 million over the course of the government's mandate; an additional \$406 million of an investment in long-term-care facilities this year alone, which will improve the safety and quality of care provided to residents and fund the opening of 3,760 new beds announced by the previous government. As well, the government intends to enhance the Ontario property tax credit pro-

gram, increasing the maximum benefit for property and sales tax credits for seniors from \$1,000 to \$1,125.

Seniors have contributed to the safety and prosperity of this province, and they deserve to know about the programs and services in place to support them. One way of finding out about those programs and services is through public education and awareness events such as seniors' seminars. Seniors' Month provides an excellent opportunity to host a seniors' seminar. Seminars are available on a number of different topics, from investment fraud protection to safe medication use. To make arrangements for a seniors' seminar in your own communities, all members may contact the Ontario Seniors' Secretariat. The seminars are provided for seniors with valuable information on healthy aging and healthy lifestyles.

Seniors are increasingly connected to the Internet. Growing numbers of seniors, their families and caregivers are turning to the Internet for their information needs. That's why we've made a guide to programs and services in Ontario available on-line and in print. It is available in 10 different languages. Information from a variety of service providers and levels of government is listed in this useful guide, of which more than 100,000 copies have already been distributed to date.

This year's Seniors' Month also coincides with a very important anniversary. This marks the 60th anniversary of D-Day and the battle of Normandy. The province's official commemorative ceremony will take place at Queen's Park on June 6 at 4 o'clock. We have received an overwhelming response from veterans to attend the ceremony. We anticipate a large public turnout as well.

Ontario seniors have contributed to the growth, prosperity and safety of this province. For that, all Ontarians owe them a debt of gratitude.

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Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I'm very pleased and proud to respond on this special occasion, Seniors' Month, on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus and on behalf of, quite frankly, our government over the past eight years and their record in recognition of the changing landscape of our province that has been enriched by the growth of the number of senior citizens.

There are almost 1.6 million seniors in our province. By the year 2016, there'll be more seniors living in our province than children under the age of 14. By 2026, there'll be three million seniors—double the number. That is wonderful news for our province: an enriched demographic that our party recognized nine years ago when we had the responsibility to form a government. I was very pleased during that period of time to have been the minister responsible for seniors for five years and to sign on as a provincial signatory to Canada's national framework on aging, which set out the principles of dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security.

Our government was ably assisted by some very important organizations that should be mentioned on this

day; in particular, the United Senior Citizens of Ontario, the Canadian Snowbird Association, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons and, of course, the Royal Canadian Legion, all working closely with our government in terms of developing a whole range of outstanding programs.

Today, it is fair to say that, of all Canadians, Ontarians enjoy the best of what any government can provide and a society can support within our nation here in our province. We were fortunate to be able to invest \$1.6 billion, the largest long-term-care commitment of 20,000 new beds in North American history. It has never been duplicated by any other government: 16,000 older nursing homes torn down and completely rebuilt to the most modern standards in the world; \$700 million in community care access, pushing us from fifth position to number one position, not only in Canada but across North America in terms of access to community care and community supports.

Our Alzheimer's strategy took four years to develop with an almost \$70 million investment, the first of its kind in North America. Today, five years later, not one province or one state in the United States has come close to trying to duplicate the effort that this province has put in and is continuing to put in under the new government.

We have the portability of our drug benefits that we can be thankful for.

We have the elder abuse strategy, the first of its kind in the world, and Dr Elizabeth Podnieks should be commended. She delivered to the United Nations conference in Spain, to a standing ovation, that finally one jurisdiction in the world had a structured program involving all aspects of safety and security for our seniors.

The Memory Project to acknowledge our veterans was developed; our seniors' safe medication program—critically important, and I'm pleased to hear today that the minister is allowing that to continue. Ontario's seniors are the most overmedicated people on the face of the Earth. The average senior in this province is taking 12 to 16 drugs every single day of their lives. We're spending \$2 billion outside of hospitals on medication. This is an incredible issue. I wish that our government had started, and I hope that some government will start, providing prescribing guidelines to better protect seniors in this province.

There are other issues, and we need to listen to our seniors. That's how we can learn from the advice they can give us. But they are concerned, because today many of them have spent their life savings protecting their largest investment, their home. They're house-rich but they're income-poor, and they're struggling to survive and stay in their home. This is a major issue, Minister, and one that has to be addressed. We believe strongly in property tax relief under the education envelope. That's not going to happen with your government. Hydro relief is another issue, because they are just not able to cope. The privatization of health care services, whether it's chiropractic, physio or optometry—all of these issues are causing seniors concern about their future and their

health needs. Prostate cancer tests are still being paid for. I raised on May 10 that zoledronic acid injections for palliative care for cancer patients were withdrawn by your government several months ago.

James Harrington, a retired OPP officer who was sexually assaulted by his case worker who was assisting him from a CCAC, has passed away. We need to change the Criminal Code to ensure that there can be a voice for seniors who die before the three years when their court cases can come forward.

There are many things we could still be doing to ensure that Ontario continues to be the greatest place in the world for us to celebrate the lives of our seniors.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm very pleased and proud to be able to respond on the auspicious occasion of Seniors' Month on behalf of the third party. I want to say that seniors, we all know, are women and men who built our cities, built our towns and built our communities over the past decades in this province. In fact, they have been the architects of our very quality of life, our way of life in Ontario.

It's the quality of life we currently enjoy that we owe to the seniors of Ontario. It's that quality of life that the seniors of Canada have given us. These people have been the volunteers who have built our communities, who have built faith communities, who have helped in our recreation centres, in our clubs, who have helped with young people in tutoring for educational purposes. They are the people who are the very backbone of our families, our communities, our small businesses and our local organizations.

But I'm concerned, because I also know that these seniors, for the most part, are people on fixed incomes. These are people who are going to be affected very negatively by the policies of this government. They are people who are going to have their quality of life eroded with health premiums they can't afford. They are going to have problems because, basically, there are issues like pensions that this government refuses to address.

For example, there are opportunities here to show seniors how much we respect their contributions, and those opportunities will come in the form of things like guaranteed pension fund increases that this government could bring forward today to honour seniors. They could increase up to \$2,500 the guaranteed pension fund for seniors, but I don't see that happening and I'm wondering why.

They could also be very well honoured by having changes and reforms to our pension system that allow pensions to be fully portable for seniors, not only existing seniors but all of us who will eventually be seniors in this province. That's progressive legislation that will really affect the quality of life of our seniors and will help them to know we really do mean what we say when we say we value the contribution of seniors.

Instead, what we have is a budget that came down that has nothing in it really for seniors. There is a pittance of contributions to affordable housing. We know that seniors are among the poorest in our province. In fact,

women who are seniors are disproportionately represented in the ranks of the poor in this province. We don't see anything coming forward in regard to addressing the issues of affordable housing that would help those seniors to have a decent quality of life in this province.

We have serious concerns with our home care in Hamilton. Our CCAC has been into all kinds of cutbacks, all kinds of restrictions, yet it's going to be another year before this province will help the city of Hamilton in regard to the home care problems we are having in helping our seniors maintain their stability and quality of life. As a member of city council, I fought very desperately year after year in our budgets to make sure we didn't cut back on home care, even though it was a provincial responsibility.

The poverty of seniors is staggering. The lack of anything in this budget is frightening, and yet we're all standing here saying we honour our seniors. Quite frankly, I do honour our seniors, but when they are facing hydro increases that are untenable, when their cars are parked because they can no longer afford insurance premiums, when their property taxes are going over the roof, that is not the kind of action that indicates we support our seniors.

What I can say about our seniors, though, is that my experience is that seniors are a very interesting group of people because they like to take people at their word. They're kind of traditionalists in that way. They take people at their word. They believe in the integrity of a handshake, in the integrity of a promise. Boy, are our seniors disappointed by the broken promises of this government in the last budget they just tabled.

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HANSARD REPORTING SERVICE

Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In accordance with the standing orders, this is the first opportunity I've had to raise a question with respect to an item that appears in the Hansard of May 20, as I was not in the House yesterday.

Briefly, I wish to have the Speaker investigate the degree to which statements made in the House can be altered on their way to Hansard and find their way in the final version. In particular, I would like to draw your attention to page 2390 from Hansard on May 20. I asked a question of the minister responsible for municipal affairs and seniors. In his response, clearly we understood that it was a misstatement that he said, "Under our budget nothing could be further from the truth." It was recalled by many people. It is on the tape. The actual reference in Hansard has been changed to, "What the member is suggesting couldn't be further from the truth."

I would simply ask, Mr Speaker, if you could advise the House of the changes in the ability for members to change what is put in Hansard, because my understanding is, those rules are far tighter than what would appear in this documentation I share with you today. I would ask the Speaker to look into the matter. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you for bringing that to our attention. I will take that under advisement and respond to that.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HEALTH PREMIUMS

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): Premier, last week, the Prime Minister said that when you make a promise—or 231 of them, for that matter—you should not break them, and that he would not break faith with the people of the province of Ontario as you did, nor should elected members over-promise. Will you now do the right thing and cancel your punitive health tax and re-list essential public services in health care that you have delisted, or don't you think you've helped Stephen Harper quite enough yet?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I am very proud to report to the leader of the official opposition and to the people of Ontario that we are doing the right thing. We've introduced a brand new piece of legislation, the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act, and it will ensure that no government ever again can go into an election while at the same time hiding the truth from the people of Ontario when it comes to the state of the government's finances.

Mr Eves: When told that Mr Martin had promised \$9 billion-plus for the health care system in Canada, and asked if he would then cancel his health tax, the Premier's response was: "We've got a campaign promise made in the thick of a campaign. Let's wait to see what the outcome of the campaign is so we can better determine exactly what we're going to end up with." What are we to infer from that, Mr Premier: You don't believe Paul Martin, and the \$9 billion is not coming, or you think Paul Martin's going to lose the election, and therefore you're not counting on the \$9 billion?

Hon Mr McGuinty: One thing that I can say without hesitation when it comes to Prime Minister Paul Martin is that he is not hiding a \$6-billion deficit from the people of Canada, unlike what happened before.

Mr Eves: Then why don't you trust him?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Final supplementary.

Mr Eves: I say to the Minister of Health, my cheque for \$76,000 was paid, which is more than I can say for the current Treasurer. If you want to start talking about cheques, let's have it with interest for about five years.

Here's another quote of yours, Mr Premier: "I gave the Prime Minister a heads-up—no doubt about it—with respect to the challenge that the budget would present and the fact that it would contain a health care premium." Mr Premier, do you think it's appropriate for you to

breach the principle of budget confidentiality to give someone a political heads-up? Laugh all you want.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The leader of the official opposition—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The Leader of the Opposition embraces an outdated policy that says that in each and every instance it is the responsibility of the Premier of Ontario to pick a fight with the government of Canada, even if that compromises the interests of the people of Ontario. We reject that approach. We're working with the federal government to advance the cause of the people of Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): I recently spoke to a single mother living in Barrhaven in my constituency, and she wanted me to ask you a question. She says that, after paying her rent, after paying her car payment and insurance, after paying her taxes and after feeding and clothing her two children, she just doesn't have the \$600 to pay for your new health tax. Where is she supposed to get the money to pay for that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think that the constituent whom the member opposite makes reference to is entitled to know a few things about what happened when the Tories put out their first budget in this Legislature. Let's remember—this from the member opposite who now champions the cause of the disadvantaged—in the Tories' first government they reduced welfare by 21.6%, they eliminated second-stage housing for women who found themselves in desperate circumstances, they fired one third of the Ministry of the Environment staff and slashed the budget by 42%. This now from the member opposite, who pretends to champion the public interest and, in particular, the disadvantaged.

Mr Baird: Premier, that's going to be cold comfort to my constituent.

I want to come back to this question. This constituent of mine is working hard. She's playing by the rules, like many other working families in Ontario—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Could I have some order, please. Thank you. Member from Nepean-Carleton.

Mr Baird: That's certainly cold comfort to my constituent, a single mother who, after paying the rent, after paying her car and insurance bills, after providing for her family, just doesn't have the money to pay for this tax. So I want to ask you very directly, Premier: Where is this single mother in my constituency to find \$600 after paying her taxes and paying all the bills? Where is she to find that money, Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite simply doesn't want to acknowledge the assistance we're providing to his constituent and many others like her throughout the province. In particular, we are, for the first time in our province, going to fund an immunization program that puts us at the top when it comes to provinces and territories. We're going to fund inocul-

ations against meningitis, pneumococcal disease and chickenpox. For one child alone that will save parents \$600. We happen to believe that investing in that kind of program in the interests of Ontario children is the right thing to do. Apparently, the member opposite is against us funding immunization programs for children in the province of Ontario.

Mr Baird: Premier, you said, not more than five weeks ago, and I'm going to quote, "Well, what we've said all along, and I'm very clear about this, is that we're not going to raise taxes." You said that on April 24. What people in Ontario want to know is, why didn't you go to Paul Martin, the man who cut \$25 billion out of our nation's health care system, before you picked the pockets of working families in Ontario? What my constituents want to know is why the federal government wasn't called to task for their health care cuts? You see, Premier, in the federal election campaign going on, for Liberal MPPs in Ontario your budget is a weapon of mass political destruction. Why won't you go to Paul Martin and say you want him to put the money back that he stole from Ontario hospitals, that he took from Ontario nurses, before you go after working families in south Nepean and across Ontario? Why don't you do that?

1500

Hon Mr McGuinty: The Tory deficit is an example—*Interjections.*

The Speaker: Order. Would you allow the Premier to respond, please?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Government House leader, could I ask you to come to order, please?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Some people will say anything to try to get in on the federal election news, but we've got some good news here. We look forward to talking about it a lot more in the months to come.

Because of our budget and the difficult choices that we have made—and, yes, we are enlisting the people of Ontario in improving the quality of their health care services—these are just some of the things we'll be able to do for the people of Ontario: 36,000 more cardiac procedures; 2,300 more joint replacements; 9,000 more cataract surgeries; 8,000 more full-time nursing positions; 150 family health teams. We think that is a worthwhile investment on behalf of the people of Ontario.

Applause.

The Speaker: Order. I find that the disruption on each side has robbed others of their questions. I also think that standing up and applauding deprives others of asking questions.

TAXATION

Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I hope to tone this down a little, but I do have a very serious question about the budget. My question is to the Premier. There is a rebellion across this province, quite literally, of people who are upset about the tax grab from your budget. They are furious at the unfairness, where a

middle-income person pays up to 16% extra of their taxes, while a bank executive who earns over \$200,000 pays less than a 3% increase in theirs. They're furious that the capital tax on banks and other large corporations is going away, that they're getting a break, while they are forced to dig deeper and deeper into their pockets.

Why don't you just come out and admit to seniors and working families that they are going to be out of pocket \$200, \$300, \$500, up to \$1,000 because you chose to side with the banks and the wealthy, and not with them?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It's passing strange that the member opposite raises a question about the profits being generated by corporations, yet he voted against our decision to roll back corporate taxes in the province of Ontario.

The member opposite and the opposition parties are apparently opposed to our budget. I'm just trying to figure out which part of our budget they're opposed to. Are they opposed to the additional cardiac procedures? Are they opposed to additional joint replacements? Are they opposed to more cataract surgeries? Are they opposed to lower class sizes? Are they opposed to 1,000 new teachers? Are they opposed to lead teachers for literacy and numeracy in our classrooms? We think, when the real story gets out to the people of Ontario, they will embrace this budget and the improvements in health care and education that will flow from this.

Mr Prue: We, on this side of the House, don't believe you any more than the people of Ontario believe you outside this House. Will you just admit who wins and who loses in your budget? We put it to you that people lose and the corporations win. This is a grossly unfair budget, when a bank clerk will pay \$450 in new taxes and the bank for whom she works—the bank of Montreal made \$602 million in profit in this past quarter—gets further big-time tax cuts. My question to you: In the most important decision of your young government, in the seven or eight months you've been here, you have sided with the banks and against seniors and working families. Why did you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, this was from a member belonging to a party that chose to vote against our decision to roll back corporate tax cuts. But I want to remind the member opposite of something about the first NDP government budget. In that particular budget, the then-NDP government decided they were going to hike gas taxes by 3.4 cents a litre. I ask the member opposite, is that progressive? Does that help our most disadvantaged who are struggling to make ends meet? We think not.

What we have done instead is that we have increased welfare rates in the province of Ontario. We've increased rates for people who find themselves on disability. We are helping people out when it comes to managing their rent responsibilities. We're doing all kinds of things to improve the quality of public education and the quality of public health care. These may not be easy decisions, but I can tell you they are the right decisions.

Mr Prue: With the greatest of respect, it doesn't take great leadership to go after the poor. Workers and the

poor across this province know they have been the subject of a tax grab. They know that a worker earning \$45,000 will pay an additional 1.25% in taxes this year. They know that an executive earning \$500,000 will pay only 0.18% on that same tax bill.

We are asking you to simply do the right thing. You've said so many times "the right thing and the fair thing." We're asking you to finally do it, to rescind your health tax and make those who can afford to pay it actually be responsible to pay it.

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite takes it upon himself to be a defender of our disadvantaged, as if somehow they have a monopoly when it come to social consciousness in Ontario. This budget and steps we have taken to this point in time prior to the budget advance the cause of our least advantaged in the province a great deal.

On the matter of seniors alone, I can tell you that seniors, when we tell them that we are going to provide thousands more cardiac procedures, thousands more hip and knee replacements, thousands more cataract surgeries and thousands more full-time nursing positions, that 100,000 more Ontarians are going to benefit from home care, that when we improve the quality of care in our nursing homes for the 70,000 of our parents and grandparents who take up residence there and who are living out their lives there—when they are made aware of those investments we are making, I can tell you that they embrace the idea that for the first time in a long time they've got a government that is on the job and doing the right thing when it comes to health care and education.

1510

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. We've discovered a dirty little secret buried in your bad-news budget. Not only are you imposing an unfair health tax and not only are you delisting essential health services, but now we find that your budget makes it easier to delist drugs. That's right. Your bill amends section 20 of the Ontario Drug Benefit Act to allow the health minister to take drugs off the formulary without going to cabinet. Your minister will be able to wipe out people's access to drugs behind closed doors. My question is, why are you making it easier to take away people's access to drugs?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I hope that the additional research dollars will be of some benefit, sooner rather than later.

We made a very specific commitment during the campaign to accelerate the process by which we can introduce generic drugs on to the formulary. That is the sole purpose of this provision as it's contained within the budget, to accelerate the introduction of generic drugs on to the formulary. That will save Ontario taxpayers money and provide good-quality care to Ontarians.

Ms Churley: Premier, I believe what you can put on, you can also take off. If that's not the point, you can

clarify that, but that's my understanding from reading it. Apparently it wasn't enough to delist—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. I'm just trying to get the House leader to be a little bit quieter so I can hear you.

Ms Churley: The public can hear me, Mr Speaker, and that's what counts here.

It wasn't enough to delist eye exams, chiropractic services and physiotherapy. Now you want to let the health minister delist prescription drugs that people depend on, and you want to do it secretly, behind the closed doors of the health ministry, without so much as cabinet approval. Yet this change, interestingly enough, was accompanied by no announcement. It wasn't even mentioned in the explanatory notes of the bill. Premier, tell us which drugs you're going to delist first. The people of Ontario deserve to know.

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, I disagree entirely with the member opposite's version or interpretation of this particular provision. One of the things the Provincial Auditor referenced in the past was the fact that because it takes us so long to substitute a generic for a name brand drug, it's coming at great expense to the people of Ontario. All we've done through this particular provision is enable the minister to fast-track the introduction of generics. That's what this is all about. There is no hidden agenda. There is nothing that we're trying to do that is beyond that. It's simply to provide better-quality care at a faster pace for the people of Ontario. It's a good thing.

Ms Churley: Premier, if you can list with this amendment, you can delist. So here you are, bringing in a huge health tax on working people after you wouldn't—

Interjections.

Ms Churley: Excuse me. Here you are bringing in a huge health tax on working people after saying you wouldn't. That was bad enough. You'd think that delisting important health services was bad enough, but your secret plan to delist prescription drugs takes the cake. But that's the way you Liberals do things, isn't it? You claim to be champions of health care, and you stand up there and say that today, but you're sneakily making it easier to take away their access to affordable prescription drugs. Yet again, another broken Liberal promise.

Premier, for the sake of the people who depend on prescription drugs, will you commit today to delete this amendment so the health minister will not have free rein to take drugs off the formulary, which is what this amendment will allow him to do?

Hon Mr McGuinty: There's an inability here to shift on the fly. The member opposite is just not prepared to accept my answer. I want to assure her, but more importantly I want to assure the people she might have caused to worry today, that the purpose of this particular provision is simply to allow the Minister of Health to move more quickly when it comes to introducing generics into the formulary. That is the beginning and the end of the purpose when it comes to this provision.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): My question is to the Premier. Your reputation as someone who is untrustworthy is crossing provincial borders. Yesterday, even the Prime Minister was asked by a high school student in Saskatoon how anyone could possibly believe him when people couldn't believe the Premier of Ontario in keeping his promise.

But we don't have to look to Saskatoon and high school students; we just have to look at the Premier's own backbench for doubts about his credibility. On his first day back in the riding following the budget, the member for Prince Edward-Hastings told CJBO Radio that he strongly disagreed with his own government's budget for delisting physiotherapy, chiropractic and optometry services. That member, Mr Parsons, said that he would fight hard to ensure that these delistings were reinstated. I want to ask the Premier: Has Mr Parsons spoken to you about this, and how will you respond to him?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): It's important to understand that in order for us to make important investments in health care, we've had to call upon the people of Ontario to help us make those investments. We've also made some difficult decisions with respect to services we were already delivering. But it's important to know what the truth is with respect to these. When it comes to optometry services, for example, we will continue to provide coverage for all Ontarians over the age of 65 and under the age of 20. And all medically necessary eye examinations will continue to be covered, regardless of the patient's age.

Mr Klees: There's a rift in the Liberal caucus. The fact of the matter is that Mr Parsons made a very clear statement that he would take this matter to the Premier. In fact, Mr Parsons—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Mr Klees: It's not just Mr Parsons who's opposing the budget. Kim Craiton, the member for Niagara Centre, told the Niagara Falls Review that he wanted to find some way to reverse that delisting as well. Both of these members—certainly Mr Parsons said there will be public meetings and that he will personally undertake in those public hearings to oppose those measures. I want to ask the Premier, who spoke about democratizing this place—in fact, earlier on he said, "Let's wait to see when the people of Ontario get to understand this budget"—will you commit today to having public hearings on this budget and give Mr Parsons an opportunity to oppose this, as he said he would?

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): On a point of order, Speaker: I was actually there when I spoke, and I would be pleased to supply a transcript. I did not say that.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjections.

Mr Klees: Now you're lying about that too.

Interjections.

The Speaker: We'll take a five-minute recess.

The House recessed from 1519 to 1524.

The Speaker: Just before the recess, the member from Oak Ridges commented on something unparliamentary. I would ask him to withdraw.

Mr Klees: I withdraw.

The Speaker: Thank you. Premier?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Speaker, I frankly can't recall what the question was. If the member wants to put it again—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member from the third party now, the member from Hamilton East. New question.

PENSION PLANS

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Premier. I represent a community where people are very worried about their pensions. In fact, steelworkers in particular in Hamilton East are very worried about their pensions and whether they will be able to enjoy financially secure retirement. They're worried because Ontario pension protection legislation is badly out of date and full of holes. In fact, the coverage provided by Ontario's pension benefits guarantee fund has not been updated since 1980 and now covers only a small part of a typical monthly pension benefit.

Premier, will you act immediately to significantly increase the monthly pension benefit protected by the pension guarantee fund? Yes or no?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): First of all, let me take the opportunity, because it is my first opportunity, to congratulate the member opposite and to welcome her to this Legislature. It is my sincere hope that she'll never lose her idealism.

Having said that, I'm sure the member will want to recognize that the challenges that are connected with people who are relying on pensions from Stelco developed as a result of her party, in 1992, changing the Pension Benefits Act and exempting Stelco from the requirement they used to have to make ongoing contributions. The reason those pensioners are at risk today is because of steps taken by the NDP government.

Ms Horwath: The people of Hamilton East didn't buy that argument several weeks ago; in fact, the people of Hamilton East sent a clear message to your government on May 13. They expect their government to be at the table fighting for them, not rewriting history; not making excuses, passing the buck and breaking promises. In fact, they are watching your government very closely on the security of their pensions. So I'm going to ask you one more time, Mr Premier: Are you going to be a part of the solution and take action to protect pensions, or are you going to sit this one out too?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, the member is going to have to, at some point in time, stop providing her idiosyncratic version of history here and tell her constituents why they find themselves in this particular fix. They find themselves in this mess because of a misstep taken by the NDP government.

We are working with the workers and with the company itself. We've assigned an individual, Jim Arnett, whose responsibility is to report to us on an ongoing basis. We are taking the necessary steps to ensure that we can provide assistance to those workers when called upon and support the company in any way we can. But what we will not do is take the step that was taken by the NDP government in the past, which is to exempt companies when it comes to making their continuing contributions to pension plans.

NORTHERN HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay-Superior North): My question is to the Minister of Health. As you know, the residents of northern Ontario face unique challenges in providing and accessing health care. Yesterday, you and the Premier joined people from across northwestern Ontario in celebrating the official opening of the new Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre and making an important announcement related to the hospital as well as another major announcement in Sudbury later in the day. There is no question that hospital boards across the north work hard to raise their share of project costs from a much smaller resource pool, but at the same time, these northern hospitals, such as the ones in Thunder Bay and Sudbury, largely because of the geographical realities in our part of the province, must provide a wide range of services to people from outlying communities, often living hundreds of kilometres away. Minister, what assurances can you give to the residents of the north that the government of Ontario is paying attention to these very unique circumstances?

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Yesterday I was honoured to attend in northern Ontario, with the Premier, two important announcements at the two regional hospitals that are the anchors of the health care system in northwestern and northeastern Ontario. We made an unprecedented funding arrangement, a commitment on the part of the government to provide 80% of the capital costs of construction of the new facilities in each of those two communities. We did so because they play a unique role in the delivery of health care in our province, unique because they're both regional trauma centres, because they're both regional cancer centres, because they're both the tertiary care centres for the entire regions and because they're connected to the important Northern Ontario Medical School, which we're very proud to be moving forward on. We recognized that those communities and their tax base are not capable of raising all the money necessary to provide services over that vast and remote area, so we moved forward.

Let me close by saying this is the kind of initiative that's made possible by a government which has made the difficult but necessary decision to make sure that Ontarians have enough health care resources to build on the strengths of their health care system.

1530

Mr Gravelle: Thank you very much, Minister and Premier. On behalf of the residents of northeastern and northwestern Ontario, we're very grateful for this understanding of our needs. The members of my community and the region are very pleased that this government is willing to take the bold steps necessary to improve health care in Ontario.

As you understand so well, northern Ontario has a variety of challenges with respect to health care. But there has been much talk about our health-first budget and how it will affect Ontarians. My supplementary today is, how will our health-first budget affect people in the north?

Hon Mr Smitherman: The essential transformation in our health care budget is a drive to community, an investment in five significant areas of community supports, all designed to divert traffic from our hospitals, which we all know have been asked to do too much over the last number of years.

In areas where remoteness is such an issue, which are, of course, most prevalent in northern Ontario, it's increasingly clear that the direction we've taken, the transformation agenda that we've fuelled as a government—more resources for home care, for long-term care, for primary care reform, for public health that works, for mental health and addiction treatment services. These five things combined fuel a transformation agenda that I like to call a drive to community to provide treatment for people in their homes, as close to home as possible.

This is what our budget was all about, the transformation agenda that we're fuelling on behalf of the people of the province of Ontario and, I think, with a special application in the most remote areas of our province, northern Ontario.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr Ernie Eves (Leader of the Opposition): It's amazing how quickly that hospital got built.

Mrs Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): That's right. That's a good hospital that we built.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order, Minister of Community and Social Services. That must be a good hospital.

The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Mrs Witmer: My question is for the Premier. For a government that claims on its Web site that it wants to focus on illness prevention and health promotion, the shift that you've made and the elimination of OHIP coverage for eye exams is certainly a backward step. In fact, Judith Parks of the Ontario Association of Optometrists says that without access to eye exams, which

identify early warning signs of eye disease, "People will go blind that need not. The health and safety of our patients will suffer."

Premier, why are you putting the health and safety of patients at risk by introducing greater privatization and two-tier health care and delisting eye exams for people between the ages of 21 to 64?

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

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I think it's important to note right off the bat that as a result of the initiatives we've taken with respect to optometry, which no doubt are difficult decisions, Ontario is now aligned with all other provinces in our country. What we've done is reach out to protect those who are most vulnerable by making sure that our seniors and young people have access to those services and that in any instance that is medically necessary there will be access to those services.

There is absolutely no doubt that there were hard choices as a result of our budget, but what the honourable member doesn't speak to is the significant \$600-million investment over four years in primary care reform for those one million Ontarians who, as a result of your eight failed years, did not have a family doctor. We bring forward a model of hope that has an interdisciplinary team approach of people working in partnership to make sure that those Ontarians, whom the member now has concern for, actually have access to the most essential health services in this province.

Mrs Witmer: I would say to the Minister of Health that nobody believes you any more. This is the man who introduced a Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act and is now decreasing access to health care services, not based on need on but people's ability to pay. You should be ashamed of yourself.

I'd like to read a letter from Kate MacNaughton. She says the "Ontario government's delisting of preventive and maintenance health services is about to hurt my family.... We ... don't visit the dentist" because they can't afford it. Now, they're not going to be able to go and have eye exams.

The Speaker: Question.

Mrs Witmer: And she says, "Screening for glaucoma and detached retina is part of a general eye exam. We are not in a position to pay for general eye exams so your legislation will put them out of our reach. As a result ... we face ... personal ramifications." They can't afford the huge bills. What do you say to people like Kate MacNaughton?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I say to the honourable member that she ought to be ashamed. Let me quote Doris Grinspun: "I'm delighted with the focus on health care and even more delighted with the focus on real transformation of the system"—home health care, primary health care, long-term care and public health. The point simply is: 100 million new dollars for community care; 406 million new dollars for long-term care; 600 million

new dollars for primary care; 65 million new dollars for community-based mental health and addiction supports; and a signature investment in public health that is the proactive kind of health care, the preventive kind of health care that Ontarians have been waiting for for a long time. One final point—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. New question.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. Do you have a copy of your budget bill in your desk? If you do, I would advise you to take it out and turn to page 13. I'm going to read to you what section 20(1) of your budget bill says. The heading says "Delisting," and it's subsection 20(1): "The Lieutenant Governor in Council or the minister may remove the designation of a drug product as a listed drug product even if none of the conditions prescribed under clause 18(1)(b.1) are breached." Premier, could you comment on that section that is headed by the word "Delisting?"

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): To the Minister of Health.

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As the Premier well said on this point earlier, the clear intent of this section is to bring forward the gold standard for the province of Ontario on the fast-tracking of generics on to the formulary. We continue to rely, in this province, on the drug quality therapeutic committee for any advice with respect to the delisting of products. I'm pleased to confirm for the member that the intent of this section is for the fast-tracking of generics to make sure that Ontarians have prompt access to these drugs and to the benefit of the taxpayers.

Ms Churley: I believe that the Premier and the Minister of Health owe the fine researchers in the NDP department an apology, because they got this right. You're the ones who need researchers over there. You're getting section 20(1) mixed up with section 18, which is the section the Premier so proudly displayed in here. That's the section that's in there to add drugs. Premier, you have, under section 20 a specific clause that allows your Minister of Health to secretly delist drugs. Do you know why we're worried? Because he's in the process of negotiating with the OMA right now.

I want to ask you again, which drugs are you planning to delist? Come clean with the people of Ontario today, and tell us.

Hon Mr Smitherman: I think the evidence is clear from a budget that increases by some \$300 million the amount of money we're going to make available for the provision of drugs in Ontario that our intent is only to enhance the quality of our drug formulary. In the initiative that we're involved in, the intent is absolutely clear. It is the fast-tracking of generic drugs for the purpose of making sure that the government of Ontario takes advantage, at the earliest date possible, once the federal

government has done their piece, to make sure we've got those cheap drugs available as quickly as possible for the benefit of our health care system. That is the intent of the section.

1540

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr Jeff Leal (Peterborough): My question is for the Minister of Labour. I've heard from constituents in my riding who are concerned about asbestos in construction workplaces. The health hazards associated with asbestos are far too familiar. Exposure to airborne asbestos fibres is known to cause respiratory conditions and various forms of cancer. Employers have a responsibility under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to protect the health and safety of construction workers in Ontario. Minister, what are you going to do to improve workplace safety and protect Ontario's construction workers from asbestos exposure?

Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour): The member for Peterborough asks a very important question. I'd like to thank him for his tireless efforts in defence of workers, in defence of workplace safety.

First of all, the asbestos regulation covering workers in construction has not been updated for some time, unlike the general asbestos regulation. That potentially means that the regulation does not reflect the best scientific and medical evidence. So what we're doing is two things. First of all, we are providing a notice advisory to all workers in construction—new construction and repair—so they will be aware of some of the best scientific advances so that this summer, as they're working, they'll be protected. The second thing we're doing, and this is important for the member to know, is asking for input on a draft new regulation so we can better update the regulation and make sure workers in Ontario working with asbestos in construction are fully and properly protected.

Mr Leal: I'm pleased to hear you're addressing the serious problem of asbestos exposure on construction projects and in building and repair operations. The statistics of workplace injuries are alarming. According to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, every week in Ontario 5,400 people suffer from preventable work-related injury, including 1,800 injuries serious enough to make the workers miss time on the job. Three people suffer amputations, two people die from work-related injuries and four people die from occupational illnesses. It is truly a shame that injury seems to be a consequence for so many people in our workforce. What is your ministry doing to protect workers from injury in the workplace?

Hon Mr Bentley: I thank the member for the supplementary. Once again, he's focusing on the number one priority of the Ministry of Labour, which is to make sure our workplaces are as safe and healthy as anywhere in the world.

What are we doing? First of all, we're stepping up enforcement. We've hired 25 inspectors, and we're looking

to see what else we can do. Second, we have ended telephone-only inspections of workplace work refusals that the previous government instituted. We've ended that program. Third, we're working with farm groups, labour groups and the Ministry of Agriculture to bring in health and safety regulations for the farm agriculture community in this province. Next, we have made the occupational health clinic in Sarnia a permanent member of the OHCOW family, which will protect workers in that community. Finally, we have updated the occupational exposure limits to make sure all workers and workplaces in the province are fully and properly protected.

BUDGET SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Premier. We know that the co-chair of the federal Liberal election campaign, David Herle, provided your government with his taxpayer-funded advice on your recent budget. Your finance minister has indicated that Mr Herle, despite his advice to break your no-tax-increase promise, was not provided with any budgetary details. This is in stark contrast to your public admission that you informed Liberal Prime Minister Martin of budget contents. Premier, given parliamentary conventions surrounding budget secrecy, can you advise us what exceptions permitted you to give advance notice of budget contents to your Liberal cousin?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The leader of the official opposition raised this just a short while ago. I answered it at that time, and my answer remains the same: We feel we have a responsibility to stay in touch with the federal government, of whatever political stripe, and we did that in that particular case.

With respect to Mr Herle, there are a number of precedents for retaining people who provided the kind of assistance they did in that particular matter. I'm quite prepared to provide those examples, taken from the previous government.

Mr Runciman: That's a clear violation of parliamentary convention in place since the 19th century, and it's clear that the government's operating motto is one rule for the general public, another for your Liberal friends. Premier, if I can get a page, I'm going to send over a copy of the oath you swore when you became Premier. It states, "I will respect as secret all matters that may be discussed by the executive council, and not disclose outside the council any facts pertaining to such matters."

Premier, you've proven your signature to be worthless. Does your admitted breach of your oath, as a member of the executive council, justify your stepping aside from your responsibilities? You wouldn't accept this from any other member of the executive council; why would you live with it yourself? Will you step aside, following this breach of your oath?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The member opposite now holds himself out as a champion of parliamentary tradition, and

yet he belonged to a government that, for the first time in the history of parliamentary tradition, introduced a budget in an auto parts factory. That's the kind of defence we have for parliamentary tradition. I will take no lectures, when it comes to this gentleman, on the matter of parliamentary tradition.

WATER QUALITY

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Premier, and it's with regard to the new water regulations that are hurting, I would say, thousands of small businesses across all of northern Ontario. I want to bring but one example before the House today.

I have a letter from a Mr Krupka, who is the owner of Notre Dame Trailer Park. He sends me this letter in order to outline what your new water regulations are going to mean to him. He is looking at capital costs of \$159,000 this year in order to bring the trailer park up to the standards of the new water regulation, with an additional cost of some \$26,000 per year of ongoing maintenance.

My question to you is simply this: What is your government going to do, either by way of regulation or funding, in order to deal with this so Mr Krupka is not in the position of other small business owners in the north of having to close their businesses because they can't afford to do this?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): To the Minister of the Environment.

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): I'm happy again to have the opportunity to address this very important issue in the Legislature. We've heard from people across the province of Ontario. We have listened to the people of Ontario, unlike the previous government, with respect to regulation 170.

At the present time, we have delayed the requirement for those who would be affected on July 1 of this year, until December 31 of this year. In the meantime, we are consulting with municipalities, we are consulting with campground associations, or associations representing campgrounds, trailer parks and so on, as well as the Ontario Medical Association, to ensure that a new regimen that will, in fact, regulate water sources and trailer parks and other municipal sources of water in the province of Ontario will be able to provide safe water to the people that they serve.

1550

Mr Bisson: I wouldn't argue, as a New Democrat, for one second that we have to make sure we have safe water regulations for all Ontarians, but it's the effect that it's having on small businesses. This particular business went to borrow money from the bank in order to buy equipment, to buy a backhoe to do maintenance within his trailer park. He was told, and I quote from his letter: "I wanted to purchase a backhoe loader at a cost of \$28,000 this year. The bank loans officer turned down the request for this purchase, as he rationalized that although my revenue was higher, my expenses" this year,

because of the regulation, when the regulation comes into place, would be higher.

You might have delayed it, but the business owners themselves are not able to borrow money because of the regulation that's still out there and looming over their heads. Will you clarify this issue once and for all, so that small business owners in the north are not faced with what Mr Krupka is faced with; that is, an inability to borrow money from the bank because of the impending costs the regulations have on their businesses?

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: What has been committed to in this Legislature is that the Minister of the Environment will be working over the next months, and in the fall we will be introducing a regulation that we believe will be more user-friendly and will also ensure the safety of water for the people of Ontario. In terms of telling him what the costs are going to be, that is yet to be determined. We have yet to receive that input.

This government is about consulting with the people who will be impacted. We will be consulting with the Ontario Medical Association to ensure that in the fall, when we bring in a new regulation or an improved regulation, it will be manageable for the people of Ontario so they can provide safe water to people in their community.

CLASS SIZE

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is for the Minister of Education. Our government was elected, and we are committed, to bring about real, positive change to public education in Ontario. Parents, students and teachers in my riding of Huron-Bruce are very concerned about their schools and the quality of education they receive.

Capping class sizes in the early grades is an issue that I know is very dear not only to our Premier's heart, but to yours, Minister, as well. Research has shown that the benefits of a hard cap are many, and my constituents are very supportive of this policy. During the election, our government promised a hard cap of 20 students during the all-important early grades. Can you tell us when you expect this hard cap to be implemented?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I thank the member opposite. I know that she, like other members in this House, replaced members who weren't concerned enough about how well students, particularly young students in our schools, would have a chance to go forward. I'm very pleased to report back to her, and through her to her constituents, that our government is committing, over four years, \$2.6 billion in new investment in education, \$854 million in this year alone, because this is a government not afraid to make tough choices on behalf of this province, kids who are lost in classrooms made too large by inattentive governments in the past—in fact, governments for some time—that did not give the advantage that education in Ontario should have to offer.

I want to report to the member that reduction in class sizes will begin this September in schools and school

boards all across this province. There will be over 1,100 new teachers deployed in the primary division, paying the attention to students that wouldn't be given by the governments that preceded us.

Mrs Mitchell: Research has shown that children who learn in smaller classes in our early grades learn better and also develop better social skills. All parents want to give their children the absolute best start. Many have said that capping class sizes is one way we can do that. Some parents in my riding are unclear about what the benefits of our hard cap of 20 students from JK to grade 3 will be for our children. Minister, can you tell us what implications this cap will have on students later in their learning careers and later in their lives?

Hon Mr Kennedy: Again, an excellent question, and excellent interest on the member's part, one that couldn't occur through previous governments because they weren't focused on what will make a difference. Making sure that individualized attention happens to students, which we will bring to 20 by the end of our term, will make sure they get their advantages recognized sooner, that they get individualized attention so their challenges are identified and dealt with at a time that is not only beneficial to them but most economical for the system. It will make sure that parents aren't competing with as many sets of parents to do their job, which has to happen from the earliest time possible.

We find lower discipline problems, learning advantages and better performance on behalf of students.

Right now in this province, the legacy under the previous government—150,000 young primary children are in classes of 26 or more, where they don't even do research because they know how hopeless it is for kids in those situations. It was ignored once by governments in the past. It was not seen to be a priority—

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Thank you.

BUDGET SECURITY

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I'd like to go back to the Premier. A few years ago, the Premier was part of a group of baying hounds calling for my resignation over the possible identification of a young offender in this Legislature. As he will recall, I did resign. Eight short months ago, Premier, you placed your hand on a Bible and swore an oath to the people of Ontario. Part of that oath deals with secrecy of cabinet discussions.

What standard of integrity are you setting for the people of this province, for the people of this country, when you have, in effect, torn this thing up and thrown it on the floor? What does the oath of allegiance mean? What does it mean to the other members of the executive council when you can simply deny it? Your signature doesn't mean anything. Now the oath of allegiance with your hand on the Bible doesn't mean anything. Shameful.

Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Speaker: Is it in order for documents to be thrown around the Legis-

lature? It seems to me that if there was a legitimate question, the opposition wouldn't have to engage in such childish stunts.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That is not a point of order.

Premier?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs): I really do appreciate the dramatic flourish. I guess, from the member's perspective, with any luck at all, it will get him on TV tonight. But I want to again make the point that we bring a decidedly different approach to our relationship to the federal government than did the previous government. We happen to believe it's important to communicate from time to time with the federal government. We happen to believe it's important to lay down a good foundation, a good relationship, so that we can work together in the interests of the people of Ontario. I will never apologize for working with this Prime Minister or any Prime Minister when it comes to advancing the cause of the people of Ontario. And I can tell you something else—

Interjections.

Applause.

The Speaker: Order. I'm afraid that they have taken up your time with all the applause. That's the end of oral questions.

Mr Runciman: On a point of order, Speaker: I think there has been an effort here today, and I appreciate your comments earlier, to delay the proceedings on the part of the government members. This is a continuing strategy. Mr Speaker, do you see what's happening here?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I'd like to hear the member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr Runciman: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate your comments and I would ask of you, if there is interruption in the House, and it is a judgment on your part—obviously it's a judgment call on your part—if it's being caused by the government members, I think the clock should be restored. If it's caused by us, we're penalizing ourselves on this side of the House. But when they deliberately delay the proceedings, it's costing us. We only get one hour a day, and I implore you to make sure that we have every possible opportunity. That's what democracy is all about.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I appreciate your comment, and you would have realized that all parties were extremely guilty today of shouting across and not allowing me to conduct the question period in an orderly manner. It is that kind of interruption that caused that delay and the stretching of time. I hope that tomorrow—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. You can understand, from all this interruption, what really caused the disruptive behaviour in the House. I would appeal to you all that you let us have a better question period tomorrow.

1600

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I appreciate your comments, but I

just want to add to this, because quite frankly we, as New Democrats, have been quite restrained in the House for that very reason—

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Wow, listen to the Liberals heckle again.

My point is this, Mr Speaker: We had five standing ovations on the part of the government today that in fact took away half a question from the opposition. I add my voice that you don't allow that to happen, because it is not caused by the opposition side.

The Speaker: I thought I had taken care of that by asking for your co-operation tomorrow.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. I'm sure you appreciate that if you do co-operate tomorrow, we will not have this in the future.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd like to point out that when the Premier sat down, there were two seconds left and we should have had a supplementary. There were two seconds left—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. We're proceeding. Pursuant to standing order 30(b), I'm required to call orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC STATUTE
LAW AMENDMENT ACT
(CHILD AND YOUTH SAFETY), 2004
LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT
DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LE CODE DE LA ROUTE
(SÉCURITÉ DES ENFANTS
ET DES JEUNES)

Mr Takhar moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads / Projet de loi 73, Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des enfants et des jeunes sur les routes de l'Ontario.

Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Mr Speaker, I will be sharing this time with the member for Chatham-Essex-Kent, the member for Guelph-Wellington and the member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Every year, well over 100 children and youth die on our roads. In the five-year period ending in 2002, over 700 children and youth were killed in road collisions. Over 76,000 children and youth were injured on our roads. That is more than all the seats in SkyDome. These numbers are nothing short of tragic. Although Ontario has the safest roads in Canada, it is clear that more must be done.

I am very proud, on behalf of the government, to be moving forward a package of measures that will, in short, save children's lives. These measures will help prevent our children from being hit by vehicles speeding recklessly and illegally past stopped school buses.

My colleague Pat Hoy, the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex, has earned the thanks and the admiration of this House for his years of determination and conviction in bringing this particular measure to life. I thank him again today.

If passed, this bill will enact other measures to further protect children and youth on Ontario's roads: measures that will prevent children from being thrown through car windshields; measures that will reverse the alarming rate of injury and death among novice drivers who travel with other teenagers in the car.

But you don't have to take my word for it. Take the word of parents from communities across the province who spoke out at events and in the media in support of these measures. Take the word of the experts in the field who have come out in strong support of these proposed measures.

Valerie Lee, president of the Infant and Toddler Safety Association, responded to the booster seat and child care seat measures by saying, "We really need to be doing this." Jack Smith of the Canada Safety Council said, "We believe it will make the roads safer for our children." Allyson Hewitt of Safe Kids Canada has also welcomed these measures. So have the CAA and the OPP. The Ontario Medical Association also tells me that mandatory booster seats will save lives.

Members will have seen the media coverage today about a new report from Safe Kids Canada that makes a compelling case for booster seats. I welcome this report. As TORONTO 1 reported yesterday, "Having a child in the back, strapped in a lap belt alone is not enough. In fact, a booster seat is crucial for their safety."

I'm sure that you, like me, were also moved by the tragic story on CityTV that told of the truly horrific injuries children suffer when they are not buckled up in booster seats. Today's Toronto Star also gives a graphic description of how seatbelts can ride up and cut into a child's internal organs when they are not using a booster seat. Our measures will prevent children in the future from sustaining these sorts of shocking injuries.

There is an unprecedented demand for us to move forward with these measures. There have been extensive calls in regional and national media for us to take this action. The Daily Observer in Pembroke said, "The provincial government is to be commended for a tough new package of road safety measures.... If they help prevent at least one needless death, they will be well worth it."

Currently, grandparents and babysitters are not required to buckle up kids. The St Catharines Standard described this fact as "a major safety loophole." They commented that "it is a loophole the Ontario government wisely plans to seal."

When it comes to school bus measures, the support from the experts is just as strong and just as vocal. Gary

Couture, Kawartha Lakes OPP detachment commander, says that up to now, prosecuting offenders has been difficult. The biggest problem is getting a description of the driver. He said, "The legislation now provides a wider range of options."

The Sarnia Observer asked, "How many sons and daughters must needlessly be killed" before we move ahead with vehicle owner liability? They went on to point out, "The problem with the current law is most bus drivers are only able to catch a glimpse of the back of the driver's head as vehicles speed by ... but the licence plate rarely goes unnoticed."

Even the Toronto Sun ran an article headlined, "Law Makes Ride To School Safer."

Talking about the teenage driver measures, Police Staff Sergeant Tom Carrique said, "This is a positive step." Peterborough county OPP Constable Bob LaFreniere is reported as saying that the teenage driver measures are "a way of lessening fatalities."

There is more. My office has received a number of letters from people across the province supporting this proposed legislation. I have heard from people who say they are glad this important issue is finally being addressed. I have heard from others who say that increasing the responsibility of people who are transporting children is a great initiative. Some have suggested that every school in Ontario should have a car seat safety day.

I could go on, but I believe it is clear to this House that these measures have widespread support, and so they should. After all, Transport Canada tells us that booster seats and child car seats, when used properly, can reduce the chance of injury or death by 75%.

1610

The only place this bill has met some criticism is in this House. I was especially shocked that the member from Oak Ridges chose to criticize this bill, even though the experts applaud it, even though parents welcome it, even though this bill, if passed, will save young lives. I say, shame. Frankly, if the member's opposition had been based on research or facts, it would be cause for serious and legitimate debate, but most of his arguments defy logic.

The member from Oak Ridges says that the cost of a booster seat is too much, that many families would not be able to pay \$100 for a booster seat. I don't know where the member of the opposition shops, but a booster seat starts at \$30, and there are several models in the \$40 to \$60 price range. Thirty dollars seems to me a small price to pay to save a child's life. It is difficult to argue otherwise. If this legislation passes, we are proposing a one-year phase-in period to give parents time to prepare.

Motor vehicle collisions are the leading cause of death and injury among children and youth. Right now, the law requires children over 40 pounds to use a seatbelt.

Interjection.

Hon Mr Takhar: My colleague on the NDP side doesn't get much time, so I think he wants to speak now.

Seatbelts don't sit properly on the body of a child that size. As a result, in a crash the child either slides under

the seatbelt or the seatbelt rides up to the abdomen, increasing the potential for serious internal injuries. The solution is a booster seat. A booster seat offers much better protection for children who are too big for child car seats and too small for seatbelts. That is why we are proposing making booster seats mandatory for children between 40 and 80 pounds, with a standing height of less than four feet, nine inches, or a maximum age of eight.

And what about the babysitters or grandparents who are transporting five kids in the back seat? It is just as important to protect five children as it is to protect one. We cannot ignore the safety of these children just because they are not with their parents. That is why we are proposing that more drivers be required to use car seats when transporting children. I realize that it may not always be convenient, but isn't our children's safety worth a little extra effort?

Valerie Lee, the president of the Infant and Toddler Safety Association said it best. She said that it seemed that people were, "Focusing on convenience for adults, rather than the safety of children. Certainly, emergencies happen. In a true emergency, a police officer is not likely to ticket the driver. The rest of the time, it just requires planning."

Of course, the same arguments were put forward when seatbelts were made mandatory for adults. The fact is, mandatory adult seatbelts have saved thousands of lives in Ontario. The measures we are proposing in this legislation will do the same for children. For those in genuine economic hardship, there are programs around the province that subsidize the cost of child car seats.

I also want to address the concern that going after the owner of a vehicle is in some way unfair. Tell that to the parents whose children have been struck and killed by drivers who illegally pass stopped school buses. Should we tell these parents that the drivers cannot be charged because no one got a good description? We are talking about accountability and we are talking about responsibility. I am sure that all members will see the fairness in that.

Equally, police must use discretion in laying charges if, for example, the crime is committed by someone who has stolen your car. I, for one, trust our police to use discretionary power judiciously.

Finally, I want to touch on the issue of teenage drivers. The sad fact is that 16- to 19-year-old drivers are involved in almost 8% of fatal collisions, yet they only represent about 5% of Ontario's driving population. This is simply unacceptable. The statistics speak volumes. Novice teenage drivers are three times more likely to be involved in a fatal or serious collision when there are other teenagers in the car.

We need to protect our teenagers. That is why we would limit the number of young passengers that a teenage G2 driver could carry to one passenger for the first six months of G2 during certain hours of the day. That limit goes up to three passengers after six months. Of course, when they pass their full driving test, those restrictions are lifted. The restrictions do not apply to G2

drivers 20 years of age or older, and they would not apply if the G2 driver has an experienced driver in the front seat. In addition, family members would be exempted from this restriction, regardless of age. This is a very moderate measure that balances the need to allow teenagers the freedom to drive while protecting them from peer pressure. This is what responsible government is all about, and this is good public policy.

To conclude, this bill, if passed, will save precious lives. I am therefore asking and seeking the support of all members of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex): I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill 73, an Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads. To say that I'm pleased is actually an understatement.

First of all, let me say that I want to thank the Premier for his support of a particular part of this bill, and we're talking about school bus safety. I also want to thank the Minister of Transportation for including the school bus portion of this in this bill.

There would be members here who know that I introduced a bill that had a component of the school bus safety aspect that we're talking about here today. Last night, I was thinking it was at least small history in my mind that I introduced this bill for the first time, that portion on school bus safety, in June 1996. We are in the first days of June now. I did note that in going back over some of the aspects of the bill.

I introduced it six times to this Legislature between 1996 and 2003, and on three occasions it received the unanimous consent of the House and was referred to a committee on three occasions. However, the government of the day did not see fit to bring this important aspect of school bus safety to a committee. Thus, I introduced it those six times.

I want to thank the supporters of my school bus safety bill. They have been with me for eight years, attempting to have the bill progress through this House and, if passed, Bill 73 will see that come into being.

1620

I want to thank the families of children who assisted me and stayed with me over these eight years, those who travelled to Queen's Park to tell their story about their children and their lives and the impact of the lack of safety in their lives. I want to thank the many organizations that supported this aspect of the bill. There are too many to mention, but certainly school boards, parents, teachers, municipalities, police, farm organizations—the list goes on and on.

To this day I receive letters from persons who have witnessed a vehicle passing a school bus when the red lights are flashing. I continue to receive mail from people who are horrified, white-knuckled, as they watch a vehicle pass a school bus illegally. It happens far too often. It is a serious breach of our driving laws.

As the minister mentioned, bus drivers have stated in a survey with Transport Canada that about one third of

Canadian school bus drivers see at least one illegal pass each day. Anecdotally, bus drivers have told me it has happened three and four times a shift. Many of these buses go out on to our highways and rural roads more than once. They may embark on one route, bring the children to the school and then go out and do another route. This happens all over Ontario in our urban centres, our small urban centres and our rural communities. There are 810,000 children who ride school buses each and every day, many of them quite young. They ride on 16,000 school buses in Ontario and, as I stated, some of those buses make more than one trip in the morning and more than one trip in the afternoon.

Why do we need this legislation? Because the current legislation states that if one illegally passes a school bus when the red lights are flashing, the bus driver must identify the offending driver. They must identify their face. First of all, the bus drivers are watching the children. Their primary objective is to watch the children get on the bus or disembark. If a car passes a bus from the back to the front, the bus driver only sees the back of one's head. If the vehicle is going at a high rate of speed, it is very difficult to identify one's face. Some cars have tinted windows, making it virtually impossible to see one's face. Daylight hours might also restrict the visibility of one's face in a car. It could be raining. It could be snowing. Some of the bus routes are long enough and late enough that daylight hours are diminished.

What we need is a conviction mechanism. We've needed this for a good many years now. Bus drivers, however, and other experts in the field of school bus safety believe they can identify a licence plate. So this bill, if passed, would allow for the identification of a licence plate. It is known as vehicle liability.

I've had many conversations over this eight years. I've done countless interviews with persons on radio, television, by mail, telephone—all manner of communication. Vehicle liability, I have explained to them, has been used by the previous government for red light cameras. If a car goes through a red light that has one of these cameras, the owner of the vehicle will get the ticket. Vehicle liability is also used for vehicle impoundment. This is when someone is driving while suspended for drunk driving. We also use vehicle liability for parking tickets and other parking offences. It's not always known who is driving the car that day, but a ticket is given. We need to ensure that we have a conviction mechanism. If Bill 73 is passed, the experts—and the bus drivers are the most expert at this—agree that they may be able to get a licence plate.

It's interesting, and I've mentioned this in the Legislature in the past, that one jurisdiction tracks these offenders. Bus drivers have seen the licence plate; they've reported it to the police. However, the police can do very little about it under the existing law. But they have sent notices to the owner of the vehicle and stated, "On a certain day at a certain time, your vehicle was seen passing a school bus when the red lights were flashing." They were getting between 40 and 60 a month at this particular police force.

In talking with police officers, I found further that often it was the same licence plates coming up over and over again—flagrant disregard for the safety of our children. And, as I mentioned, many of them are very young. They depend on those flashing red lights for their lives.

In the main, people seem to stop for red lights, stop signs, railway crossings. But for some unknown reason, to me at least, they believe they can pass a school bus with reckless abandon. I've even had reports given to me that they pass on the door side of the bus down on the shoulder of the road—extremely dangerous. We've had many injuries and many deaths when people pass a school bus with flagrant disregard.

We are proposing to amend the Highway Traffic Act to make vehicle owners accountable when vehicles illegally pass stopped school buses with overhead red lights flashing. Currently, the offence is only imposed on a driver. If you believe that someone who is driving your vehicle might pass a school bus when the red lights are flashing, it would be wise not to let them drive that vehicle. If you believe that someone is driving your vehicle and might break any of our highway traffic laws, maybe you should think twice about letting them use that vehicle.

We are proposing in this bill, if passed, to amend the Highway Traffic Act so that all school buses would display warning signs to remind drivers that they risk a maximum fine of \$2,000 for illegally passing a stopped school bus with overhead red lights flashing. That is the maximum that could be imposed.

I want to give credit to the members opposite, and members of the past government, for having raised the fine levels. However, they didn't go far enough, because without a conviction mechanism you could have raised the fine to any amount, you could have made it \$10,000; the problem was, we could not get convictions. It was nearly impossible to identify one's face. I've had reports and I have received film sent to me by parents who watched persons pass a bus when the red lights were flashing. They sat behind shrubbery and bushes in their yards and filmed, not one, not two, not three, but four cars in succession passing a school bus when the red lights were flashing. It happens all too frequently. It is extremely dangerous.

During a two-month campaign to educate drivers on school bus safety in Chatham-Kent some time ago, I might add, the police reported 107 violations where motorists drove past school buses while their red lights were flashing. That's 107 times in a two-month period, when the police were on this blitz, that they witnessed people passing school buses with the red lights flashing.

One might say, "Why don't the police do this on a more frequent basis?" As I mentioned, there are 16,000 school buses, some of them running more than one route per day, certainly one in the morning and one in mid-afternoon. It is impossible for the police to follow 16,000 school buses each and every day. Thus we need a change in our law. We need to ensure that people understand that

passing a school bus with the red lights flashing will not be tolerated here in Ontario.

1630

There are other jurisdictions that use this method of vehicle liability: Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Yukon. When I introduced my particular bill in 1996, I had calls from as far away as Florida, other states in the union, and perhaps from some of these very provinces, inquiring about my bill.

In the United States, 15 of the 26 states surveyed indicated their motor vehicle laws contain provisions to hold vehicle owners liable. One must be certain about who is driving one's vehicle. We are stating to the public of Ontario that passing school buses will not be tolerated.

The public grew to know what the law was, what the law actually stated through 1996 and the subsequent eight years because of the publicity garnered from previous bills. I had bus drivers telling me that people were passing the school buses with their hands up to their faces, shielding their faces so that they could pass without being detected. This can't be tolerated. People knew what the law was from police, school boards, parents, teachers and the Legislature talking about this—and they were shielding their faces as they passed school buses.

I've heard all manner of excuses for why one should pass a school bus when the red lights are flashing, and there is no valid reason for doing so. Persons have told me, "Well, I know all the children who get off at this particular house. I know all the children who get off. I see that bus every day. I know, when those five get off, that's all that get off that bus."

But I know of someone who was injured when visiting a friend. In that instance, perhaps it was the sixth child getting off. I don't know the exact number, but the point is you do not always know who is getting off that bus.

All manner of excuses: The prime one I get is, "I didn't see the bus." It's yellow. It's big. It's as big as a transport. It has lights all around it, some on top of it. There are strobe lights on some of our buses. They didn't see the bus, they told me. However, they did go around it. These people happened to pass a bus from the back; thus they must have gone around it. There is no excuse for passing a school bus when the red lights are flashing.

I'm so very pleased that this aspect of the bill is contained in Bill 73. The other aspects of the bill are excellent: to provide booster seats and there are some changes to our teenage driving laws here in Ontario, all in the name of enhancing the safety of children and youth on our school buses.

In wrapping up, I simply want to thank all those people who supported me over these eight years. I also want to once again thank the Premier and the Minister of Transportation.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I am very pleased to rise in support of Bill 73, a bill that helps save children's lives. I would like to thank the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex for all the work that he has done on

this issue, and the Minister of Transportation for introducing the legislation that is so long overdue.

School buses are a topic that, as a former trustee, have been near and dear to my heart. Some 800,000 of our children ride on school buses every day. That's almost half of the student population of Ontario. If you go to rural school boards, almost every child rides on the school bus every day.

In fact, school buses have an excellent safety record. If you look at the transportation that occurs while the student is on the bus, your child is much safer riding on a school bus than in the family car. There is no safer place for your child to be, going up and down the highway, than on the school bus. But where there is a problem is getting on and off the school bus. Virtually all school-bus-related accidents have to do with children getting on or off the bus. We are proposing to fix that with this legislation.

The current legislation says it's illegal to pass a school bus while the red lights are flashing. The purpose of that is clear: to stop the traffic in both directions so that children who are getting on or off the bus, as the case may be, can cross safely to the other side of the road. This is a system that only allows our children to approach the school bus and go home at night safely if they can safely cross the road. That's what the issue is here.

But we hear time after time—in fact, data show this—that a third of school bus drivers have an illegal pass at least once a day. If you talk to school bus drivers, every school bus driver can rhyme off incidents of cars that illegally, repeatedly pass buses. Of course, the danger is that while children are trying to cross, somebody who is illegally passing is going to run down a child. On average, one child per year is killed because of somebody who was illegally passing a school bus. We want to stop that.

When I talked to our drivers in my home board of Upper Grand in the Guelph area, they described the situation. They've got maybe 72 kids on the bus, and they have to make sure the kids on the bus are safe and that the kids who are getting on and off the bus are safe. If somebody illegally passes the bus, how on earth are they supposed to identify the driver? The only way you can get a conviction under the current law is to identify the driver of the car. That just doesn't happen. In fact, bus drivers tell me that even when they have partial identifying information, or they think they have information, and report it to the local police, the police are wonderfully co-operative about investigating. But even when charged, when it actually gets to court, the onus to identify the driver is so great that the charges actually fail. It's virtually impossible to get a conviction. The bus drivers regard it as an exercise in frustration.

That is why we are proposing, under this bill, to change the law so that instead of having to identify the driver, the bus driver will merely have to identify the vehicle; that is, to get the plate number. With the plate number, they will be able to report that incident to the police, and the police can investigate and will be able to

lay charges. We hope that as drivers realize they can no longer run and hide, they will stop breaking the law. In order to remind them of the law, if the act passes, we will be putting warning signs on buses to remind drivers that it's illegal to pass and that the fine for an illegal pass is \$2,000.

This legislation that my colleague for Chatham-Kent-Essex has introduced on innumerable occasions—it seems to him, I'm sure—as a private member's bill has been supported in the past by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. When I was president of that organization we supported it. The Ontario School Bus Association, which represents school bus operators, is enthusiastically supporting the legislation. This is something we need to do, and we need to do it now.

1640

Unfortunately, the Tories seem to have voted against it, or at least blocked it, on some occasions. The member for Oak Ridges, the former Minister of Transportation, Mr Klees, told the House just a few weeks ago, when we introduced the legislation, that he thought this was just another tax grab. Well, it's not another tax grab. It's about protecting children's lives.

The second issue arises with children getting on and off the bus. When you are talking about very little people, the driver in fact has a blind spot as a child gets off the bus and comes around the front of the bus. The driver has a blind spot and can't actually see the little kiddies if they're close to the bus. In the last 10 years, six children have been killed and many injured by their own school bus because the driver couldn't see the little kid walking around the front of the bus.

If any of you have looked at school buses, you may have noticed that there's this peculiar wire thing on the front. This is a safety arm that, when the bus stops and the kids are getting on and off, opens out. It forces kids to walk out and around the bus and get far enough in front so that the driver will absolutely, positively always see the little kids coming around. Bus operators support adding this. The school boards support adding the arm. In fact, about 50% of the school buses in the province already have these safety arms. We will be making it mandatory, if this legislation passes, for every new school bus to have the safety arm. This will cut down on the death and injury of our children and this is a very important step, supported, as I said, by the boards and operators.

These are two very important measures that have to do with school bus transportation. But those aren't the only issues we're covering here.

We're also dealing with the issue of teenaged drivers. All the data tell us that for 16- to 19-year-old drivers, the risk of serious motor vehicle accidents leading to death or serious injury goes up threefold if there are three or more passengers in the car. We know teenagers. You get a car full of teenagers and you get this peer pressure thing happening. They drive too fast, they don't pay attention and accidents happen.

I know there was an accident in my community, at my kid's high school. Not too many years ago a carload of

teenagers—it had nothing to do with alcohol; all of them had 0% blood-alcohol, but it was a group of teenagers in a car, an inexperienced driver, a little bit too much speed, by the sounds of things, and we had fatalities. We don't want that happening, and it's been documented over and over that that is what happens with young drivers. Interestingly, with older drivers the rate of accidents seems to go down slightly when they have passengers. But with teenagers, the more passengers, the more it goes up.

What we are proposing in this legislation is that for the first six months a teenager with a G2 licence will only be able to carry one other passenger aged 19 and under. After that, a teenager will be able to carry up to three passengers aged 19 and under. Once they've passed their full G licence, the limit will stop.

If the teenager is transporting other family members—perhaps they're taking younger brothers and sisters to the ball game or they're going to school as a family—this restriction will not apply. But in terms of having a car full of your buddies, I know it's tough on the kids, but they're not going to be able to do that any more. That's in this legislation.

In fact, Constable Bob LaFreniere from the Peterborough county OPP said, "I really and truly believe it will lessen the risk of disturbances in the car," adding that most collisions are caused by driver distraction. Can you think of anything more distracting than a group of teenagers in a car? "I see it as a way of lessening fatalities," he said.

The final thing we are doing is introducing a requirement for increased use of booster seats. There's some fascinating data. Most parents believe that as their children get to be about maybe four or five they can get rid of the booster seat and just simply strap the kids into the car seat belts. We need to think about the way that seat belts are designed. Seat belts are designed to go around your hips and they're designed to go across your bones in your chest and shoulders. If you put a little kid in a seat belt, what happens is that because they are so small, the seat belt rises up over the abdomen—no bones protecting them—and the shoulder belt rides up over the neck, so that the child becomes more prone to injury. In fact, the doctors who deal with this actually have a name for this. They call it "seat belt syndrome." Seat belt syndrome describes the pattern of injuries to the internal organs and spine caused by a seat belt that doesn't fit correctly. The damage is often so severe that doctors can see the mark of the lap belt on a child's abdomen.

In fact, what we are led to believe is that many deaths and serious injuries occur to children who are riding in cars with improperly fitting seat belts. What this legislation will require is that kids up to the age of eight, who are small, will be required to be in a booster seat. What that does is makes the little kid taller so the seat belt fits properly. While this is a bit of a nuisance, admittedly, for parents, you can get a booster seat for around \$40. I must say that as a mom it does have an upside because when you make the little kids taller they can actually see out

the windows, and when they can see out the windows they cause less distraction.

There are four very important measures in here, and I am very pleased to be able to speak in support of all of them.

Mr Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward-Hastings): I am pleased to speak to this bill as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, as an MPP and as a parent. I certainly have received calls of concern about this bill, and I will say up front that I could not support the bill more.

I want to look first of all at the booster seats and the dynamics of an accident. I've had parents say, "I can put my children in seat belts." If you are driving a car at 120 kilometres an hour and you hit an immobile object such as a tree, your occupants and your children continue to move at 120 kilometres an hour. If you are in a head-on where you are doing 60 or 70 kilometres, the impact is of 140 kilometres an hour hitting an immobile object.

With the seat belts, the straps are perhaps two inches wide—I still think in the old terms—so the full force of stopping your child will be spread across this little two-inch-wide area across their abdomen as opposed to a booster seat where there is a very large area that will contain it and spread it over 20 times, 30 times greater an area, having less of an impact on it.

For far too many children in seat belts who are between 18 and 36 kilograms, the belt will end up across their neck, and again, when the vehicle stops, they don't. Sometimes the belts will kill. Sometimes they will go through the windows, and that will kill. There shouldn't be one child in Ontario die because of being unrestrained.

I've had concerns expressed to me from grandparents and neighbours and friends that say, "I want to move the children and this is now a difficulty for me to have the seat in it." We're talking life and death, folks. We're not talking inconvenience; we're talking life and death.

I've had people say to me, "We drive carefully." I don't doubt that, but that's why we invented the word "accident," because there are things that are beyond our control.

With seat belts—and we still have young children at home—one of the games is sometimes to reach over and undo them while travelling. If you're at a great rate of speed, do you stop and do the belt up or do you continue driving for a while, as opposed to booster seats, which are more difficult to undo?

1650

I have had people contact me saying, "We have three young children, and three booster seats won't fit in the back of our vehicle." I can appreciate that that's a problem. But again, we are talking our children's lives.

It has been suggested to me by many that the booster seats are too expensive. We bought ours for about \$30 or \$40. They may be as much as \$150 for your child. Folks, everything is relative. We buried our son in January, and I would trade everything we own for one more hug. Is your child not worth \$40? Yes. That's a pretty cheap price to pay to have your child live.

The arguments put forward, I would suggest, are inconveniences. It may even require a sacrifice, but for every parent in Ontario, we know that part of raising children is making a sacrifice to ensure they are successful and to ensure their health. The \$40 may require a financial sacrifice, but I will confess to having no sympathy for that argument. Your child's very life depends on that booster seat in far too many cases. I applaud this bill because there cannot be a price put on our children, whether it be to prevent them from death or whether to prevent an injury.

We also have mandatory safety crossing arms as part of this bill. In 1999, there was an absolute tragedy in my community. I was chairperson of the school board at that time when a young man had permission to ride a bus other than his to go to another student's birthday party. He got off the bus, the driver closed the door and the young person realized that he had to go to the other side. Being eight years old, he acted like an eight-year-old and bolted across in front of the bus and was killed instantly. It's a loss that his family will never get over and a loss that the bus driver will never get over. To the best of my knowledge, the bus driver never drove again, but it wasn't his fault. It was no one's fault. Because of the high nose on the front of buses, this young man lost his life, for sake of the cost of an arm. We need to realize that children are children and will behave like children. We have the responsibility as adults to protect them, and that didn't happen in that case.

Many of the bus operators in Ontario are voluntarily adding the arms, but I want to pay a special tribute to the Jelley family in Trenton, who have, since the loss of their beloved Brandon, paid for crossing arms on a number of other buses to ensure that no other parent experiences what they have experienced. That is tremendous strength in the face of a brutal loss and I applaud them for their efforts to protect other children. That's how much it means to them and that's how much it should mean to everyone else in Ontario to save children's lives.

Warning signs: I'd like to talk about the vehicle owners being accountable. I applaud the member for Chatham-Kent Essex for persevering with this. He referred, when he was talking a few minutes ago, to flagrant drivers who pass buses knowing that they're doing it. We live on what used to be a highway. I have seen the bus stop and I have seen cars down the road blowing the horn for our kids to get off the road and out of their way. Because they were in such a rush, they were prepared to put my children's and your children's lives at risk to pass it. Facing it and coming behind it, they believe that if they blow the horn, then it's off their conscience, and it's not.

I have personally seen vehicles that I would say I am 99.9% certain of who was driving them, but not 100%, when I've spoken to the police. Again, as Mr Hoy referred to, there were no charges because a judge would have to determine absolutely, beyond all reasonable doubt, that that person was driving. That couldn't be the case, and the police couldn't pursue it. So I applaud this.

Now, I've had callers say, "Do you trust bus drivers to do this? Do you trust them to detect these cars going past them?" Folks, we trust them to take 72 of our children, put them in a steel box, run them down the highway at 100 kilometres per hour, looking after the bus, looking after discipline, looking after the hurts and, in fact, even providing counselling in social worker roles at times. Yes, I trust our bus drivers because they've come to me for years with grave concerns about the young people on their buses putting their lives at risk when they go across.

Sometimes it frustrates drivers. You'll see a bus stopped and the lights stay on. They wait and wait, because the driver is not letting the children out until he or she is absolutely certain the cars have stopped both ways—very inefficient but very safe. I applaud them for that because they've said children's lives are ahead of letting someone hurry to get home to watch a TV show.

Certainly some arguments have been made about holding the owner of the vehicle accountable. Why not leave it with the driver? How can the owner be accountable? If someone drinks and drives, we hold the owner accountable, because we say if that person is drinking and driving, they could kill someone. I would suggest that before you loan your car to someone, if it's not you driving when you pass, you better remember that that person could kill someone or two, three or four kids crossing a highway. If it's important to do for drunk driving, and I believe it is—I know it is—it's equally important to do it to protect our children.

We need to be ashamed at times of some of the actions of motorists on our roads. We live in a society and all of you have experienced where you're driving along the road and someone will tear past you where there's a solid line and it's illegal to pass, you get into town at a traffic light and they are there beside you. They've risked your life and their lives and the lives of those in oncoming cars to get there ahead of time. It's time we stopped allowing them to risk our children's lives so they can get to where they're going three seconds sooner than if they had obeyed the law.

Mandatory warning signs on buses: How many signs do you want on buses? A sign on the bus warning that if you pass there will be a fine of \$2,000? There are still signs on the 401, which I drive regularly, that were put up by the NDP government and say that for 100 kilometres an hour the fine is zero, for 120 the fine is that, and for 140 the fine is that. That still has an impact on me. I believe it still has an impact on motorists. People think about the money it will cost them. So yes, I support that also. I think it is a sign that says to people, "This province is taking seriously what you do around our children and their buses. If you choose to flagrantly violate it, it's going to cost you big dollars." It's still cheap compared to a child's life.

I hope we never collect a fine. I hope there's never a penny that comes in of the \$2,000, because I hope people will look at that and say, "My gosh, I have a responsibility as a citizen of Ontario not to pass that bus, and I will stop now."

Teenage driving: I have recollections long ago of being a teenager. In fact, I would suggest to you there's an 18-year-old trapped inside this 57-year-old body. With my weight problems, there are probably two 18-year-olds trapped inside this body.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): That left me a long time ago.

Mr Parsons: OK. But I remember getting the licence and wanting to show it off. I was an absolutely superb driver when I was out the lane and down the highway, but when I was out of sight, I was an appalling driver if I hit—

Mr Bisson: Try being a new pilot.

Mr Parsons: Accident history tells us that if they have three or more young people their age in the car, the chances of their having an accident compared to zero passengers goes up about five times, because people are people and they want to show off this new power. It's a sign of attaining adulthood. It's showing how fast they can drive the car and how much they can impress.

Then I talk to police officers, ambulance attendants and parents who have had to identify their 16-year-old daughter or 17-year-old son at the hospital. We say that we have a responsibility as adults to override these youthful desires to speed and show off, and to put in place a mechanism to ensure their safety. They may not like it. I am sure each of us growing up was told, "It's for your own good." This is for their own good. The statistics tell us all too clearly that we lose too many young people for absolutely nothing other than a moment or two of trying to show how cool they are, how mature they are and how fast they can drive.

1700

Interjection.

Mr Parsons: I don't need to know because I was probably with you.

Yes, this legislation presents a need for parents and the public to change what they're doing, but it presents a wonderful initiative on the part of this government and this ministry to protect the children of our province, the young people of our province and even, in the case of teen-aged drivers, others on the highway who could potentially be involved in an accident with a carload of teenagers.

It is a good bill that will make Ontario a better and safer place in which to live. I am very proud of this bill. I applaud the Minister of Transportation and I applaud the staff for bringing forward a bill that will very quickly and simply enhance safety in this province.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): It's pleasure to rise with the Liberal leadoff and make a few comments on Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads. I am going to ask a question here and maybe Mr Hoy can answer it, or someone from the Liberal caucus, in the response. It's about the identification of the vehicle.

Let's take an example in which someone passes a bus with the lights flashing. From your understanding, as a

clarification for me because I don't understand this, I want to know who can identify that licence plate. First of all, is it simply the bus driver? This is a scenario where there is no photo radar and no police officers are around. Will it be, for example, just the bus driver? Could it also be perhaps one of the passengers on the school bus, for example, a grade 7 or grade 8 student? Could it be someone in a field nearby, such as a parent waiting for the child at the gate or someone on a tractor doing some cultivating or taking off hay or grain? Could it actually be someone in another vehicle?

I'd really like to get clarification on that because I think it's important that we know just who can identify the person and who will be able to have that person charged, because now we are talking about a \$2,000 fine for the owner of a car that someone else is driving.

Mr Bisson: I really enjoyed your 15 or 20 minutes. I thought the member for Prince Edward-Hastings did a really good job of pulling together all the points, doing it in a way that was very passionate and certainly got my attention and, I would imagine, that of other members of the assembly. I want to congratulate you on what I thought was quite a good 20-minute presentation on this bill.

I want to say at the outset—I will be speaking a little bit later—that we will support this bill. We think most of what is in it is pretty good stuff.

There are just a couple of things that come to mind. One of them is the point my good friend Mr Dunlop has raised, which is the issue of charging the owner of the car for having gone by a school bus. I take it there has been a change in the Liberal position because I remember the Liberal caucus being opposed to that with regard to photo radar when we were in government. The ideological position of the Liberals of the day was not to charge owners of vehicles that may be charged by way of photo radar because, the scenario was, you might lend your car to somebody. The person who drives the car gets caught by photo radar and the owner gets caught. So I just say to the Liberals, it's about time that you come to your senses on that point. I never really understood why it is, as a caucus, you opposed that, if there was a way to do it.

Keep in mind, the only reason people—I shouldn't say the only reason, but one of the big influences in being able to make sure that people follow the law is the fear of getting caught. If the fear of getting caught, in the case of the school buses, is that a police officer has to see you in order to charge you for passing a school bus when the school bus is stopped and the lights are flashing, there is not much likelihood of that happening, because the driver, by and large, will see the police car if it's an unmarked one, and the police can't be everywhere.

So it's the fear of getting caught. I think that adds to the ability of being able to prevent this. Now, if the driver of the school bus or others can say, "That particular car on this particular driver's licence has infringed the law," and then the person is charged, there's less likelihood of them doing it.

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I'm really pleased to rise to support this bill. I think that legislation like this that is based on research really deserves to be supported by everyone in the House. These are safety issues.

I want to speak specifically to the issue of the novice drivers. Having grown up in a small town, I want to draw on two personal experiences: one as a youngster and one as a mother.

My experience as a teenager is one that my children are never going to have to experience; that is, having known young people who died in car accidents on side roads outside of town. The majority of the time, there were more than two or three kids in the car with the driver. My colleague from Guelph spoke about the peer pressure when kids get in a car together. They feed on one another, and the distractions are obvious. We all remember that, and the member from Prince Edward-Hastings talked about that.

My experience as a mother has been somewhat different, in that I've lived in the city with my children. I don't have any teenagers any more—they're all out of those years—but those years between 13 and 20, especially between 16 and 19, you wonder at night where they're going to be. But living in the city, I knew that they were on transit or in a cab. They didn't have to drive in the city.

So this bill, with the provisions for school buses, the provisions for young drivers, has a lot to do with safety for rural children. I think those of us who live in urban settings need to think about how important these things are for kids outside of the city. They are more at risk of accidents from school buses and from being in cars on side roads. So I support this 100%.

Mr Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I clearly support the bill that's in front of us today. I think the speakers who spoke today brought forward some excellent points. I don't want to really repeat all of what they had to say. Just in general terms, the whole issue of driving and the way people drive their vehicles, I've noticed as a driver in the past few years, has changed dramatically. People are driving a lot faster. There have been, at least in the Toronto area and my own riding of Scarborough Southwest, quite a few more serious and fatal accidents taking place. Pedestrians are getting killed or seriously wounded by these accidents.

Anything that can be done to reduce injury or death is welcome. The correct use of child car seats here would do exactly that: reduce deaths. Transport Canada has said it would do it by 75%, which is a substantial number.

I think that this is the first step in looking, at some point in time, at even the broader issue of trying to deal with drivers and driving habits in general, because I've seen a great deterioration, at least in Toronto and the Scarborough area. We need to bring forward laws that, as mentioned earlier, can make people afraid or at least concerned that if they break them, they will be punished. I think this law is at least bringing awareness and starting in the right process, of having people try to drive safely and to try to protect their children or passengers as well.

1710

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

Mr Parsons: On behalf of the Minister of Transportation, the members for Chatham-Kent Essex, Guelph-Wellington and myself, we would like to thank the people who responded: members for Simcoe North, Timmins-James Bay, Don Valley West and Scarborough Southwest. The names are almost lyrical as you run through them.

The question was asked by the member from Simcoe North as to who will be able to report it. The answer I'm going to give you is very vague. It may be better developed, but I don't have the exact details, which is, it will allow bus drivers and concerned citizens to report.

Obviously that has to be dealt with. I'm sure what you were suggesting is that there has to be some credibility of the witness. The exact process will appear in the drafting of the regulations. I would suggest there will need to be additional consultation with the local police forces and the crown attorneys to ascertain what exactly it is.

We can't have a police car follow every bus, and the risk is too great to not do something, so there will be consultation and it will be drafted. It is a very, very serious point to prevent malicious allegations, neighbours just upset, or somebody making an honest mistake reporting the vehicle. We require protection for the owner of that vehicle.

However, I would like to express thanks and pleasure for the comments that are made. There is no greater treasure we have than our children. There is no way to put money on to it.

For neighbours and friends who want to be good neighbours and perhaps transport children to a club activity or to the school, I know that they also want to do the right thing. I know that we will find a way to ensure that the seats are there and available. I truly believe that the bill itself will strengthen the safety on our highways.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Dunlop: Mr Speaker, may I have the unanimous consent of the House to stand down our leadoff hour?

The Acting Speaker: Is there unanimous consent? Agreed.

I am prepared to recognize the member for Simcoe North.

Mr Dunlop: I want to thank the members of the House for standing down the lead. Mr Klees, our critic for transportation, wanted to speak for an hour on this particular bill and—

Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal): I'd rather hear you for an hour.

Mr Dunlop: No, you don't want to hear me for an hour. It's always a pleasure to speak to a piece of legislation and it's always a pleasure to listen to Minister Caplan heckle me. So it's a typical day.

Hon Mr Caplan: It's a good-natured heckle.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, it's a good-natured heckle.

I'm pleased to speak to Bill 73, An Act to enhance the safety of children and youth on Ontario's roads. The first

thing I wanted to really say is, there are a lot of really positive things in this piece of legislation, and I'm the first to acknowledge that. But there are a lot of things that have been done to draft this legislation that I'm not happy with at all and I want to put on the record.

I think the safety of our children and our grandchildren, our nieces and nephews, is paramount. There's no question at all that that's a priority. Years ago, in 1970, I lost a sister in a school bus accident. I brought that up here in the House before. The lights were flashing. She was just seven years old at the time. I can tell you, that had a major impact on my parents until the day they both passed away.

School bus safety has got to be a high priority. I think someone mentioned a little earlier that each day in the province of Ontario a little over 800,000 students climb on the buses. They're taken to their schools and they're brought back home. I think we should acknowledge the great job that our School Bus Operators' Association of Ontario do in this province. There are very few lives lost. Of course, any life lost is one too many.

I want to talk a little bit about safety and our government's record from 1995 through to the fall of 2003. I want to put on the record that back in 1995 the province of Ontario ranked sixth in North America for road safety. We had some excellent Ministers of Transportation in the eight years we were in power who made a lot of very positive moves, so in 2002 we moved to number one in North America. I'm thinking of people like Norm Sterling, Frank Klees, David Turnbull and Tony Clement. There were a number of ministers—

Mr Bisson: Al Palladini.

Mr Dunlop: Of course, who could ever forget Al Palladini?

They made a number of improvements in Ontario so that today I don't believe we've dropped from number one in this time frame. As a result, we should be very proud and build on our strengths.

I think one of the areas we're very strong in is that of drinking and driving. I was so proud to be part of the ignition interlock device bill that requires an ignition interlock to be installed in vehicles as a result of a first-time offence. I believe it's still the toughest regulation, the toughest piece of legislation, dealing with impaired drivers in North America. I know that other provinces and other states are seriously looking at what we do with our drinking and driving as well.

I'm very concerned about a number of factors in the area of seat belts in particular. I believe the legislation calls for the addition—people between 40 and 80 pounds and anyone less than four foot nine or less than eight years old will now have a booster seat—or having a birth certificate; they must have a birth certificate available.

To begin with, there are a couple of points I want to make on that. When we're dealing with cars and vans, the fact of the matter is that there will be a number of areas where we will have to police this. That means we will require more police officers to check vans and cars with young children in them. There are a number of

things the police officers will require. One, of course, will be a set of weigh scales. People may laugh at this, or they may think I'm making a mockery of the bill or something, but we do have to make a point. Who will police all these cars across our province? As you say, we are two million, so I'm guessing there are probably 500,000 or 600,000 children who would fit into this category. Somehow we have to police that, so police officers will be required to have scales to weigh children less than 80 pounds.

They'll also have to have some way of measuring their height. That will require some kind of measuring tape or maybe something like this, which came from Safe Kids Canada. Maybe everyone received this. They have a kind of scale here. If I could just show this, Mr Speaker—

Hon Mr Caplan: Is that a prop?

Mr Dunlop: No, it's not a prop. It's a kind of way to determine the height of our young people.

The third area, and a very important area, is, who will carry birth certificates for the young people? We have a number of people we would have to work with, among which are, of course, grandparents.

I have three little granddaughters. They all require a special seat. My daughter and her husband have a minivan; I think it's a Dodge Caravan minivan. Three of the seats have specific booster seats, baby seats, whatever you want to call them. They're for the specific ages of these three little girls. We have to transfer those seats to our vehicles so we can take those little girls with us, and so do the babysitter and the other grandparents.

We will have to have, at all times, copies of birth certificates that the police will be able to monitor in case we're pulled over with those three little girls. I think it's important we make sure everyone in the province understands that you will have to have a copy of their birth certificates. At that age that's the primary source of identification, of the proof of age.

1720

The other thing is the cost of the seats we have to identify with. My understanding is that the baby seats or the car seats you buy today, and I haven't bought a car seat for a while, are tax-exempt, that there is no provincial sales tax. Maybe I can get a nod from the Speaker because he knows a lot about this, but I believe the car seats are tax-exempt.

I really and truly believe that Mr Arnott's bill, which is Bill 77, a private member's bill, should exempt these seats as well for up to 80 pounds. If you're going to do it for kids up to 40 pounds and they're included, why would this not be included? It's at least a break. You're probably discriminating against children who are between 40 pounds and 80 pounds if you're not able to provide a tax exemption for them. I think even their shoes are tax-exempt at that age.

It's important that this House, and Mr Sorbara because it's probably a financial issue, take a serious look at Mr Arnott's bill in light of the fact that these are the families, these people who have children who are up to 80 pounds at that age group, who were the hardest hit by Dalton

McGuinty's budget we received last May 18. They're already receiving much higher gas prices because Paul Martin won't move on that. They're receiving higher hydro prices because Dalton McGuinty broke a promise, and the same with natural gas prices. I'm trying to be nice here, but the fact of the matter is that this latest piece of legislation actually hits the average Ontario family for, I believe, around \$2,000. If you are going to pass this legislation, and I understand the NDP is supporting this bill and probably some of our members will support it, at least give them the exemption and pass Mr Arnott's bill.

I think it's the right thing to do. I'm always hearing the Premier say that: "It's the right thing to do." The right thing is to make sure these young people, these young family members get an exemption on these booster seats and car seats that are being required at an extra cost to the family as a result of Bill 73.

The other thing I want to talk a little bit about is the irony—I know there have been studies done, and Ms Sandals, the member from Guelph-Wellington, dealt with this a little bit in her comments, but one thing that a lot of people are puzzled with in our transportation system today is the fact that we have all these fancy air bags and booster seats, car seats, all these restrictions for the grandparents and parents, in cars, minivans, vans, half-ton trucks, but right today—and I understand what the member from Guelph-Wellington said. I do understand that school buses are probably the safest place for children to be, but it has always amazed me that there have never been seat belts or booster seats in school buses. The same little child, the little junior K child who weighs 35 pounds or 25 pounds, hops on a school bus and they sit three or four to a seat, no booster seats, no car seats, no seat belts and down the highway they go.

When they get out at grandma's house, they hop into some elaborate seat in a fancy truck with air bags, and it is puzzling. I know there are all kinds of comments people can make around that, and I know the school bus operators wouldn't want me to talk about adding seat belts and booster seats to school buses, but it has always been strange that it actually does not apply. I don't think there ever has really been a move to go in that direction.

The other area: I talked to Mr Takhar about this. I had a late show one night with him because I didn't like his answer, because I know when we were consulting on this piece of legislation, he didn't really consult with very many police services in our province. I thought the minister owed the Police Association of Ontario and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police the opportunity to comment, because it's going to take a lot of additional police officers to enforce this particular piece of legislation.

Mr McGuinty, like our government, promised 1,000 new police officers in the election campaign last year. The police services are already under tremendous pressure—things like grow ops, the gang-related crimes, the fact that now we're seeing some downtown car chases. It's amazing that now they will require more police services to implement this, and I don't know how they're going to do a very good job of it.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): They have money for a language cop, though.

Mr Dunlop: Yes, they have money for a language police officer but not for checking out booster seats.

I think the minister owed that. Apparently, he has talked to the OPP, because he mentioned Deputy Commissioner Pilon in his comments, that one day he had talked to him about this. I applaud Mr Pilon, because I know him well and he would give good advice.

Something has come up in the bill, and I think we need clarification again from the government. I'd like to read it out. It's under the section called "Limitation." It's subsection 207(7) and it reads: "An owner of a motor vehicle convicted of an offence under section 128 on the basis of evidence acquired through the use of a photo radar system or under subsection 175(19) or (20) is not liable to imprisonment, a probation order under subsection 72(1) of the Provincial Offences Act...."

I am concerned about the words "photo radar" being brought into this piece of legislation. Why do we have the words "photo radar"? It doesn't exist in the province of Ontario. Why is photo radar in Bill 73?

Mr Runciman: Is this another secret?

Mr Dunlop: I think it's a secret. I'm going to tell you what I think it is. I'm getting some looks from over there, but I think this is a way to sneak photo radar into Ontario again. We already know that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is on record as saying this is nothing but a cash grab.

The Premier just this winter made the statement to the media that yes, it's a cash generator. I think what the minister is planning on doing—and maybe he hasn't even been brought into the loop—is to bring in photo radar. Maybe Mr McGuinty knows it in his office, but I can tell you, this is a way that they would be able to sneak this into a school zone, put a few photo radar cameras in place, implement that program and say, "Well, it's strictly for the school zones," and then build on that throughout the rest of the province. That's my concern, because I cannot understand why you would even use the words "photo radar" in this bill.

There's going to be lots of opportunity to debate this, and all kinds of people are going to have Qs and As on this, so we'll be able to get a good clarification, I'm sure, even in the next few minutes, on why photo radar is mentioned in this particular piece of legislation.

I only have a couple of minutes left, but our problem on this side of the House is that we believe it is a tax grab. If it's not a tax grab, I think the government should make an amendment, and any money collected under this program should go to the school boards—not into the municipality; not into the OPP. This is my idea. I haven't caucused this with our people or anything like that; I've just thought this up. If it's not a cash grab, let's put the money back into the schools. Why not? Why would it go to the municipalities? Why would it go to the OPP or to Minister Sorbara's ministry? It should go into the school boards. They're always saying they need more money. It would help them with their transportation costs.

A little earlier, Mr Klees was criticized because he said it was a tax grab. I still believe the \$2,000 for someone who isn't even driving the car, who will receive that fine—it's just not fair.

1730

Some person, some little old lady who has never had a speeding ticket in her life, not even a parking ticket, lends her car to her nephew. The guy goes by a school bus, and she gets the \$2,000 fine, a bill in the mail. There's something wrong with that. So if it is going to pass, let's make an amendment to the piece of legislation. I'm getting some nods—

Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton): Let's give it to the school boards.

Mr Dunlop: Let's give it to the school boards. They need the money. Mr Kennedy obviously hasn't come up with enough money in his budget, because I've seen our grant allocations—very disappointing. I thought, in our board, we'd probably end up with another \$30 million or \$40 million. I'm extremely disappointed, for all the way he talked about and hammered our government for years. Now all of a sudden, we haven't got enough money. So I'm very, very disappointed that not nearly enough money came to the Simcoe county school boards as a result of this budget. I've just gone over the grant allocations, and we definitely have a problem with the amount of money that the Simcoe Muskoka and the Simcoe district school board have received in my riding.

I asked the question a little earlier, and Mr Parsons tried to answer the question. I know he didn't come up with the exact details I asked, but I'm really concerned, and I think our caucus will be concerned as we draft the regulations and as we look at the bill either going to committee or passed in third reading. We really do have to know who can identify that licence plate.

Again, I mentioned earlier possibly someone driving their John Deere tractor in a field, picking up hay or something. He spots a car going by, knows the licence plates, sees the licence plates from a good angle. Can he have that driver charged, or that car person charged? At the gate, can Grandma, who sees the car go by the school bus, actually have the driver charged?

All these questions have to be answered about this bill. There's not one person in this building, not one person in this room who I'm sure has anything against public safety, community safety and the safety of our children and our grandchildren. There's not one. I speak on behalf of our caucus, and I'm sure I'm correct with that. But the fact is, this bill, as it stands right now, is a tax grab as far as the fine goes for the owner of the car.

Second of all, we absolutely have to see Mr Arnott's bill passed to give these hard-working families a break. They need a break because of the McGuinty budget that is costing over \$2,000 per person, per family. We need to know that everybody in this House will support Mr Arnott's bill. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker: I was going to give you an extra two minutes, but you thought it was time. I'm pleased to recognize, in questions and comments, the member for Timmons-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: I think this is the appropriate time to raise this particular e-mail that I actually got from a Mr Terry McGarry in regard to the comments made by my friend, and it reads as follows: "Dalton, I must give you credit for being consistent." That's a good start in an e-mail. "Your government consistently introduces the most ridiculous legislation one can imagine."

I wanted to use this in response to one of the comments from the Conservative Party. It goes on:

"Just when I think I've heard it all, you and your people come up with something even more bizarre. Case in point, proposed legislation on car seats for kids. As a grandparent I cannot understand your logic. With this law, I have to put my 10-year-old granddaughter in a bumper seat (just because she weighs less than 80 pounds) on the rare occasions that I drive her somewhere. Based on her size, I'll still have her in a bumper seat when she's a teenager. (Want to go to your grade 8 grad? Sure, honey, just hop into your bumper seat, and poppa will drive you there.)

"If you really want to keep the kids safer, make it a law that school buses have to have seat belts or bumper seats for the smaller kids.

"For God's sake stop with the stupid ideas!"

Those are the comments of Mr McGarry, and I would like to hear what my good friend Mr Dunlop has to say about those particular views that are brought forward.

I think it's an interesting point that he raises in the e-mail, because on the one hand we're going to do something in order to protect younger people and infants in cars, but we're not going to require that there are bumper seats and/or safety belts in school buses in order to protect kids.

I think he raises, I've got to say, an interesting point. Are we saying that children who are in our cars are more at risk because Grandpa drives faster, or are we saying something else? I don't know. It's one view—I'm not saying I share this particular view entirely—but I think it raises an interesting point. Should we be looking at doing something in regard to school buses? So I'd like to hear what my good friend Mr Dunlop has to say about this e-mail from Terry McGarry, especially the part that says, "Your government consistently introduces the most ridiculous legislation one can imagine."

Mr Richard Patten (Ottawa Centre): I was going say how somewhat enjoyable it was to see some rationality and some good thought and debate on an issue on which it would appear that most of us are really in accord. But I would say to the member for Timmins-James Bay, who just spoke in his two-minuter, I think he knows that in the legislation there is a ceiling on age. And it's not just related to that.

Mr Bisson: Yes, I know that.

Mr Patten: So hopefully your friend will be watching or listening or will read Hansard. Because if it was based on weight, there would be some members here in this House that would still be sitting in one of those booster seats.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): Right behind you.

Mr Patten: That's true. The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex might in fact be required to sit in one of those seats; certainly not the member from Timmins.

There will be further opportunities for debate on this, and discussion and review at committee. Therefore, those considerations that are put forward are there. But I would make the assumption that all members in this House are truly in agreement that when it comes to any kind of threat to life, particularly with children and young people, we want to do whatever we can as responsible adults to ensure that we contain and protect them from harm, and ensure that they in fact will be protected from undue behaviour.

Mr Runciman: I want to compliment the member for Simcoe North for his contribution to the debate. Certainly we do have some concerns about the legislation. We'll hope, as the member opposite indicated, that there will be an opportunity at committee for friendly amendments, and that we won't see the Liberal members of committee operating in lockstep to the dictates of the whip, as has been the practice to date.

The member raised the issue of photo radar and the reference to that in the legislation and expressed his concern, and I think the concerns of our caucus. I think they're legitimate. Despite the protestations of government ministers and government members that there are no plans to reintroduce photo radar into Ontario, I think that members on this side, and the public generally, can be somewhat sceptical about those assurances, given the track record of this government over the past eight years in terms of breaking promises, saying one thing to the public and then, a few short weeks later, doing quite the opposite. Given the issues raised in question period today, it apparently doesn't mean anything to the Premier of the province, even when he lays his hand on a Bible and swears allegiance, takes an oath of allegiance going into the executive council of this province. That does not mean what it says when you take the oath. "Put your hand on the Bible and swear" doesn't mean what you're saying. I think it should be of serious concern to every Ontarian when the Premier of the province makes that kind of a statement and takes that kind of an action with respect to an oath of allegiance when you enter the executive council. If another member of cabinet breaks the oath, we would appreciate, we would understand, we would call for their immediate resignation. And I'm sure the Premier would do so. What happens now that the Premier has breached his own oath?

1740

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I've had the opportunity to sit and listen to some of the debate on the bill, and I can tell you that it sounds quite interesting to me. Although there may be a few pieces that need to be ironed out or made more clear, it seems to me that what I've heard, particularly changes in regard to the way we will treat cars that pass school buses with their lights flashing—I think that's extremely important.

My son, in fact, takes a school bus every day, has done so for his entire time in school. I have in fact myself personally watched cars disobey the current law regard-

ing passing school buses with their lights flashing. As a parent, I can tell you it's an extremely frightening thing. It was extremely frightening one particular day when I watched a child about to run in front of the bus, not quite knowing what the protocol was from the kid's perspective. This child was about to run out in front of the bus, not realizing where the caution line was. There's a bar that comes down, and the kids are supposed to stop before there and make sure there's nothing coming. That didn't happen and a car ran the lights. It could have been a very difficult, very awful and horrible, tragic situation. Luckily, that didn't happen; the tragedy didn't occur. However, the driver still managed to abuse his driving privileges by not obeying the laws with respect to the flashing lights.

I applaud the member for bringing forward this bill. I think it's going to improve the accountability of drivers and, frankly, the accountability of car owners in making sure that, if they are lending out their car, they're lending it out to people who are responsible drivers and who understand the laws of Ontario. I think that's a very positive thing. Again, I will likely be supporting this bill, but I believe there are a few amendments that will probably come to clean it up a little bit.

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

Mr Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from Timmins-James Bay; Ottawa Centre; Bob Runciman, my colleague from Leeds-Grenville; and Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East for their comments. I want to congratulate you, Andrea, on your election. It's good to have you here, and it's nice to have the NDP as our neighbours here on the opposition side.

Mr Bisson: We like being your neighbours.

Mr Dunlop: Yes. The dynamics have changed here since that's happened this week. We see the fear on the side of the Liberals. We've seen Mr McGuinty today—he looked bad, pathetic. You know how bad it was when he had to stand up because he was afraid of Mr Runciman's supplementary. That's how pathetic it was today.

The Acting Speaker: Take your seat.

Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It is my understanding in questions and comments that they should be directed to the debate at hand.

The Acting Speaker: Yes, I would agree that in response to questions and comments members should attempt to respond to the questions and comments in terms of their discussion. I would remind all members of the House that that in fact is the procedure around here.

Mr Dunlop: I can understand why you wouldn't want me to respond to Ontario's weak link. There's no question about that. But I was simply referring to Mr Runciman, who gave comments today. He was commenting on Mr McGuinty's weaknesses today. The fact of the matter is—

Hon Mrs Dombrowsky: Point of order.

Interjections.

Mr Dunlop: This is pathetic. He's already ruled on it.

Mr Speaker, I do want to say a few things that are of concern here. One is a sneaky way of bringing back photo radar. There's no question about it. Just say that photo radar won't be brought back. That's all I want to hear you say: "Photo radar will not be brought back." Somebody can say that.

Second of all, we have to adopt Mr Arnott's bill. Bill 77 should be adopted because those booster seats should be tax-exempt because of Dalton McGuinty's budget, which is costing every Ontario family over \$1,000.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr Bisson: I'm so glad to have this opportunity to do a one-hour leadoff. Oh, man, you don't know how happy I am.

Mr Runciman: Oh, no.

Mr Bisson: What do you mean, "Oh, no"? I was going to say something nice about you. I just want to say I'm happy to have the Conservatives as our neighbours again. I want to let the Conservatives know we are good neighbours. We don't make a lot of noise. We tend to share. We like inflicting pain on the government with the official opposition. We believe we should be working together to make sure we hold that particular government accountable, because this government, you know, brought this bill in today—and I've got to say, we're going to be voting for this bill. But where are all these other things that they—

Applause.

Mr Bisson: Thank you. I just started. Isn't that wonderful? Thank you, thank you.

I've just got to say, in the context of this bill, the government could have chosen to bring many other things into this Legislature today. They could have, for example, been debating issues having to do with why it is they're breaking election promises they've made since being elected. Remember the Oak Ridges moraine? Great big promises during the election that they would stop the development on the Oak Ridges moraine. They brought forward a broken promise. It wasn't 10 days after they were elected and it was gone. But instead, we're here today on the Highway Traffic Act: a great bill, a wonderful bill, a bill that we're going to support and we want a few amendments on but that we think is great.

Applause again, please, because there were other broken promises. I've got a list in my office and I've got to go through the countdown. It's like 200-and-some-odd promises that they made, and of the legislation that they've introduced in this Legislature up to now, over 70% of what they've done is a broken promise. I've got to say that where I come from, when you break 70% of your promises—or to put it the other way, if you don't do 70% of what it is you promised you'd do, that's considered a failure. I think we've got to send them back to remedial election school. We've got to remind this government that when you're out there campaigning and you're telling people on the doorstep, "We're going to do this and we're going to do that"—my good friend Mr Wrye comes in. I'm so glad that Mr Bill Wrye is coming in, a former member, a former Minister of Labour and

transportation and everything. He knows, because he was a member here when it was important, when members were running in an election, to do what they said they were going to do.

We understand that at times governments have to adjust. We understand, for example, that the Conservatives, who made their motto and their creed on doing what they said they would do, at times had to break some of the things they said because of circumstance. I think most people, fair-minded as we are in Ontario, are prepared, as they were for Mr Wrye when he was Minister of Labour—I remember well the whole occupational disease file when Mr Wrye was the Minister of Labour and I had to go to his office as a steelworker then in order to hold his feet to the fire. I remember Mr Wrye. I used to deal with him way back then. I used to have to hold his feet to the fire when it came to the whole issue of industrial diseases and the promises to workers the Liberals had made that had not been kept.

Every now and then I accept that a government is going to have to maybe amend its ways. But these people aren't just amending their ways; they're having total amnesia, I've got to say. I ran in that election, along with the rest of the people here and about 300 other people who weren't elected, and I remember what these Liberals had to say. Here we are today, debating this Highway Traffic Statute Law Amendment Act, which I think is a good bill and I say again that we're going to vote for, but where are all the bills that we need that keep the election promises? Where are they? There are so many.

For example, on the issue of auto insurance, as my friend Rosario Marchese is saying, people are being whacked by auto insurance increases when these guys promised, on the doorstep and in debates and across this province, that they would do something to keep auto insurance rates from going through the roof. This government hides behind the façade of having done a couple of things last fall and this winter, but I'll tell you that as I go around and people either come to my constituency office or call me, send e-mails or letters or I run across them, people are upset. They're saying, "They promised they were going to do something, and they didn't." They say, "Thank God, Gilles, we voted for you, because at least we know where you stand, and you stand on our side." I just remind the government that you've got to keep that in mind.

But we're here on the Highway Traffic Act. It's such an important piece of legislation that I think it needs to be spoken to. I notice my good friend was about to get up on a point of order or leave—I'm trying to determine which so I can continue. You're leaving? OK. That means I can continue. Good.

Mrs Sandals: Do you think you deserve a point of order?

Mr Bisson: I might, at times. I've been known to stray a little bit. In the context of the debate of this legislation, I think it's important to point out that we're here and are probably going to be spending two or three days of debate on a bill—

Mr Chudleigh: Is that all?

Mr Bisson:—well, we might do more; who knows?—that we essentially agree on. Why? Because this government doesn't want to keep its promises. I just say to the government that I was out there last week, like most of you, for constituency week. People were stopping me on the street, and when I was knocking on doors for Charlie Angus, our NDP candidate in the Timmins-James Bay riding, it was just amazing. You go to door after door and people were just saying, "That guy Dalton McGuinty"—I can't repeat in this Legislature what I was told.

In fact, I got into the elevator of my apartment building this morning—because as members who are from outside of Toronto, we're allowed an apartment to stay in when we're in Toronto. I was getting in the elevator. You know what it's like in apartment buildings in Toronto: Hardly anybody ever speaks to each other in elevators. The conversation was just amazing. One guy came in, and I said, "Good morning." He said, "It's a great morning if you're not a Liberal." That was the first comment he made. The rest of the comments about Dalton McGuinty I can't repeat in here. If I did, the Speaker would find me out of order, and it would be unparliamentary and, I think, a little bit crass.

Mr Chudleigh: You could withdraw.

Mr Bisson: I could withdraw, but I want to keep this very civil, so I say to the government: Good bill, but we should be doing something to keep our election promises.

Let me speak specifically to a couple of points on the bill.

Applause.

Mr Bisson: I was waiting for the applause. You're with me. I'm glad. This is good.

The other thing is, my good friend Mr Parsons talked about age, and I'm getting to the point where I've got to wear these things now. I used to just do them for show at one point, but now I have to wear them to see what is written on the paper.

1750

The bill essentially does three things: The bill deals with the introduction of the issue of booster seats, it deals with the issue of people passing school buses when the lights are flashing and how to charge those people and it deals with the issue of graduated driver's licences to prevent young people from having additional passengers in a car, as a measure of safety.

I've only got about six minutes left today in this opening lead, and I think I'm going to deal with the last part first, just very quickly. It's an interesting concept. I've got to say I don't totally disagree with what the government is trying to do here, because what they're saying is that anybody, a driver who first of all gets their G1, then moves on to the G2 licence, will have a sort of stepped ability to have passengers in the car. We're saying that for the six months the driver can only carry one passenger if the passenger is under the age of 19, and for the balance of the G2, you would be allowed up to three.

That's an interesting thing because I heard some people across the way say—I see in the briefing note

we've been given by the government, the appendix and stuff we got with the bill when it came in, that the stats indicate there are more young people who die in car accidents who are under the age of 19, so the logic is that if you reduce the number of passengers in the car, it is somehow or other going to make the driver safer.

I wonder if the issue is that it's one of those things where we say, "Liars figure and figures lie," because it only stands to reason, I think, that if you have a driver who's under the age of 19 who has only one passenger in the car, compared to what they're able to do now with two or three or four passengers, that driver, I would argue, is probably no safer or dangerous on the basis of how many people are in the car.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: No, hear me out. This is an issue I want to bring to committee. I'm not totally disagreeing with what the assumption is in the bill; I'm just wondering if we should look at these numbers a little more closely.

If I'm working out stats that say how many young people died under the age of 19 who were passengers in cars driven by drivers under a G1 or G2 licence, it only stands to reason at this point that if that G1 or G2 licence got into an accident, there was an ability to have more passengers, so there are more fatalities or injuries.

If, on the other hand, we were under your new regime, for the same period of time, it stands to reason that we would have fewer injuries or fatalities, because you start off with the concept of having fewer passengers in the car. So the issue is the driver. That's the only point I'm making here. I don't totally disagree—

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: Just listen. It's my hour; just let me make the point. You can get up and respond to this all you want in the two minutes you're going to get at the end of the speech.

I just want to say for the record that I don't disagree that there are times where a young person gets into a car and is more reckless because he—more likely he, but he or she—is being encouraged by the—what do they call it?—peer pressure inside the car. I don't discount that. All I'm saying is I think the numbers are a little bit distorted. I think there are instances where you would still have the same accident, you would have the same conditions, and it's not necessarily because there were other people in the car; it's because the young driver may have some bad habits. That's all I'm saying.

It would be interesting in committee to talk to some of the people who worked out the stats to see if that's the case, because I'm a big believer that regulation is necessary and laws are necessary to protect the public good, but I also believe we have to be careful sometimes not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I just want to look at that number. I agree that at times people get urged on because there are more people in the car, but I can also understand that it's driver habits we have to get to.

Certainly, young drivers today are much safer than they were, let's say, 10 years ago, since the introduction of the graduated driver's licence system. The whole idea

of why the NDP government put that in place in the first place was to find a measured way of being able to increase the ability of somebody to drive, not to go from the age of 16, as I did. On my 16th birthday, I ran down to the licence bureau, I wrote my beginner's exam and I was in there with my driver's test within about three days. So I was barely 16 with a driver's licence and a Dodge in 1963, driving not fast, not with a lot of people in the car, but very slowly up Third Avenue, if I remember correctly what I was doing. Back then it was called cruising, but that's a whole other debate that I want to get into later.

Interjection.

Mr Bisson: The point I want to make is that not all young people speed in their cars. Some of them are cruising, but that's another story.

The point I make is that the graduated licence system made sure that young people like me had a measured and graduated way of getting licences over a longer period of time. So there were some restrictions.

I was born in the month of May. I remember that I went down on a trip with my friends at some time in June, after I got my licence. I took my 1963 Dodge, and me and my buddy jumped in and drove down to Toronto to watch a movie or something and do whatever we were doing in Toronto at the time, and on to Highway 400 for the first time. I remember I was a little petrified, coming from northern Ontario. It made sense to have a graduated licence.

I understand what the government is trying to do here. I just think we need to look at the numbers a little more closely.

The other quick point I want to make—we've got a couple of minutes left and I just want to take a look at the

other part—is that the legislation says that the restrictions would not apply if accompanied by a fully licensed driver with at least four years of driving experience or if the passengers are family members.

I again make the point that if we're going to be consistent, if you've got under-19-year-olds as passengers—listen, if you put my brother and me together back then; Jeez, we were quite the pair, and we are still today. You've got to come to the cottage in the summertime. To say that Claude and Gilles getting in the car were less likely to get in an accident than Claude and my buddy Mike, I've got to say, doesn't stand up. I think if you're trying to get at the 19-year-olds issue and peer pressure, many of us have good relationships with our brothers and sisters. I can tell you, my brother and I were known as being pretty close, and we're still the best of friends today, and we're just as crazy as any of our friends put together. So that's a bit of a flaw in the bill that we need to rethink a little bit. Is the issue that they're under 19 years old, or is the issue that they're safer because they're my family members? I would say, if I just look at my brother and me at 16 or 17 years old, it's certainly the case.

Mr Speaker, it being almost 6 of the clock, I would suggest that this House recess until the next time we can deal with this legislation. I'll continue my speech at that time.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you for your assistance. It is indeed 6 o'clock. This House stands adjourned until a quarter to seven tonight.

The House adjourned at 1757.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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