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(Hansard)**

Wednesday 20 October 2004

Mercredi 20 octobre 2004

Speaker
Honourable Alvin Curling

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Président
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Greffier
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 20 October 2004

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 20 octobre 2004

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Each year, we are reminded to thank farmers. In my riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, farming makes a significant contribution to the local economy, employing about 1,250 people, with farm receipts in excess of \$43.6 million.

Last week, I attended the annual general meeting of the East Nipissing/Parry Sound/Muskoka Federation of Agriculture. Their message to me was pretty bleak. The BSE situation continues to be desperate despite the recent funding announcement by the McGuinty government. According to farmers in my region, this new funding will only help large operations, not the family farm.

Farmers are having a tough time getting the ear of the McGuinty government. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture went so far as to hire a well-known lobbyist to ask what the association should be doing to get this government's attention. The consultant advised that this government is being run centrally by the Premier's office and that the Premier has a huge staff filled with the wrong people.

The evidence speaks for itself. The 2004 budget saw a 20% cut in funding for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Then the government announced that it was suspending the municipal outlet drainage program. Farmers are also concerned with how their farms are affected by the Greenbelt Task Force report.

Today, on our first opposition day, we are highlighting the government's failure to support farmers in Ontario. It's about time this government fulfilled its responsibility to make the Ministry of Agriculture and Food a lead ministry and showed some leadership by providing the support for farmers that it promised before it was elected.

CHILDREN'S BREAKFAST CLUB

Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I rise in the House today to acknowledge the establishment of two new chapters of the Children's Breakfast Club in my riding of Mississauga East.

The Mississauga breakfast clubs opened their doors exactly two weeks ago today, with one location at Bloor

and Dixie and the other at Glenhaven public school. After only two weeks, the locations are already serving breakfast to over 80 children in the area. These numbers are expected to continue to grow, doubling or even tripling over the coming year.

The Children's Breakfast Club is a non-profit organization founded on the belief that every child has a right to a nutritious breakfast. In addition to receiving a nutritious meal, children who are part of the program are given the opportunity to participate in a variety of educational activities, including field trips, participating in sports tournaments, and joint outings with other breakfast clubs or programs.

Programs such as the Children's Breakfast Club are assisting our government in its efforts to promote a healthy diet. The breakfast program educates both children and their parents about the importance of a nutritious breakfast, and assists those needy families who could not otherwise provide this essential meal for their children.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank staff and volunteers at the Mississauga breakfast clubs on behalf of my constituents in Mississauga East. Their generosity, hard work and tireless efforts are making all the difference in the lives of children in need in my riding.

GREENBELT LEGISLATION

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): The Liberal government claims to care for the protection of green spaces, but it has shown through its actions that it has no clue how farmland is to fit into its greenbelt or Toronto growth plans. In fact, when it first defined its greenbelt study area, it divided the Holland Marsh in half: half in, half out.

Farmers in my riding tell me they are confused about what the government is trying to do. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture said that farmers are "perplexed with the greenbelt proposal and its long-term impacts," and that the proposal "gives no indication of how it will protect agricultural land other than utilizing a land freeze."

Farmers in the frozen area are already feeling the effects of the greenbelt bill. The OFA has heard from farmers who are having trouble borrowing money from lenders due to the fuzziness of the government's proposals. Lenders are telling farmers that their land is worth less.

Nothing in the government's greenbelt proposals does anything to encourage farmers in my riding to continue

farming. Local plans to promote farming have been ignored by this government. Federations of agriculture and municipalities in the GTA worked together in 2003 to produce a GTA agricultural action plan. This locally driven plan would promote farming in the GTA, help preserve urban-rural boundaries and allow decisions to be made at a local level.

It's time for this government to start listening.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I want to focus again on the crisis facing alternate level of care patients in our community.

Recently the Ministry of Health agreed to a request from the Sudbury Regional Hospital to discharge and place patients in long-term-care facilities outside our region. This is because there are no long-term-care beds available in our community. As a result, patients could be placed far from home, in Espanola, on Manitoulin Island and even in Chapleau.

This is very distressing to family members, who have advised my office that they already go to the hospital daily to provide additional care to their loved ones. Clearly, they won't be able to do that if their loved ones are so far away. They are concerned about the mental, physical and emotional well-being of their family members as a result.

When Timmins faced a similar crisis this summer, the Minister of Health funded temporary beds at the Timmins hospital and in long-term-care facilities in the community. The latter option makes good sense in Sudbury because a redevelopment project at our home for the aged means that some 30 temporary beds could be created at Pioneer Manor for the next six months. What is required is funding from the ministry to support the beds.

In the longer term, the minister must also allocate new, permanent long-term-care beds in Sudbury. Again, Pioneer Manor might be considered in this regard. With the redevelopment, there remain existing C and B beds which could be converted to A beds at a cost that would be far less than building new A beds from scratch.

The minister has said he hopes to have a solution to the immediate crisis by the end of the week. This must occur. Patients and their families need to know they won't be placed in long-term-care facilities far from home, and work must be done on a long-term solution to ensure we don't have a crisis like this again.

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CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): Mr Speaker, 2004 marks the 15th anniversary of the historic discovery of the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis, the first human genetic disorder identified in the human genome. CF, regrettably, is still the leading genetic cause of death in Canadian children. Canadians have been at the forefront of the fight to find a cure or control for cystic fibrosis for the last 40 years.

Leading this fight is the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. It is the world's second-largest non-governmental granting agency in the field of CF research.

Today I would like to recognize the work of three Ontario researchers: Doctors Lap-Chee Tsui, Jack Riordan and Francis Collins. With the support of Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children, these researchers are credited with the discovery of the gene responsible for CF. Continuing with this progress, last May, Dr Richard Boucher, from the University of North Carolina, reported the successful creation of a mouse with lung pathology similar to human cystic fibrosis. With these developments in research and treatment, young Canadians with CF are living longer, healthier lives.

Finally, I would like to invite all members to join me, my colleagues from Beaches-East York and Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, and the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the discovery of the gene responsible for cystic fibrosis tonight in the dining room. Joining us will be young Adele and Celia Orr from my riding, sisters afflicted with cystic fibrosis. I look forward to seeing all members in attendance to support this worthy cause.

CHICKEN FARMERS

Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): I say to you, Mr Speaker, to my colleagues and to those in the gallery that today is Chicken Day at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. I'm pleased to welcome chicken farmers here to Queen's Park from across the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

Mr Hudak: I'm going to run out of time.

I don't want to ruffle my colleagues' feathers, but I believe that, if not the number one feather riding in the province, we definitely have the best tasting chicken in the riding of Erie-Lincoln. I recommend that you try it. I've had the opportunity to tour a hatchery, Fleming Chicks—

Interjections.

Mr Hudak: —I can't believe I'm being heckled on this, Mr Speaker—and to visit with Gus Panagopolis, who has a layer and grower operation in Fulton in my riding, all the way to Port Colborne Poultry, a major manufacturer and employer in Port Colborne.

I'm very pleased that about 150 chicken farmers are in my riding of Erie-Lincoln: in Niagara and the Dunnville area. I'm very proud of their investment, very proud of their confidence in the local economy and very proud of the outstanding product. From supply management in the province of Ontario, my friends, our chicken farmers.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): On a point of privilege, Mr Speaker: I just want to remind the House that we have good chicken in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound too.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): That's a good point of privilege.

Members' statements.

SENIOR CITIZENS

Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): We have our own chicken farmer here, the member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mr Speaker, I can't tell you how proud I am to be part of a government that's fighting to ensure our seniors are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. For eight long years, the Conservative government bullied the poor and vulnerable and abandoned seniors in this province. The Conservatives cut back standards in long-term-care facilities. They eliminated the requirement of even one bath per week. They eliminated standards, they stopped inspections and on the Canada Day long weekend they surreptitiously hiked the fees for Ontario seniors by 15%.

Our government is turning that around. We finally have a Minister of Health who understands that seniors deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. That's why we are making sure that long-term-care facilities are inspected and standards are enforced. That's why we are making sure that our seniors and our vulnerable get at least two baths per week. That's why we're making sure that 600 new nurses and 1,400 additional front-line staff are hired so that a registered nurse can be on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I know that seniors in my community are thrilled to finally have a Minister of Health and a government that are standing up to support them when they need us, and I'm proud to be part of that government.

HOME CARE

Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence): This year we are making sure that 21,000 more deserving Ontarians have access to home care in Ontario, Ontarians who otherwise would have been forced to stay in expensive hospital beds for weeks and months away from their loved ones, away from their community. These are seniors who might otherwise have lost their homes and had to move into long-term-care beds at a much higher price.

These are Ontarians the Conservative Party left behind. That's right, they made a shambles of home care. Do you want to talk about bullying? When local volunteer boards of community care access centres stood up for our seniors, for our frail, for our vulnerable, do you know what the former Conservative government did? They fired those community volunteers who spoke up on behalf of sick seniors. Every single one of those volunteers was fired by the former government. They replaced the citizen boards with government puppets who ripped apart home care in Ontario. That's the shameful legacy of the Tories on home care.

We're putting the care and money back into home care. We are investing over \$73 million to reach more than 21,000 Ontarians to make sure they can get the care they need in their homes. We're making sure health care is delivered in neighbourhoods where our seniors want to

stay: in their communities. It's the right thing to do for Ontarians, and it's the right thing to do for our seniors.

HEALTH CARE

Mr Brad Duguid (Scarborough Centre): When it comes to health care in Ontario, the McGuinty government is delivering real results. We've heard about long-term care. The Tories cut standards; we're bringing them back. We've heard about home care. The Tories cut funding and took home care away from Ontarians. We're making new investments to help 21,000 more Ontarians get home care this year.

Let's look at nurses. The Tories likened them to the Hula Hoop and said they were out of style. Well, I've got news for you: Nurses never go out of style. That's why we're investing in 2,400 new full-time nurses this year alone.

Let's look at doctors. The NDP cut off the supply. The Tories talked the talk but didn't walk the walk. We're actually getting the job done, changing the way doctors do business so that underserved communities have access again, so that northerners have access again, so that seniors have access again.

Let's look at hospitals. The NDP cut 8,000 beds. The Tories closed hospitals and ERs. We've invested almost \$1 billion since taking office to help hospitals. We're working with them to balance their budgets.

After 13 years of fewer nurses, fewer doctors, longer wait times, less home care and lower standards for our seniors, we finally have a Premier in Dalton McGuinty and a Minister of Health in George Smitherman who are turning this ship around. That means more doctors, more full-time nurses, reduced wait times, more home care, more community care and higher standards of care for our seniors.

That's real change. That's what we're fighting for, and that's what we're delivering.

VISITORS

Mr Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'm sure all members of the Legislature would want to help me in welcoming students from the Mississippi School in Carleton Place, Ontario. There are four students sitting in our west lobby here: Courtney Coady, Breanna Holzschere, Lucy Bidgood-Lund and Patricia Roberge. They are here with their teacher, Kelly Hough, and a parent, Aleta Roberge.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): What can I say to the dean of the Legislature? That wasn't a point of order, but welcome.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): On a similar point of order, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Who has the point of order?

Mr Wilson: I'm trying to enlighten you.

I want to welcome Amanda Phillip and Leslie Morrison, who are with us here today.

The Speaker: There was no enlightenment, but it's OK.

Today we have with us in the Speaker's gallery a parliamentary delegation from the Republic of Poland, led by His Excellency Longin Pastusiak, Speaker of the Senate. He is accompanied by his wife and other Senators. Please join me in warmly welcoming them to the Parliament.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated October 20, 2004, from the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

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INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

KIDS FIRST LICENCES ACT, 2004

LOI DE 2004

SUR LES PLAQUES D'IMMATRICULATION EN FAVEUR DES ENFANTS

Ms Broten moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 130, An Act to support children's charities in Ontario / Projet de loi 130, Loi visant à aider les oeuvres de bienfaisance pour enfants en Ontario.

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

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): Ontario's children's charities are an invaluable component to the socio-economic network of the province. This bill proposes an optional program allowing persons to make donations to support the work of registered children's charities in Ontario when paying fees for licences, permits and number plates issued under the Highway Traffic Act.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AMENDMENT ACT (WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND WORKPLACE HARASSMENT), 2004

LOI DE 2004 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SANTÉ ET LA SÉCURITÉ AU TRAVAIL (VIOLENCE ET HARCÈLEMENT AU TRAVAIL)

Ms Broten moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 131, An Act to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act with respect to acts of workplace violence and workplace harassment / Projet de loi 131, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail en matière d'actes de violence et de harcèlement au travail.

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

Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore): This bill amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to impose duties on employers, supervisors and workers with respect to acts of workplace violence and workplace harassment which are defined to be acts of physical or psychological violence or coercion, psychological harassment or misuse of power. Among other duties, this bill will require employers to develop a written code of conduct with respect to workplace violence and workplace harassment that is reflective of a commitment to maintain a workplace free from violence and harassment as well as establish formalized policies and procedures, including a complaints procedure, a reporting procedure and an investigative procedure, and establish remedies and disciplinary measures to deal with workplace violence and workplace harassment.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

BIODIVERSITY

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): I'm delighted to rise in the House today to inform the members of this government's intention to develop an Ontario biodiversity strategy.

On Monday night, I invited representatives of environmental, industry, aboriginal and other groups, as well as senior staff from other provincial agencies, to discuss our plans. I let them know that we wished to move forward on this important commitment, and sought their comments and advice. I proposed to them an open, transparent and inclusive process that involves all organizations working together to develop this strategy. I want them to be our partners in this project.

The Canadian Biodiversity Strategy defines biodiversity as "the variability among all living organisms, including diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems." In other words, whatever we can do to maintain a rich diversity of plant life, animals and entire ecosystems will make our province stronger and improve our quality of life. In fact, the strategy also points out that "biodiversity supports human societies ecologically, economically, culturally and spiritually."

Unfortunately, the importance of biodiversity is not often recognized. We see ecosystems being degraded and species, as well as genetic diversity, being reduced at an ever-increasing pace. There is broad recognition that we need to do something about this global environmental

problem. From our perspective here in Ontario, action is required at both the federal and provincial levels.

The members may be interested to know that Canada was the first industrialized country to ratify the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Subsequently, the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy was released by the federal government in 1996. Ontario is a signatory to that document. That agreement commits each province and territory to use the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy as a guide to our actions and invites all Canadians to join with us in conserving Canada's biodiversity and using our biological resources in a sustainable manner. It also calls upon each government to develop its own approach to implementing the Canadian strategy.

Part of the UN convention is the 2010 biodiversity target. The target commits jurisdictions to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss. That means Canada will be reporting on its progress in this area six years from now.

We view biodiversity conservation as a shared responsibility for all Ontarians. That is why we are beginning an open and inclusive process with other agencies, organizations and the public to come up with this strategy. On Monday night, I received tremendous support from the groups that were assembled for both the commitment to developing an Ontario strategy and for the open and inclusive process that we've proposed to use for its development.

An Ontario strategy will be a helpful guide when working on programs and policies related to biological resources. It will also be a useful framework for a range of current initiatives, including protecting green space, halting the spread of invasive species, protecting species at risk and reviewing our parks and protected areas legislation. At the same time, it will support similar efforts to conserve biodiversity by Ontario industries, stakeholders and the public. The strategy would also identify gaps in what we're doing now and highlight priorities for action over the next five years.

Other jurisdictions have moved or are moving ahead. Quebec has a strategy in place. Saskatchewan has recently released its plan. British Columbia, Alberta and other provinces are now working on theirs.

We owe it to all Ontarians, both present and future, to protect the rich variety of species and ecosystems that we've been blessed with in this province. We have a responsibility to conserve biodiversity and use our biological resources in a sustainable way.

Conserving biodiversity is a key way of ensuring a healthy environment, strong communities and a thriving economy. I encourage everyone to take part in the development of the Ontario biodiversity strategy. We will be making available through our ministry a Web site and, on that, a workbook that will help guide the discussions. We should be up and running on that site by the end of November.

I look forward to informing the House of our progress as this initiative proceeds.

HEALTHIER SCHOOLS STRATEGY

STRATÉGIE VISANT DES ÉCOLES PLUS SAINES

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I rise today to speak about the government's efforts to make schools healthier places for students to learn. Our goal is to develop the intellectual, physical and emotional potential of our children and young adults so that they become the best contributing citizens they possibly can be.

To this end, every student should enjoy regular physical activity, appreciate a healthy lifestyle and have access to a full range of extracurricular activities, something that some folks in the House could probably benefit from as well.

Schools should be healthy environments where children get the right instruction, can follow the right example, and benefit from the right experience. Unfortunately, under the previous government, things were allowed to slide to the point where schools relied on vending machines filled with junk food as a source of financial assistance for their elementary schools.

We have taken a different approach. We have begun to rebuild our publicly funded education system, investing \$1.1 billion since coming to office, including \$854 million this year.

Je crois qu'il nous incombe de donner à nos élèves les meilleures chances possibles de succès, ce que nous pouvons en grande partie faire en sensibilisant les élèves à une bonne nutrition et aux choix alimentaires sains. C'est pourquoi je suis heureux d'annoncer une nouvelle politique sur la malbouffe pour aider à créer des milieux d'apprentissage plus sains pour les élèves de l'Ontario.

1400

Current research on children and nutrition provided by the Dietitians of Canada presents a staggering picture: there has been an increase in the consumption, for example, of carbonated products from five ounces per child per day to 12 ounces, that the serving size has grown 300% since the 1950s, and milk is consumed 30% less in schools that also sell soft drinks. Some 27% of boys and 23% of girls in grades 6 and 8 consume candy and chocolate bars daily. In fact, by the time children reach the tween years of nine to 12, many have lifestyle habits that could put them, sadly, in the fast lane for developing cardiovascular disease as early as their 30s.

Not surprisingly, the research also indicates that well-nourished children are more likely to be better prepared to learn. Likewise, inadequate nutrition can have a detrimental effect on children's ability to learn, as well as their physical growth and development. This is what parents have told us they want us to be supporting.

To provide boards with clear direction on what food items would be considered acceptable under this new policy, we asked the Dietitians of Canada, who are the credible voice on the subject of nutrition, to develop guidelines based on their extensive work and research. Today, we are providing these guidelines to all school

boards. They include examples of healthy snack and beverage choices, including milk, vegetable juice and yogourt, and certain snack foods, including popcorn and so on, as long as they're low enough in fat and sodium.

Under our new junk food policy, boards need to ensure that all schools with students from kindergarten to grade 8 restrict the sale of food and beverage items in vending machines to healthy and nutritious choices. We firmly believe this is one small way that Ontario's publicly funded education system can and must deliver excellence to students. Our schools and the broader school community, including parents, can play a very influential role in heightening our young people's awareness of the importance of good nutrition. We are counting on their support to really make the difference and help young children learn early in their development the importance of making those choices for themselves about a healthy lifestyle.

Cette initiative représente un autre pas vers la mise en oeuvre de la stratégie globale visant des écoles saines. Nous avons déjà fait des progrès en ce sens en accordant des fonds aux conseils scolaires leur permettant de mettre les écoles à la disposition des groupes communautaires après les heures de classe pour que ceux-ci aident les élèves à demeurer actifs.

This past July, I joined my colleague Jim Bradley, Minister of Tourism and Recreation, to announce a community use of schools initiative. By ensuring that school space is affordable and accessible to communities that schools serve, the government is supporting healthy, active lifestyles, encouraging citizen engagement in community activities and fostering safe and vital communities. Our vision is to have every school in Ontario recognized as a centre of community activity. Already, boards have begun to sign on to the voluntary agreement, providing increased opportunities for students and other members of the community to stay active. Next steps in the healthy schools strategy will include increasing minimum daily physical activity to 20 minutes in our elementary schools by next fall. We're also looking at how we can bring about healthier food choices in our high schools and our cafeterias.

Some of our school boards—in fact, many of them—already set a tremendous example in terms of the healthy alternatives to junk food they have already placed in their vending machines. We applaud their efforts in a whole variety of areas to put the health and well-being of students first. Today, we are asking all boards and schools across Ontario to do what I know they really want to do and these guidelines will make possible for them to do which is the same thing: to provide a healthier outlook for all the students under their care.

BIODIVERSITY

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): In response to the Minister of Natural Resources, I have a question: Where is the strategy on biodiversity, and what is it?

You were asked by the Environmental Commissioner, in his report of last year, November 27, 2003, to come up with a coordinated strategy on biodiversity, coordinated not only through MNR, but through agriculture, municipal affairs and environment. You tell us today that you have the “intention to develop” a strategy. It's not developed yet. You've indicated today that you started on this Monday. Monday night, you invited representatives to discuss it.

I'll quote further from your statement: “Unfortunately, the importance of biodiversity is not often recognized.” I'll say—especially with your government, Minister.

Why do you make this announcement today? You've made this announcement less than 24 hours before Ontario's Environmental Commissioner delivers his next assessment on how this government operates. We'll see how MNR does this time.

In last year's report, Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller highlighted biodiversity as the key issue to be developed by MNR. I guess you got in just under the wire. You got in under 24 hours, Minister, given that you were given this direction on November 27.

Gordon Miller advocated for and instructed this Legislature to bring in a coordinated policy for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Environment and MNR.

He indicates that government often fails “to grasp a wider perspective.” I agree. “This failure to see the bigger picture”—I would indicate that the bigger picture is still lacking.

In his report, he not only talks about coordination, he talks about invasive species. I hear no details on invasive species and ecological land acquisition, and no mention of the northern boreal initiative, seed stock and afforestation.

HEALTHIER SCHOOLS STRATEGY

Mr Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): In response to the Minister of Education, it's truly another red-letter day for the McGuinty government in Ontario. The self-proclaimed education Premier and his education minister are truly making a mark on our education system—and it's a question mark.

After one full year in office, this dynamic duo of McGuinty-Kennedy has stage-managed more photo ops and spun more tales than Barnum and Bailey could ever conceive.

While they're plying their trade, school boards, school councils, parents and students are left wondering what these masters of the spin are up to and what it's all leading to. What are their priorities for education? What is their plan? And when they're finished with their smoke-and-mirrors performance, what role will be left for school boards, school councils and parents in our province?

What leading-edge thinking has led to today's announcement that the Minister of Education is assuming the role of official parent for Ontario's children? What

equips this Minister of Education with the omniscient wisdom to be the nutritionist-at-large for the province of Ontario?

What message does he send to school boards, school councils and parents by reaching into every school throughout this province and micromanaging right into their vending machines? Parents are not to be trusted—that's this minister's message. School councils are a sham, principals have no role and boards of education are meaningless to this minister.

That announcement, interestingly enough, comes only days after another one of this minister's bright thoughts, and that is to install cameras in every one of our elementary schools. Now we know that the purpose of those cameras is to ensure that these children don't consume Girl Guide cookies or pop in those schools.

The parents of Ontario want this minister to get on with his job of ensuring quality education. We are debating in this Legislature a bill brought forward by this minister to dismantle the professional learning program for teachers in this province. Minister, spend your time on quality education, not on trying to be the parent to every student and child in this province. What do you know about parenting?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): In the meantime, I'd like to hear the response from the third party, from the member for Timmins-James Bay.

BIODIVERSITY

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): It's interesting, we have the Minister of Natural Resources who walks in here today to announce that he is finally doing something, after 12 months of being at the helm of the ministry, on what was one of their key campaign promises in the last election, which was dealing with the whole issue of biodiversity.

I find it rather passing strange that 12 months after—you have to ask yourself, why 12 months? I think the reason is pretty simple. The public is starting to get the idea of this government when people such as hospital CEOs—

Interjections.

1410

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order, member from Eglinton-Lawrence. I'm very interested in what the member from Timmins-James Bay is saying. Order.

Mr Bisson: I'm also interested, Mr Speaker.

That minister has been at the helm for 12 months. He's had 12 months to act on what was one of their key campaign promises. Here we are, 12 months later. Better late than never—no argument. But you have to ask yourself the question: Why today? Why did they wait 12 months to all of a sudden announce a biodiversity strategy for the province of Ontario? Simply put, they're trying to divert the attention of the people of Ontario off the bad record of this government when it comes to a number of issues, such as we're going to hear later during

question period, about how this government tries to bully people who work at hospitals to shut up about their hospital deficits. I think that's rather shameful.

But, to the biodiversity. You have to ask yourself a couple of questions. The first one is: Is this going to be another one of these committees that the minister puts together and at the end of the day does nothing with? I ask myself that question because there is already a track record, we'll learn later, about how some of the ministers of the crown have already done so. But, number two, if there is some work to be done in this area, and it should be taken seriously, there are a number of issues that have to be dealt with. The litmus test is, what will the government be prepared to do by way of legislation; and are they prepared to put the money in the Ministry of Natural Resources that has to be put in place to make sure those strategies are taken seriously and followed up? Stay tuned: another time, another channel. We'll soon find out.

HEALTHIER SCHOOLS STRATEGY

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): This Minister of Education would prefer to talk about empty calories than about empty promises. Why don't we talk about the fact that the centre for policy initiatives says we are \$1.5 billion short of where we should be to correct the problems that the previous government has left us? When are we going to talk about the failed funding formula that the Conservatives left us, that the Liberals spoke about, that they don't talk about any more? Why don't we talk about the botched busing transportation initiative they introduced, where 31 boards across this province are going to lose anywhere from 1% to 60% starting next year? When are we going to talk about the fact that we've got a moratorium on school closures and that schools are closing today and next year? When are we going to talk about the fact that this government in July said, "We are giving you \$100 million for special education," and in the next breath takes \$100 million away from the boards? When are we going to talk about these important things? When is this government going to say, "We need a new funding formula that addresses the needs of all of our students"?

I wager to you, Speaker, that your government, colleagues of yours are never going to change that funding formula. We are never going to see a new formula other than tinkering around the system and hoping to get away and playing with these kinds of initiatives where we can divert people's attention from the real problems we face in education and talk about empty calories instead of empty promises.

Minister of Education, why don't you talk to your colleagues about increasing minimum wage adequately so that people can afford to eat nutritious foods? Minister of Ed, when are you going to talk to your colleagues about increasing social assistance adequately so that people can buy nutritious food? Minister of Ed, while you are at it, why don't you tell Mr Sorbara, the finance minister there,

to release a couple of dollars so people on ODSP can have the money they need to buy nutritious food? Why don't you take the time, lean over to your colleagues and chat with them and say, "We've got to do something about this so people can afford to eat nutritiously"?"

Minister, I know you and the Premier are good at dealing with empty calories, but I know you're not very good at dealing with your empty promises. We'll deal with it.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Let's take some time to prepare ourselves.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): My question is for the Premier. I think it's important today to get your views on the record with respect to a growing fear over the personal conduct of your Minister of Health and the culture of fear he and his officials are spawning in the men and women responsible for our hospitals. Minister Smitherman describes anonymous sources as cowards and, under that definition, you have at least two cowards in your own caucus. Liberal MPPs, in today's Toronto Star, are expressing concern about Mr Smitherman's approach. Premier, are you going to continue to ignore the climate of fear this minister has created, ignore the concerns of your own backbenchers?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the outstanding work being done by our Minister of Health, George Smitherman. Is Minister Smitherman enthusiastic? You bet he is. Is he passionate about his responsibilities? You bet he is. Is he a fighter? You're darned right he is. I'm glad he's on our side, but, more importantly, I'm glad he's on the side of the people of Ontario. He is relentless at pursuing transformations that will improve the quality of their care.

Mr Runciman: Is he a bully? You bet he is.

Premier, you want to stick your head in the sand instead of showing leadership on this issue. Your own caucus members are expressing concern about the minister's strong-arm and intimidation tactics, yet you keep the blinkers on and defend the indefensible.

This morning on your local radio station, CFRA in Ottawa, the president of the OHA, the Ontario Hospital Association, Hilary Short, said that every hospital is feeling the heat right now. In this morning's Globe and Mail, the minister is quoted attacking hospital CEOs, implying that they're uncooperative fat cats, an attack that necessitated a response from the president of the Ontario Hospital Association. Is this the kind of environment you want to defend when you're getting headlines like, "Fear and Loathing Rule at Hospitals in Ontario"? Is that your idea of good government?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I am proud of the efforts and the accomplishments of Minister George Smitherman. Let

me tell you about some of the things that he has fought for and some of his achievements: He has fought for and obtained more full-time nurses for the province; he's fighting for reduced waiting times; he's bringing home care to 21,000 more Ontarians; he's investing in community health care for the first time in over a decade; and he's making sure for the first time that our seniors, 70,000 of our parents and grandparents who are living out the remainder of their lives in our nursing homes, are entitled to two baths a week and that a registered nurse is on duty on a 24/7 basis. Yes, I am proud of the accomplishments, the achievements, the passion and the enthusiasm of our Minister of Health, George Smitherman.

Mr Runciman: Premier, as you know, this week the vice-president of child advocacy at Sick Kids Hospital, Cyndy DeGiusti, was forced to resign two days after she publicly complained about the impact your policies will have on patient care at Sick Kids. From all reports, Ms DeGiusti was an outstanding employee, truly dedicated to the young patients at Sick Kids, but she was shown the door. And you and your minister say you're innocent; your threats and a bully minister had nothing to do with it.

Premier, if you truly believe your minister's ham-fisted approach to the hospital sector had nothing to do with Ms DeGiusti's dismissal, will you support the Conservative and NDP proposal for a committee hearing into this issue? Will you do that?

1420

Hon Mr McGuinty: It is remarkable how quickly the former government would try to convince the people of Ontario that they should forget their record when it came to setting a new standard for bullying in the province of Ontario, if not in North America. I want to remind you of their record: They fired every CCAC board when they complained about cuts and asked for more money; they sent a gag order to paramedics to stop talking about ambulance delays; they bullied nurses by comparing them to Hula Hoops; they bullied pregnant women on social assistance when they took away their nutritional supplements; and they bullied everyone on social assistance when they wanted to drug-test all of them.

Again, and I will be perfectly clear and unequivocal in this regard, Minister George Smitherman is being absolutely relentless in pursuing something that is not easy: the transformation of our health care system so that together we can improve the quality of health care we deliver to all Ontarians.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): First of all, I want to assure the House that I was not standing in ovation to the Premier's answer. I do have a question for the Minister of Health. In his absence, I refer it to the Premier. I see no end to your government's continued incompetence and mismanagement when it comes to dealing with Ontario's

rural communities, and that includes the hospital sector. We learned the other day that the Campbellford hospital is predicting it will close up to 19 beds and cut 21 full-time jobs. Also in the same riding we learned from Mr Cable of the Northumberland Hills Hospital that they have your ministry's approval to cut 12 of 25 complex care beds. We already know we have countless Liberal members who won't go on the record, and Mr Rinaldi is silent on the closure of the hospital beds and layoffs of medical professionals in his riding. Is Mr Rinaldi one of the Liberal members your minister is bullying into silence and submission?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I want to assure you that as we speak, in fact, Minister Smitherman is meeting with representatives of the OHA in order to ensure that we have a respectful ongoing dialogue, to ensure that we can proceed together with the transformation of our health care system, including ensuring that we're getting value for Ontarians, but most importantly, better quality health care for Ontario patients and their families. That's what this effort is all about; that's what this exercise is all about.

I'm pleased to report that so far, 50 Ontario hospitals have balanced their budgets and say they can live with our new accountability agreements. They say they can, in fact, continue to deliver quality services to their patients. We look forward to dealing with the hospitals on a case-by-case basis to ensure that we're getting good accountability for the money we invest in our hospitals without compromise and, in fact, improving the quality of care for patients.

Mr Hardeman: I think that answer is an embarrassment, as it goes nowhere close to answering the question that was asked. I'm sure there is time during ministers' statements when you can make statements, but I would appreciate answers to questions.

Perhaps, Premier, you can explain why the Sault Area Hospital is cutting 75 full-time jobs and has a deficit of \$6 million and growing. Given Mr Bartolucci's silence yesterday on the suspension of Dr Koka, it is clear that he's afraid to talk to you, and now he's silenced on the cuts to his own hospital. Perhaps you can tell us if Mr Bartolucci is yet another Liberal member whom you have asked not to speak out on hospital cuts and bed closures. Who will speak for the hospital in the Soo? Not anyone who doesn't want to feel the wrath of your minister. Would you stand in your place today and say that Mr Bartolucci can stand up and defend the staffing cuts at the hospital in his riding?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Speaker, the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I appreciate the—

The Speaker: Can I get the response from the Premier? I'm hearing shouting from both sides. Sometimes I hear three questions coming from one side—

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order. Could I just hear the Premier's response, and maybe just tone down the heckling? Thank you.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I'm sure Ontarians are asking themselves, where was the great outcry from the members opposite when they shut down all those hospitals? Where was the outcry when they fired all those nurses? Apparently they have found religion. Apparently it's not a long journey on the road to Damascus; it's only this corridor here that separates us.

The work that we are doing is not easy, but our full and sincere intention is to ultimately improve the quality of care for Ontarians. This is what Roy Romanow said recently about what we're doing here. He said, "When I talk about sustainability with Premier McGuinty and Health Minister Smitherman in this province, I hear a strong commitment to future of publicly supported medicare, and a resolve to spending resources designed to leverage the changes necessary, rather than spending on the status quo. It seems to me that Ontario wants to do the 'real work' required to ensure medicare's sustainability." That's what we're doing.

The Speaker: Final supplementary.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): Premier, your government's treatment of rural communities is pathetic—

Interjections: Shame, shame.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. That's highly unnecessary.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. OK, we've had our fun.

Final supplementary, the member for Oxford.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Your government's treatment of rural communities is pathetic, whether it's hospitals or crisis intervention centres for farmers. Ministry officials have been handing out crisis intervention packages to farmers suffering from mental distress because your government has done nothing to address their needs. It includes a 1-800 number for farmers desperate for help and on the brink of losing everything. We called that number and to our horror the crisis line was disconnected, referring callers to a 1-900 crisis number where you can pay \$2.99 a minute. The farmer in desperation will hear a recording saying, "The crisis service is no longer available."

Premier, not only have you silenced your members but you have silenced farmers in crisis. Will you address your government's incompetence and assure us today that crisis intervention hotlines for farmers will be re-instated immediately?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): Speaker, I'm not sure how this flows from the original line of questioning related to health care. I know it is in the opposition's interest to try to exploit regional differences in the province of Ontario, but we feel a responsibility on this side of the House to move the province forward and all Ontarians together.

Just to set the record straight with respect to what we're doing in rural Ontario, recently our Minister of Education committed \$31 million strictly for rural schools. We have recently announced another \$30 million for our BSE recovery funding program. That's in addition to the original \$92 million already delivered. We have also committed \$20 million in nutrient management assistance and another \$10 million for the Ontario cull animal strategy.

Speaker, I see you are telling me that my time is over, and I thank you for this opportunity.

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Your health minister's bullying has created a culture of fear at Ontario's hospitals. The Sick Kids child advocate criticizes your hospital cuts on Saturday and by Monday she loses her job. Officials say she is gone because you're strong-arming hospitals to keep quiet.

From Kapuskasing to Campbellford and from Hamilton to Ottawa, hospital workers are afraid to speak out about your hospital cuts because they fear they may be the next to go. Even one of your Liberal backbenchers agrees your health minister is bullying. He said, "My community isn't happy. Some of these people are volunteers. They don't deserve that."

Ordinary Ontarians want peace and better results, not your health minister's intimidation and bullying. You've banned pit bulls in the province of Ontario. Why don't you muzzle and leash your health minister, stop the bullying and get on with the real job of ensuring that hospitals have a budget?

1430

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I find that beneath the dignity that we should all attempt to attach to this Legislature. Let me say this: I know it is, again, in the interest of the members of the opposition to describe what is going on in their self-serving and idiosyncratic way. But what is actually happening is that there are all kinds of people speaking out. There are all kinds of people who have the opportunity to express their disagreement or concern with the approach that we're bringing to transforming health care generally, and how we deliver care in our hospitals more specifically. We expect that. That is healthy. It's important that we continue to have that dialogue and that debate.

But let me say this on behalf of this government: We will be relentless. We will not shrink from our responsibility to continue to bring about the kind of change that will put our health care system on a sustainable footing and the kind of change that will improve the quality of care that we deliver to Ontarians.

Mr Hampton: Premier, today the health minister met with the Ontario Hospital Association. Here's what the hospitals had to say: "Any charges by Minister Smitherman that hospitals are reluctant to change or look for

savings are unfounded and unfair to the managers of our hospitals and to the 3,000 voluntary hospital trustees who govern with such commitment under increasingly difficult circumstances." And they go on: "Hospitals have patients walking through our doors each and every day. Dismantling the hospital system piece by piece, before the new system is in place, poses a huge risk to patient care."

And what did your Minister of Health have to say? Your Minister of Health said he's "loving" all the media attention he's getting as a result of his hospital cuts.

Premier, will you tell the people of Ontario why they should be loving your approach to health care when all they are seeing from your bullying, intimidation and cuts is more and more threat to their community hospitals and more and more threat to patient care?

Hon Mr McGuinty: I think the leader of the third party knows full well that Ontarians are seeing much more activity than just the dialogue that we're having with our hospitals. They're seeing more full-time nurses. They're seeing the commitment we made to increase cardiac procedures by 36,000, cataracts by 9,000, hip and knee replacements by 2,300. They're seeing a brand new vaccination program that's going to vaccinate two million children over the course of the next three years. They see the changes we're making in home care, bringing home care to 100,000 more Ontarians.

Let me say this to all those people who commit themselves, who dedicate themselves and devote themselves to the quality of care we are delivering at present in our hospitals: We commend them, we thank them, we value them, but we also want to work with them. We ultimately have a responsibility to bring about a transformation in health care. We're going to do that, and we're going to do that working with our hospitals.

Mr Hampton: It will be news to people out there in the hospital system that you're working with them. Yesterday, the minister was attacking the hospital boards and administrators. Today, furious George was going after front-line health care workers. Instead of addressing your government's short funding of hospitals, now he's going to wage war on the lowest-paid, most vulnerable workers in our hospitals. And, Premier, you should know who these workers are. Most of them are women. He says either their wages should be slashed or their jobs and their pensions and benefits should be contracted out.

Is this the McGuinty government's definition of efficiency: cutting the wages, the pensions and the benefits of the lowest-paid health care workers, attacking the most vulnerable workers? Is this what you meant by "Choose change"?

Hon Mr McGuinty: This is nothing but pure, unadulterated invention. The minister has never suggested anything in that regard. What we have done—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Member from Simcoe North, come to order. New question.

Mr Hampton: To the Premier: Instead of ducking the scrums, you go outside the House afterwards, because

that's exactly what Mr Smitherman, furious George, said to the media earlier today.

But the issue is this: It is time to muzzle your pit bull. It is time to start working with hospitals instead of attacking them. You say you don't have the money. Well, here is the equation, Premier. You're getting \$825 million in new federal money. You've got \$2 billion squirreled away in your budget in contingency fees.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Minister of Labour, would you come to order, please.

Mr Hampton: I don't think the Liberals like hearing these questions, Speaker.

You've got another \$1 billion from your new health tax. Add it up. That's \$4 billion you're sitting on, which is supposed to go, or can go, to health care.

My advice, Premier, and I'm asking you to do it: Will you stop your health minister from attacking the hospitals, from attacking the boards of hospitals, from going after the lowest-paid workers in the hospitals, and sit down and work on their budget problems?

Hon Mr McGuinty: It's always interesting and entertaining to listen to the NDP leader's particular interpretation of the facts. We are investing more money in hospitals than ever before, and we feel a responsibility to ensure that we get value for patients with that additional investment. So we've decided, for the first time, that we're insisting hospitals enter into accountability agreements. We want to ensure the money actually translates into better quality services. We think that's important to do on behalf of Ontario patients.

If people ask us whose side we're on, whether on the side of the doctors or the hospitals, we're on the side of Ontario patients. The whole thrust of our effort is to ensure that the additional money, the record amount of money we are investing in hospitals in Ontario, \$11.3 billion this year, actually results in better quality services for the people of Ontario.

Mr Hampton: Premier, let me give you an example of what's going on out there. While you pocket \$825 million of new federal health care money, in Sault Ste Marie they're laying off 75 hospital staff—40 of them are in nursing—and money will actually be taken out of their budget for drugs that are used to battle cancer. We already know about Sick Kids—\$45 million. Almost every hospital in northern Ontario is facing a serious budget deficit, and they all agree they're going to have to cut or delay services to try to meet your budget restrictions.

Meanwhile, you've got the \$825 million of federal money, you've got the new health tax money and you've got \$2 billion in contingency reserve. Why don't you sit down with the hospitals and try to work some of this out instead of sending out your pit bull to attack hospital workers and hospital administrators?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again I fundamentally reject the categorization the leader of the NDP brings to this. Maybe he doesn't know, but I said a moment ago and I'll say again that the Minister of Health has just returned

from a meeting with representatives of the OHA. He does that kind of thing on a regular basis.

In keeping with the hospitals' request, we have given them 18 months to find a way to balance their budgets. We've established a brand new seven-step process, working together with them. We've only gone through the first step. The members opposite would have us believe that all of these things and challenges that are connected with hospitals have somehow derived from this new approach we're bringing to funding our hospitals. That is in fact not the case. The Minister of Health is determined to work with our hospitals to ensure we can improve the quality of their health care, and he will continue to do that.

1440

Mr Hampton: Premier, going out and attacking the lowest-paid hospital workers is not a new approach. We saw that for eight years. Going out and attacking hospital administrators and the volunteer boards of hospitals is not a new approach. People saw that for eight years.

What the people of Ontario want is peace in their health care system. They want to see that new federal money and the new health tax money invested in real services. They don't want to see their community hospitals cut. They don't want to see more cuts like the cuts to chiropractors, cuts to physiotherapists, cuts to optometrists. They've had enough. They have seen that for eight years.

You, Premier, promised change. You, Premier, said, "Choose change." You got the federal money; you got the new health tax money. Where's the change, Premier? All we see is the same old tired agenda, the same old attack on hospitals and hospital workers. Where is the change?

Hon Mr McGuinty: The leader of the NDP and I part company on this, as we do on many other issues. He would say, "Listen, you got some money from the feds. You got the new premium money. Just send it over to the hospitals. We don't really give a darn as to what way they spend it."

We're bringing a different approach on behalf of all taxpayers and Ontario patients. We are insisting that we get value for that new money. We are insisting that we improve the quality of care as a result of that additional investment that we are making in our hospitals.

The leader of the NDP is a staunch defender of the status quo. I accept that. He'll be there for a long time. He has championed the status quo for a long time. We're not going back there. We're moving forward with the transformation of our health care system. We're moving forward with our plan to improve the quality of care for Ontario families.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): My question is for the Premier, and it's a very clear message. You may want to stand by while your bully minister beats up our hospital executives, but those of us in the opposition are not going to stand by and allow this fear and intimidation to continue.

Cyndy DeGiusti has an important job. Her job is to go to work every day and defend children's health care services as a children's advocate. On Saturday, she spoke out about the bullying tactics of your government and the cuts to patient services. She showed up for work on Monday morning and, much like Donald Trump, she was fired.

Premier, will you not stand in your place and join those of us on this side of the House in calling for an immediate public hearing into this tragedy affecting children in the province of Ontario? Would you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: This is just a little hard to endure coming from the then Minister of Community and Social Services who proposed that we drug-test welfare recipients in the province of Ontario. That would be his idea of a progressive, modern, responsible approach when it comes to public policy.

There is not a shred of evidence that links the departure of that particular employee with this government or its actions. I have said publicly, as has the Minister of Health: If anybody is the butt end of negative treatment of any kind as a result of criticizing this government, we say that is wrong. We are big enough to take on any kind of criticism, constructive or otherwise, and we look forward to a healthy, vigorous, passionate debate as we improve health care in Ontario.

Mr Baird: What we're talking about is the climate of fear and intimidation that is experienced right across our health care system and your inability to even address the problem.

In our home community of Ottawa, the hospitals are in crisis. The Ottawa Hospital is looking right now at plans to lay off nurses and plans to increase patient waiting times for important procedures.

In last year's election, on page 12 of your campaign document Excellence for All, you said that you wanted to help communities have "the necessary training to implement effective anti-bullying measures." You said, "It is time to put an end to bullying." Premier, will you stand in your place and say there is no room for bullying by your bully minister in our health care system? Will you do that?

Hon Mr McGuinty: Again, this coming from a member from the Ottawa community who now purports to be a champion of health care. I ask him, on behalf of the people of Ontario and the in excess of 100,000 who signed a petition to save the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, where was he when his government decided they were going to shut down the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and remove that important and valuable resource for the people of eastern Ontario?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Member for Nepean-Carleton, I'm calling you to order. I will regard this as a warning.

Hon Mr McGuinty: I might ask him as well, where was he when his government decided that they wanted to shut down the l'hôpital Montfort that also benefits the people of eastern Ontario?

Here's an interesting observation made by the then parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health, John O'Toole, who said, "Some would say she"—in reference to then Minister of Health, Elizabeth Witmer—"ran away with the cheque book but somebody else got the cheques. We spent a ton and got not as much as we would have liked."

We are spending a record amount on hospital funding in Ontario, and we are determined to ensure that we get value for taxpayers and, more important than that, that we get better quality of care for the people of Ontario.

The Speaker: New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker: It seems to me it's a day of naming people. I will start doing that now, because I want to get on with question period. And while I'm at it, there's a lot of loose language here, unparliamentary language. I would like you to refrain from doing that.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. Around the province, hospital officials will be forced to cut programs, beds and services because you refuse to adequately provide operational funding to these hospitals, but there is more to the problem. The Ontario Hospital Association reports that more than 30 badly needed capital projects are now on hold because your government won't commit the funding to these projects. This year, you're going to receive \$825 million in new federal funding and you also have another \$2 billion in unallocated funds sitting in reserves. You've got the money. Will you do the right thing and finally release the cheques so these capital projects can proceed?

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

Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): As I've had the opportunity a few times in the House this week on issues with respect to capital projects, I'm happy to repeat for the honourable member that I'm working very closely on this file with my colleague the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. I do acknowledge that there are quite a few projects out there that have expectations of funding. This was created in part measure by the presentations by that party while in government of cheques which, when taken to the bank, bounced. The reality beyond that is that we do have an obligation to ensure that any capital project that moves forward has appropriate operational funding associated with it. We do expect to be in a position reasonably soon to offer some go-forward for projects in Ontario, and we're going to do so in keeping with our plans to transform the health care system in Ontario.

Ms Martel: Let me give you an example of a project that has been delayed. The St Peter's hospital project in Hamilton is a clear example of how your failure to fund these projects is really hurting patient care. Two projects at St Peter's were approved in August 2003—urgent

upgrades of badly dilapidated facilities and a 90-bed facility for young people with disabilities. The government shared the project with 62% of a \$33-million total project, with community fundraising for the balance. The community funding is secure. Everything is ready to go, but your government has refused to give the go-ahead and the funding to start this project. Let me repeat: Your government has some \$3 billion sitting unallocated this year that could be used for these important projects. I ask you again, will you cut the cheques today and fund these badly needed hospital projects?

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm not getting into the new math that the honourable member is using, but I am happy to say—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): Order. Member for Nickel Belt, you asked the question; now hear the response.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Order, member for Nickel Belt.

1450

Hon Mr Smitherman: I'm pleased to say that on Saturday night I'll be attending Mayor Larry Di Ianni's gala for St Peter's Hospital to raise money for the academic specialty hospital unit for young adults with disabilities.

Here's what the CEO of St Peter's Hospital has to say about me and my involvement with those projects: "George Smitherman is the only Minister of Health" that he has seen in his hospital. "George Smitherman has been nothing but supportive of the hospital project. He has been fair and met with patients and staff."

The ministry has already provided over \$1.8 million for two hospital projects to support their planning efforts. The key point here is, like many other hospitals in the province of Ontario, we're working co-operatively with St Peter's on the development of their plan. We hope to be able to make announcements with respect to these projects shortly.

HEALTHIER SCHOOLS STRATEGY

Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham): My question is for the Minister of Education. Minister, today you announced that you would be banning junk food in all elementary schools. I support this decision and have seen first-hand how banning junk food in schools contributes to healthier food choices for students. A year ago, York region public school board removed all vending machines and junk food from school property. Educators, parents and students supported this decision.

A 15-year research study published in the journal *Obesity Research* in May 2003 found that at least one in four children is overweight in Canada, compared to one in 10 in 1981. Childhood obesity can lead to a number of health problems such as diabetes, and children who are obese tend to grow into obese adults. Minister, why is this announcement today important?

Hon Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I want to thank the member for Markham for his interest in this subject and in the well-being of students. It's just a small step that we're taking today. Making it comprehensive, in answer to the member, was really just a way of summarizing the consensus that exists. Parents want us to do this; so do the school and the school principals. The school I was at today, Parkdale public, a fine school in this area, said, "Thank you for giving us the guidelines, the ability now to work with parents and work with our own school communities."

What the Dietitians of Canada provided today was a practical list, an idea which I think everyone in this House would probably join in promoting, that students should be able to make those good choices when they're young enough to be impressionable and that that high intake of sugar and the veering away from good foods is something we all need to do our own small part on, and these guidelines help to do that.

Mr Wong: I'm pleased to hear that our government is taking a proactive approach to childhood obesity and putting preventive measures in our schools. We've heard before of this government's commitment to making Ontario's schools healthier. Encouraging healthy eating by removing junk foods from schools is one step. What other measures are we taking to ensure that our education system is keeping Ontario's children healthy?

Hon Mr Kennedy: Just as the government has an outlook to have Ontarians in general be healthier, we have a healthier schools outlook, and we're working closely with colleagues like the Minister of Tourism and Recreation on an initiative that would, for example, put back in our schools community use of gymnasiums, classrooms and fields that had been locked up by previous governments that didn't support the idea that schools should be a community hub for those students—that they have those after-hours activities—and for the rest of the community as well.

Further, there has been a downgrading of physical activity in our schools. We need to do something about that, and we're looking for mandatory physical activity for all elementary students. Again, some of the members opposite I know come from the last century, and they think it's wrong for us to lay out guidelines for young children to be able to participate in our schools and to be able to direct them. We believe there's a stronger community consensus, and it's about doing what we can to head off exactly what the member prefaced his question with: obesity, heart problems and things that we can do something about. It's a smart government that does that when they have the chance.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture. The farmers of the province are in crisis. The crisis is not of their own making, and they have to depend on programs like CAIS to help them make ends meet when their farms are in

peril. Your government has the responsibility of delivering this funding to farmers. Part of this responsibility is to deliver it in a timely fashion. But, Minister, your lack of clear processes for farmers to follow has meant that the CAIS program is absolutely dysfunctional. Your own government estimates that 16,000 farmers across the province did not submit what the ministry considers to be a complete application. I have a suspicion that some of this group is from my riding, but I expect they come from every rural riding across the province. Your ministry has only just admitted the serious failings of this program and now plans to contact everyone who tried to apply for the program. It is not acceptable that you are leaving farmers in the lurch, knowing how close many of them are to losing their homes, their farms and their livelihoods.

Minister, what steps are you going to take to speed up the CAIS program, not just for the farmers who are currently in the backlog, but also for those responding to the letter asking for more information?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I want to thank the honourable member for the question. As of the end of September, over \$25 million has flowed to farmers in this province as a result of the CAIS program, so I don't agree with her statement that the dollars aren't flowing. Certainly we recognize that we had almost 30,000 applications for CAIS and that a number of those applications were not complete. We are working with those farmers to ensure those applications are updated and turned around as quickly as possible. I ask the member to be conscious of the fact, and we are conscious of the fact, that we need to get money out as quickly as possible. Ministry staff—and I ask you to stand up and support ministry staff—are working as quickly as possible to deliver those dollars to the agricultural community.

Ms Scott: The applications started to come in at the end of April, and some were extended to the end of June. That's four to six months. That's a long period of time for farmers to be waiting. It's a very serious matter. As you know, farmers are very proud individuals and they do not seek financial help frivolously. I want to remind the minister and everyone here that the barn doors are silently closing, farms are going out of business and the economics of our community are going downhill.

When you add 16,000 more farmers to the end of your backlog, do you have any plan to handle this? How many months are the farmers going to have to wait? Is that going to be another 16 weeks on top of what they have already been waiting, four to six months? Farmers are losing their homes. Minister, tell us how you're going to solve this catastrophe affecting our farmers.

Hon Mr Peters: I want to thank the honourable member for the question. I would welcome it if there is any specific farmer within your constituency—quite honestly, for any of my colleagues who are here in the Legislature right now, if there's a particular farmer who has extreme hardship, we're going to work with you. We're going to work with that farmer to make sure those dollars can flow as quickly as possible.

This government is committed to supporting the farmers of this province. The Premier announced in February—we delivered \$64 million in transition funding to farmers. We embarked on the mature animal strategy because we wanted to do something for the long term. We've invested in abattoir capacity in this province, the very thing the federal government has said we need to do.

I want to thank the Premier for his support, and my colleagues around the cabinet table, for coming forward to match the federal funding. We're coming forward with an additional \$30 million to support the cattle industry in this province. As we speak, we're working in consultation with the cattle industry to make sure we get it right, unlike your government, which designed programs on the back of a tablecloth and didn't get it right and didn't ensure dollars flowed to farmers. We're going to make sure dollars get where they're supposed to, and that's in the farmers' pockets.

WATER EXTRACTION

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a question for the Premier. The proposed Great Lakes annex will allow the eight Great Lakes states to divert unlimited water from the Great Lakes water basin that we all share. What's worse, Ontario will not be able to veto such water-takings, which will seriously threaten the levels of the Great Lakes. There are no set limits on how much water can be diverted. There is no time limit on those diversions. The Council of Canadians, legal experts like Steven Shrybman, the Sierra legal fund and others echo that it effectively gives free rein to the US to remove our water to service sprawl. Premier, do you support this annex giving the US the power to drain Ontario's Great Lakes?

Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): The minister will speak to this.

Hon David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources): As the member knows, the government of Canada and the government of Ontario absolutely prohibit the diversion of water from the Great Lakes. That is the law in this province, and that is the law in this country. What a lot of people don't understand is that no such law is present in the United States, either at the state level or the federal level.

Over the years, Quebec and Ontario have been trying to engage the eight neighbouring Great Lakes states to start to bring their thinking around to thinking, as we do, that this is a precious resource, that the ecosystem of the Great Lakes must be protected and that they start to think the way we do about protecting that and preventing diversions.

1500

Ms Churley: Premier, I really would like to hear your response to this. It's a very serious matter before us, and your minister is obviously ignoring a very important, legal analysis that says that this agreement undermines the integrity of the Great Lakes and our water. You campaigned to stop water-taking that damages the environ-

ment and depletes water tables. The agreement opens the floodgates for water to be taken out of the Great Lakes; there's a body of opinion that says that.

I'm going to ask you, Premier, will you agree to not sign this very flawed annex agreement so that a new agreement can be made that gives Ontario, not the US states, the power to protect our own Great Lakes from thirsty US developers? Will you do that?

Hon Mr Ramsay: I would say to the member that, as she knows, we are in a consultation stage right with this charter annex proposal. The deadline has just ended, and obviously we are collating all the responses we have had from this consultation.

But I think the member needs to appreciate that while there's a strict prohibition on diversion on the Canadian side, both provincially and federally, the Americans don't have that. For the first time, we have engaged the Americans to start thinking about the lakes as we do. What we're talking about now is getting the states for the first time, if they agree, to start passing their own laws in their own jurisdictions to control and prevent any major diversion from the Great Lakes. By putting it into law, we would be able to access their courts and force them to enforce their law.

We're looking at this. We're listening to the consultation and pushing for Canada's position: to have no diversions from the Great Lakes.

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. During your recent visit to my riding of Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, you had the opportunity to interact with and hear the concerns of residents of my constituency in the agricultural industry.

During your visit, you reinforced our government's proactive approach with regard to ensuring public safety with new agricultural regulations, such as nutrient management, and the new provincial water regulations. However, a major concern that my constituents had during your visit, and which you heard, was the cost incurred by the agricultural sector in complying with these regulations. Public safety is of the utmost concern to the agricultural sector in Ontario. However, the farmers of the province are struggling financially. Can you tell this House how our government is going to aid the agricultural industry to ensure compliance with the Nutrient Management Act?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I think this is a government that has clearly demonstrated that we are committed to implementing Justice O'Connor's Walkerton report. We're moving forward with what he identified as where we should move forward first, and that's on the largest agricultural operations in this province. That's why we've committed, over a two-year period, \$20 million to assist those 1,200 largest farms in this province to move forward to meet the Nutrient Management Act and regulations. We're

working very closely with the nutrient management advisory committee to make sure that we get it right.

This is a government that is concerned about the environment, but we also recognize that we can't put the burden solely on the backs of the farmers. That's why government has to come to the table. Our dollars, combined with federal dollars, will provide up to 75% of funding for those 1,200 largest farms, which, incidentally, generate 30% of the nutrients in this province. We're going to work with farmers. We're going to work with groups like OFEC to make sure we get it right.

Mr Brownell: I'm pleased to hear that the ministry will work with the farmers of the province and match the dates of compliance with the availability of provincial funding. I laud you for recognizing the need for such assistance, and I recognize the need for this program in my constituency. In order for farmers in my riding to take advantage of funding, it is essential that they are aware of programs that are in existence. Minister, can you tell how and when farmers can apply for funding—you talked about the larger farming community—and who is administering the program?

Hon Mr Peters: This program will be delivered through the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association. We've contracted to work with them. These are demonstrated leaders in understanding the soil and crops of this province, and we're going to be working with them.

As well, I think it's important to note that the focus here is on the 1,200 largest farms. We're going to be working with the Ministry of the Environment, with the nutrient management advisory committee, and we're conscious of the source water protection legislation that's going to be coming along. As the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition clearly pointed out, we need to make sure that the Nutrient Management Act and source water protection fit together. That's why the Ministry of the Environment and myself are going to be working very closely together to make sure that we get this right, because we know that the opportunities for nutrients to escape from a farm and into a watercourse don't necessarily go by farm size. That's why, be it a large farm or a small farm, we're going to work with the Ministry of the Environment to make sure that nutrient management and source water protection move forward on phasing in the other agricultural operations.

The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling): New question.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Minister, you've just finished saying that you're providing nutrient management funding of \$20 million for large operations. However, the George Morris Centre, commissioned by your government, reveals compliance costs for nutrient management will be a staggering \$235 million to \$609 million. Minister, does your government have a policy here to put our farmers at a competitive disadvantage? Are you putting farmers out of business?

Hon Mr Peters: I welcome this question on a couple of fronts. We firmly believe, as we've announced on the \$20 million that we're moving forward with, that there is

a role and an obligation for government to be there to help farmers phase in. That's why we're moving forward on the 1,200 largest operations.

As a responsible government, we realized too that we needed to get an accurate picture of the true costs of implementing the Nutrient Management Act. That's why we commissioned the George Morris Centre to bring forward that report, which clearly shows that there is a substantial cost. Unlike the previous government, this government is prepared to make sure we don't hide anything from the public. That government and the previous Minister of Agriculture commissioned from the very same entity a report to look at the impact. They printed it on purple paper and never released it. We put the information out. We made it available to the farmers in this province. You never released that information. You didn't have the guts to do it. This government has the guts. We're going to work with the agricultural community.

Mr Barrett: In contrast to what you've just said, in that same announcement you've delayed the nutrient management compliance deadline to December 31, 2005. Like the beef set-aside program, there are no application forms; there may not be forms until March 2005. We know you've already budgeted \$5 million in funding for this fiscal year, but without those application forms farmers have no way to access the money. Also, that funding is part of a transition fund. If the \$5 million is not used this year, it's lost. Does this mean the \$20 million you've just announced may, in effect, only be \$15 million by the end of the program?

Hon Mr Peters: Perhaps the honourable member should speak to organizations like the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition or the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, with whom I participated and made sure I had a conversation with last week.

During the first two weeks of November, there are going to be consultation sessions taking place all across the province. The closest one to the honourable member will be held in the Ancaster-Dundas area. At that point—those first two weeks in November—the application forms and the full details of the nutrient management assistance program are going to be made available to the farmers, so that they know very clearly.

The honourable member made mention of the date. Unfortunately, your government put in place a date for farmers to comply with that was not achievable. We're prepared to work with farmers in this province. That's why we've asked the farmers to have a completed nutrient management strategy in place by March 31. We're going to give them time, through the end of the year, to meet the opportunities to comply with this new legislation. We're going to work with farmers, unlike you.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

I saw you out there reading your documents, and I wanted to give you a chance.

Minister, you will know that in the developmentally handicapped sector, when it comes to community supports, community organizations across the province are having to reduce services because of a lack of funding, a situation that's been going on for some time. For example, in the city of Timmins, we have one organization that is potentially going to be closing down two group homes for the developmentally handicapped in our community if something is not done; this with 20 people on waiting lists to get into those particular group homes. In other organizations in the community, when it comes to services for the developmentally handicapped, we have services in the community being cut. What is your plan to deal with what is starting to become a very serious situation for the developmentally handicapped across this province for community services?

1510

Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I very much appreciate the question. As you know, historically, in the last 30 years all governments have continued to put more money into developmental services. It is an area that is probably the least partisan of all government activity. What has happened is that volume and demand increased exponentially, far exceeding any funding that governments have traditionally continued to put in developmental services. This has left us with huge dilemmas. How do we find funding to meet the gaps in services that we know exist in this sector? This is what we are working on every day. The example that this MPP is giving, the number of agencies that he deals with locally—he and I worked together on several of these issues for families in his region. I can tell this member and the agencies in his community that we are working on a complete policy review to see how we can improve the delivery of services to that community, because we understand the gaps that do exist.

Mr Bisson: Minister, the community organizations, as you well know, are working on those things themselves. What they've been looking for is for the government to fund those things they've long recommended, and that's what this issue is.

I'm further worried because I was at a press conference earlier this summer where you announced the closure of the last three institutions in this province where developmentally handicapped people reside. We're going to take the last thousand people in those institutions, who admittedly were the hardest to serve when it came to moving them out of the services some years ago, with community supports that are ill-equipped to deal with what's in the community now. I say to you, Minister, that if we can't deal with what's in the community now when it comes to providing services to the developmentally handicapped, how in the heck are we going to deal with that as you close the last three institutions and put the last thousand people into communities that are ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deal with the input?

Hon Ms Pupatello: Again I want to say that I was pleased to see that this MPP attended that press conference, because it was a historic moment where we moved forward, to where other parties of other governments have been all along, to finally close institutional care in the developmental sector in Ontario to join other jurisdictions that will not use institutional care but rather have moved to community-based services.

We, I think, in this House all agree: We do have concerns that we will prepare the community to serve the individuals who will be moved into the community. I will tell this member that there will not be an individual moving from the institution to the community unless that community is ready to receive that person and those supports are there. In the 13 facility closures that have happened in the history of government, those supports were in the community before those people were moved. I will tell this member as well that a \$110-million announcement that came along with that facility closure announcement secures additional funding in this sector as we move to grow the capacity of services for developmental individuals.

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture and Food. Parts of the agribusiness sector in Ontario are having a record year. Now, for example, the Chicken Farmers of Ontario are here today, and we welcome them. But as you know, Minister, other sectors are facing unprecedented challenges.

As the member for Perth-Middlesex, I'm keenly aware of the devastatingly negative impacts of the continued border closure of Ontario cattle to the US market. I want to give my farmers some hope. I understand that today there was a major announcement in regard to the Chinese market. Could you explain its significance to the beef and dairy farmers of Perth-Middlesex?

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I would like to thank the member from Pork-Middlesex—pardon me, Perth-Middlesex, the pork capital of Ontario—for that. I think it's important to recognize and we need to commend the federal government for moving forward on signing two protocols with the government of China to restore trade in livestock genetics. This is one of the first positive signs that we have seen in the past 17 months. I know, in speaking with the federal minister, that there are other initiatives in place. But this is definitely going to help the farmers of this province. This is, I think, going to help send the message to other governments that Canadian cattle are safe.

Mr Wilkinson: That's just great news. Minister, as you know, last Friday the US imposed a punitive duty on Ontario pork. As you mentioned, pork is huge in my riding. This is a direct threat to the success of the many pork producers in my riding.

On Monday, along with my seatmate, the member for Markham, who's the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, I was at a reception where the Premier spoke. It was a reception in honour of all the Consuls General who have offices here in Toronto. He was kind enough to introduce me to Madam Chen, the Consul General for the People's Republic of China. We discussed the punitive US duty. I asked her if her country would be interested in expanding our agricultural trade. She said yes. She's arranging a meeting.

Minister, would you be prepared to meet with representatives from the People's Republic of China?

Hon Mr Peters: In response to the member, certainly, I look forward to the opportunity to meet with the Chinese officials, because what we need to do is try to develop new trade opportunities. That's why I want to commend the member from Chatham-Kent Essex, Pat Hoy, who's been working very hard with the Korean delegation to try and develop new markets for not only Canadian beef but Canadian pork, which is ultimately going to help pork producers in your riding. That's why it's great to have the Chicken Farmers of Ontario here today, because they play a very important role in the agricultural economy of this province.

That's why we stand up. We made sure that Ontario had a place at the table in Geneva at the world trade talks. We were there defending the interests of supply management. We were there defending the interests of individuals like these chicken farmers who are here today. We're going to stand up and do everything we can to resume trade. It is unfortunate that we've seen the border closed to beef and the additional duties that are being imposed on the swine industry, but we're going to continue to stand up and advocate for Ontario farmers.

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

Hon Mr Peters: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I'd just like to correct the record on a comment that was made in the House here earlier today. There was a comment raised about a telephone number, a farm crisis line. There is a farm crisis—

The Speaker: Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: One at a time. That's not a point of order.

Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: Earlier in question period, the Minister of Health referred to a document where he quoted Grant Walsh, the CEO of St Peter's hospital. I'd like that document tabled in the House.

The Speaker: That's not a point of order.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. All who are leaving the Legislature now, maybe you'd do so quietly. As a former Speaker used to say, when the Speaker is standing, I would like members to be sitting. Be seated. It brings a bit of order to the place.

PETITIONS

CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas there are approximately 23,000 children and youth in Simcoe county and York region who have special needs; and

"Whereas approximately 6,000 of these children have multiple special needs that require a range of core rehabilitation services; and

"Whereas children with multiple special needs (and their families) throughout the province access ongoing rehabilitation services that are critical for their development at children's treatment centres in their area; and

"Whereas there is no children's treatment centre in Simcoe county or York region. For families that can travel, the closest services are in Toronto; and

"Whereas Simcoe county and York region is the only area left in the entire province that does not have access to children's treatment centre services in their own area; and

"Whereas, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care provided funding to the Simcoe York District Health Council for implementation planning for an integrated children's rehabilitation services system in December 2001; and

"Whereas the implementation plan was submitted to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care in December 2002; and

"Whereas the proposal was reviewed and approved by the appropriate ministries in 2003 and in August the Ministry of Health advised the Simcoe county and York region district health council that the funding had been committed and would be available shortly;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to release the funding for the children's treatment centre in Simcoe county and York region so that core rehabilitation services can be delivered to the children and youth in Simcoe county and York region."

I support the petition and sign it.

1520

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have hundreds more of these petitions coming in about the cuts to health services. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the McGuinty Liberal government is cutting provincial funding for essential health care services like optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic care;

"Whereas this privatization of health care services will force Ontarians to pay out-of-pocket for essential health care;

"Whereas Ontarians already pay for health care through their taxes and will be forced to pay even more through the government's new regressive health tax;

"Whereas the Liberals promised during the election that they would not cut or privatize health care services in Ontario;

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

"We demand the McGuinty Liberal government keep its promises and guarantee adequate provincial funding for critical health services like eye, physiotherapy and chiropractic care."

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature to it.

GO TRANSIT SERVICES

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly from the Lisgar Residents' Association, and it reads as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

As one of those residents, I affix my signature.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): "To the Parliament of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I sign that.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I have a petition that reads, "We Deserve Better: It's Time for a Raise!"

It says:

"To the Ontario provincial Legislature:

"Because the minimum wage was frozen at \$6.85 for almost nine years, despite significant increases to the cost of living; and

"Because the McGuinty Liberals have raised it by a mere 30 cents and \$7.15 is still far too low; and

"Because a full-time worker earning the current minimum wage in a large city is almost \$6,000 below the poverty line, and to reach the poverty line would need an hourly wage of at least \$10; and

"Because the minimum wage should provide people with an adequate standard of living;

"We demand that the Ontario government immediately increase the minimum wage to at least the poverty line—that means \$10 an hour—and index it to the cost of living."

I support this petition.

IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

Mr Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly from a group of residents in the Lisgar area. It is about access to trades and professions in Ontario and reads as follows:

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

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

"Whereas Ontario, its businesses, its people and its institutions badly need the professional, managerial and

technical skills that many newcomers to Canada have and want to use;

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

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

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition. I affix my signature and ask Anthony to carry it.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas many volunteer fire departments in Ontario are strengthened by the service of double-hatter firefighters who work as professional, full-time firefighters and also serve as volunteer firefighters on their free time and in their home communities; and

"Whereas the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association has declared their intent to 'phase out' these double-hatter firefighters; and

"Whereas double-hatter firefighters are being threatened by the union leadership and forced to resign as volunteer firefighters or face losing their full-time jobs and this is weakening volunteer fire departments in Ontario; and

"Whereas Waterloo-Wellington MPP Ted Arnott has introduced Bill 52, the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act, that would uphold the right to volunteer and solve this problem concerning public safety in Ontario;

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

"That the provincial government express public support for MPP Ted Arnott's Bill 52 and willingness to pass it into law or introduce similar legislation that protects the right of firefighters to volunteer in their home communities on their own free time."

I have signed this, and it has come from my riding.

EYE EXAMINATIONS

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): "Whereas the 2004 provincial budget was not clear on whether adult optometry patients who have or who are at risk for medical conditions, such as diabetes, glaucoma, macular degeneration and clinically significant cataracts would continue to be covered through the Ontario health insurance plan; and

“Whereas Ontario’s optometrists strongly feel that Ontario seniors, those under 20 and those with chronic sight-threatening diseases must continue to receive primary eye care services directly from Ontario’s optometrists; and

“Whereas forcing patients to be referred to optometrists through their family physicians ignores the years of specialized training optometrists undertake to detect, diagnose and treat eye conditions; and

“Whereas almost 140 communities across the province have already been designated as underserved for family practitioners and the government’s approach will only exacerbate the problem unnecessarily;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care immediately clarify that the eye examination services they provide to patients at risk for medical conditions will continue to be covered by OHIP and the coverage for these services is not dependent on a patient being referred to an optometrist by a family physician.”

I agree, and I’ve signed this petition.

1530

Mr Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition to the Legislature, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas the 2004 provincial budget was not clear on whether adult optometry patients who have or who are at risk for medical conditions, such as diabetes, glaucoma, macular degeneration and clinically significant cataracts would continue to be covered through the Ontario health insurance plan; and

“Whereas Ontario’s optometrists strongly feel that Ontario seniors, those under 20 and those with chronic sight-threatening diseases must continue to receive primary eye care services directly from Ontario’s optometrists; and

“Whereas forcing patients to be referred to optometrists through their family physicians ignores the years of specialized training optometrists undertake to detect, diagnose and treat eye conditions; and

“Whereas almost 140 communities across the province have already been designated as underserved for family practitioners, and the government’s approach will only exacerbate the problem unnecessarily;

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

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care immediately clarify that the eye examination services they provide to patients at risk for medical conditions will continue to be covered by OHIP, and the coverage for those services is not dependent on a patient being referred to an optometrist by a family physician.”

I affix my name in full support.

TTC RIGHT-OF-WAY

Mr Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition. It’s addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and especially to the Minister of the Environment. It reads as follows:

“Whereas an environmental assessment is underway on St Clair Avenue West to study the potential transit improvements;

“Whereas the consultation process so far has been in bad faith, top-down and rushed, which has disappointed and angered the local community almost entirely, and not been up to any acceptable public standards;”

Interjection.

Mr Ruprecht: I think this petition is of such importance that the member may want to listen to this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Order. Continue, please.

Mr Ruprecht: That’s right. The member may want to listen to this petition because of the importance of the very subject.

The Deputy Speaker: Continue with the petition, please.

Mr Ruprecht: “Whereas the comments by the chair and the members of the Toronto Transit Commission have made it clear that there is a predetermined outcome to this EA process, regardless of the objections of the local community;

“Whereas a dedicated right-of-way would restrict left-turn access to neighbouring streets;

“Whereas a dedicated right-of-way would force significantly more traffic on to local streets;

“Whereas safety must be a high priority;

“Whereas a right-of-way would lead to the reduction or elimination of on-street parking;

“Whereas traffic bottlenecks at certain intersections and underpasses are already terrible;

“Whereas the road would have substantial negative economic impact on local businesses;

“Whereas there is no guarantee that a dedicated road will improve transit service substantially, as the number of streetcars serving the streets will actually be reduced;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, strongly urge the Ministry of the Environment to order a full environmental assessment on St Clair Avenue West, one that genuinely consults and takes into consideration the views and opinions of the local community.”

Since I agree with this wholeheartedly, I’m glad to sign it as well.

CHILDREN’S HEALTH SERVICES

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): “To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas there are approximately 23,000 children and youth in Simcoe county and York region who have special needs; and

“Whereas approximately 6,000 of these children have special needs that require a range of core rehabilitation services; and

“Whereas children with special needs and their families throughout the province access ongoing rehabilitation services that are critical for their development at children’s treatment centres in their area; and

“Whereas there is no children’s treatment centre in Simcoe county or York region—for families that can travel, the closest services are in Toronto; and

“Whereas Simcoe county and York region is the only area left in the province that does not have access to children’s treatment centre services in their own area; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care provided funding to the Simcoe York District Health Council for implementation planning for an integrated children’s rehabilitation services system in December 2001; and

“Whereas the implementation plan was submitted to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care in December 2002; and

“Whereas the proposal was reviewed and approved by the appropriate ministries in 2003 and, in August, the Ministry of Health advised the Simcoe county and York region district health council that the funding had been committed and would be available shortly;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario to release the funding for the children’s treatment centre in Simcoe county and York region so that core rehabilitation services can be delivered to the children and youth in Simcoe county and York region.”

I’m pleased to sign my name to that.

OPPOSITION DAY

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

INDUSTRIE AGRICOLE

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I move that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario call upon the government:

To recognize the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food’s budget has been reduced by over 20%;

To reinstate full and future funding to the municipal outlet drainage program, which has been cut and given only temporary transition funding;

To reinstate full and future funding to the genetic research programs of Ontario dairy herd improvement, Ontario swine improvement and beef improvement organizations, so that Ontario food quality and safety will continue to excel;

To provide BSE funding to Ontario’s ruminant industry quickly as is being done in other provinces; and

To call upon Premier McGuinty to fulfill his campaign promise to support the farmers of Ontario by doing these things immediately.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Bruce Crozier): Mr Hardeman has moved:

That the Legislative Assembly call upon the government,

To recognize the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food’s budget has been reduced by over 20%;

To reinstate full and future funding to the municipal outlet drainage program, which has been cut and given only temporary transition funding;

To reinstate full and future funding to the genetic research programs of Ontario dairy herd improvement, Ontario swine improvement and beef improvement organizations, so that Ontario food quality and safety will continue to excel;

To provide BSE funding to Ontario’s ruminant industry quickly as is being done in other provinces; and

To call upon Premier McGuinty to fulfill his campaign promise to support the farmers of Ontario by doing these things immediately.

Mr Hardeman. The member for Leeds-Grenville.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Hardeman, you have the floor first. If you yield the floor, it goes in rotation to the next person.

Mr Hardeman: I would ask for unanimous consent to let Mr Runciman speak first.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr Hardeman has asked for unanimous consent that Mr Runciman speak first on this motion.

Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): And that he speak second.

The Deputy Speaker: I didn’t hear him say that.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: That Mr Runciman speak first and that Mr Hardeman speak second. Is there unanimous agreement? Agreed.

Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I want to thank Mr Hardeman for his generosity, and I also want to thank him for tabling this motion. It’s an indication of the member’s commitment to the farming community in rural Ontario and the residents of rural Ontario, and of his deep faith in maintaining a way of life that is regrettably under severe stress at the moment.

I wanted to lead off as the Leader of the Opposition, albeit temporarily—we’re not sure how temporary—by indicating the support of the leader of our party, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario, Mr John Tory, for this, being the first opposition day in this session of the Legislature. I think it indicates the commitment of our caucus with respect to representing and making sure the concerns of rural Ontarians are heard in the Ontario Legislature, and hopefully they will be recognized by the government of the day.

To a significant degree, that isn’t the case as we speak. We have seen a number of situations occur. I represent a riding that has a significant rural component, and I know that the folks living in rural Ontario are under living situations and working situations they have not experienced in my lifetime and their lifetimes. We’re seeing people leaving the farming community, under significant stress. A lot of it can be attributed to the mad cow crisis—I think that’s an appropriate description—and the fallout from mad cow.

It’s not just the beef farmers who are facing these challenges. As a result of this, we’re seeing a ripple

effect, and it's slowly but surely having an impact on many others: dairy farmers and their ability to get rid of cull cows; we're seeing it with feed dealers who are now facing situations where they are having difficulty maintaining and continuing in business because of the shortfall in income for many in the farming community; farm equipment dealers; and those who operate a range of small businesses in rural Ontario, like a grocery store, a hardware store, whatever it might be, who are now also suffering from the impacts that have trickled down, if you will, from the mad cow crisis.

1540

Just recently we saw the Kingston Stockyards closing and the family—I think it's the Martin family—who had run that business for many years losing that family business and losing their own home when the bank made a decision to foreclose. Those are the kinds of difficult situations we're seeing.

I met recently with representatives of the OFA in the Leeds-Grenville area, and they were describing to me some of the stresses their families are under. We don't have statistics—I don't have them, and perhaps we may hear some later today—about suicide rates and marriage breakdowns, those kinds of traumatic situations that many in rural Ontario are facing today.

Our role here as the official opposition is to talk about the Liberal government's response, and it has been sad to say the least. What have they done? They have delayed the safety net payouts, they have delayed supports with respect to mad cow—in fact, the Premier had to be embarrassed into even announcing money. After he was booed at the plowing match, he miraculously came up with money with respect to BSE. I call that government by crowd reaction.

We have things like a farmer can't take a cow to the local abattoir to have it slaughtered and cut for his own family's use because of initiatives by this government. You can take a deer, but you can't take a cow for local use. Water regulations are another situation causing serious problems in rural Ontario. This Liberal government is going to close down community and church halls because of their intransigence. We have a Minister of Agriculture who said he was going to be a strong spokesman on behalf of rural Ontario. That just isn't happening. They have no faith in him. They have no confidence in him to speak up and fight for them around the cabinet table. It just is not happening.

Mr Hardeman: Today I stand to present this motion to draw attention to the fact this government has cut over 20% from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's budget, and important programs such as the municipal outlet drainage program and genetic research funding to Ontario dairy herd improvement, Ontario swine improvement and the beef improvement organizations have suffered as a result.

I want to draw attention to the lack of understanding this government has shown by cutting programs without regard to consequences and with no consultation with the people who are directly affected. I want to draw attention

to the incompetence this government has shown in the administration of its programs by not getting transition funding to farmers who have been waiting for a year, and by not being ready to distribute BSE funds as soon as they were available.

I want to draw attention to this government's failure to keep its election promise of showing support for Ontario's farmers by making the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food a lead ministry at the cabinet table. I will show that this government is not making agriculture a lead ministry; it's actually walking the other way, leaving the Ministry of Agriculture behind.

Since the election, I have been concerned about the importance of the agriculture community and rural Ontario to this government. First, rural affairs disappeared off the radar screen, only to have its programs reappear under the jurisdiction of the minister responsible for urban infrastructure. Since then the Liberals have marched on with an obvious urban agenda.

This government has consistently diverted dollars from rural to urban Ontario and has set in place programs that benefit large cities over towns and villages. It has not protected rural residents from unfair hydro increases, as they promised. It has broken its promise of transition funding for tobacco farmers. The 2 cents per litre gas tax proposed for municipalities is dedicated to transit, diverting the majority to urban Ontario. With the massive cuts to the agriculture budget, the ministry is no longer able to sustain programs that were invaluable to the farmers of this province, like the municipal outlet drainage program.

In May of this year, the Liberal government saw fit to remove \$128 million from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food's budget. It was the largest cut to any ministry—over 20% of the ministry's budget. The minister stood in this House and refused to admit that he's at the mercy of his urban colleagues and that he was powerless to stop his portfolio from being ravaged. He has explained away the cuts, but in reality \$128 million is just gone. It has gone to benefit an urban agenda.

I stand today to call upon this government to recognize that the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food budget has been reduced by 20%. When the 20% cut was announced, it was obvious farmers would not enjoy the same support they had from our government. However, I think everyone believed there would be some consultation about priority funding and that stakeholders would at last have real input into their decisions. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Municipalities and farm organizations were appalled by the lack of consultation. Eighteen hours' notice was given that the Ontario municipal drainage program would be cut. Municipalities were faxed at 7:30 at night to let them know that the program would end at 5 pm the next day. Let's be clear, this is not a program that helps municipalities, but the money will now have to be paid by the farmers directly.

This proves how little the Liberal government understands or cares about the impact its policies are having on

the daily lives of average citizens or how deep is the rift they create between rural and urban Ontario. The Ministry of Agriculture's own communication states that drains "are a vital component of local infrastructure. Without them many areas of the province would be subjected to regular flooding, reduced production from agricultural land and increased public health risks." Yet the program was cut without regard to consequences. It was only after the Premier met with massive negative reaction from farmers and municipalities that even he thought about transition funding and consulting with stakeholders. If he had consulted, he would have known how the few million dollars he was going to save by cutting the program would so drastically affect a farmer's bottom line. I stand today to call upon this government to reinstate full and future funding to this program. Temporary transition funding is not adequate or appropriate.

Then funding for genetic research was cut. The Ontario herd improvement, swine improvement and beef improvement organizations were told they would no longer receive financial support from the government. With no consultation, millions of dollars were lost to these organizations without a word of warning, even though auditor's reports were received stating they were meeting and exceeding the terms of their contracts. Farmers still reeling from the impact of BSE will now have the cost of these essential services added to the price of doing business, or in many cases their losses in doing business.

Finally, I question the rationale behind removing the funds from the DHI, OSI and BIO when they use a portion of the money to provide food safety and traceability programs. The Haines report recommendation 12 states, "I recommend that the provincial government work together with industry and commodity groups as well as the government of Canada and the other provinces to develop a national strategy for traceability." The Liberal government has declared its commitment to begin implementing this report and has publicly stated they will implement every one of the report's recommendations as soon as possible. The minister has called on everyone involved in food safety to make this happen. Well, the DHI, OSI and BIO were doing just that, yet the funding was cut, again without regard to consequences. The minister didn't stop to think that he was cutting funding to an organization which was doing a job that he was asking them to do. I stand today to call upon this government to reinstate full and future funding to do genetic research so that Ontario food quality and safety will continue to excel.

The minister and his staff have explained the \$128-million cut to the Ministry of Agriculture's budget as simply the end of one-time special funding. Minister Peters is on record as saying BSE relief is included in that group. The borders are still closed; the live cattle, beef and dairy farmers are still suffering extreme financial hardship; spin-off industries, processing industries and whole communities are suffering. This is not a situation that needs one-time funding, nor is it a time to

make drastic cuts to safety nets. Yet the minister says BSE is special one-time funding. Sixty-five million dollars of the budget cut came directly from safety nets, and money to cover farmers' needs through the agriculture policy framework dropped dramatically.

There were reasons why I, and our government's agriculture minister after me, did not sign the APF. It was because as it stood it was not a good deal for Ontario, and it's not a good deal for Ontario farmers. During my tenure as minister, I managed to get \$30 million more from the federal government to get Ontario's fair share of the safety net. That also, of course, included \$20 million more from the province to match federal funding. Minister Peters and the Liberal government have bargained that away. During my tenure, Ontario farmers got their cheques. Now when the time comes for the Ontario government to contribute their 40% to BSE compensation, they find themselves behind the eight ball, totally unprepared to administer the program.

Alberta put infrastructure in place as soon as the federal government announced the money. They had the applications ready and waiting, because that government recognized the dire need of its people. The Ontario government was nowhere to be seen. It took massive negative reaction to prod this government into doing what was right, and still they seem to drag their heels.

When a crisis of similar proportion was happening in the pork industry under our administration, we had the cheques to the farmers before the federal money was even produced. We had cheques in their hands within 30 days. I call upon the government to provide BSE funding to Ontario's ruminant industry quickly, as is being done in other provinces.

1550

But the incompetence of the administration of safety net money doesn't stop there. Farmers in this province are waiting for safety net bridge funding that should have been in their pockets a long time ago. We're talking about \$90 million. Forty-five million of the \$90 million was for the 2003 year. Now commodity representatives are saying they don't expect to see that money in 2004, never mind the other \$45 million that should be paid out this year. The Liberal election platform stated, "We believe that the role of the Minister of Agriculture and Food is one of the most important in cabinet. We will make OMAF a lead ministry in a Liberal government."

The developments in agriculture thus far tell me this is simply not true, that this is another Liberal broken promise. The way this government is managing agriculture is just not acceptable. Therefore, I call upon Premier McGuinty and Minister Peters to fulfill their campaign promise to support the farmers of Ontario by reinstating funds to the ministry budget, to the municipal outlet drainage program, to genetic research organizations and to safety nets, and to do this in a competent, efficient manner as soon as possible. I and the farmers of this province would truly like to see Premier McGuinty and the Liberal government make OMAF a lead ministry at the cabinet table, as they promised to do in the

election. I think the people of Ontario deserve nothing less.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I can think of no better time than now to have this debate, because now, one year after the beginning of the McGuinty government, we're in a position where we can compare all of the promises made with all of the promises broken. I think this needs to happen, because the record of promises on the one hand, and then the conduct on the other—the contrast is almost breathtaking. First, I want to concentrate on some of the promises made.

Before and during the election, Mr McGuinty said, "The Harris-Eves government has completely ignored the needs of our province's rural communities. It has downloaded unfair financial burdens on to rural municipalities." Then he went on to say, "We will give rural communities a voice and provide them with stable funding so that they can chart their own course." That was one of the promises made. Then there was, I guess almost contiguous with that, another promise which said that Liberals "will make research work for Ontario farmers." Then there was another promise made, referring to the McGuinty government: "We will consult with the industry. The Harris-Eves government has done little meaningful consultation with farmers on issues that directly affect them. We will listen to Ontario farmers and get their best advice." Those were the promises that were made during the election. Now, one year after, I think it is important to look at what in fact has happened.

Let me deal with the first promise, the promise that said the McGuinty government "will give rural communities a voice and provide them with stable funding so that they can chart their own course." Well, what we have seen happen is that since then the Ministry of Agriculture and Food has lost 20% of its budget, and program after program has been slashed with no consultation. Then there was the promise that the McGuinty government "will make research work for Ontario farmers." Well, there were a number of strategies, a number of initiatives that were carrying on important research, whether it was genetic research or whether it was research in terms of crops, and these have been slashed with no input, no consultation with farmers, none, simply a fax—received, in some cases, in the middle of the night—saying, "As of tomorrow, the funding for this strategy, this initiative or that program is gone."

The promise to consult with the industry is, I think, a most egregious failure. Imagine, when you have established programs within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and farm organizations are contributing partners to those programs and initiatives, and then you receive not a phone call from the minister, not a request for a meeting from the minister, but a fax in the middle of night telling you that the program, the initiative, the strategy that you're a partner in, is terminated unilaterally. This shows, indeed, a unique respect for farmers and farm organizations.

I want to go back to the complaint, the criticism of the former Conservatives that they were downloading. I want to talk, in that context, about the municipal outlet drainage program. This is another one that was literally eliminated: no consultation, no discussion, just a quiet notice to municipalities that were affected that the program was gone.

What does this do to municipalities? Well, I guess if municipalities took the same attitude as the McGuinty government, they could try to say to farmers, "Well, it all falls on you," but municipalities can't do that. Municipalities know that they've got municipal drains, that they've got drainage systems that were established over time using the municipal outlet drainage program, and they have to maintain them and continue them.

So what this is going to mean for municipalities, quite simply, is that municipalities are being hit with another round of downloading. The same downloading that Mr McGuinty used to criticize the Conservatives for, the McGuinty government is now repeating in spades. But you didn't even have the decency to go out and consult with municipalities or farm organizations. You didn't even have the decency to call them and say, "There's an issue here." You simply tried, in the dead of night, to push it down on to municipalities and hope that there would be minimum media coverage of the issue. The Conservatives may have downloaded openly. What we're getting from the McGuinty Liberals is downloading on to rural communities by stealth, downloading by the back door, and the municipal outlet drainage program is an example of exactly that.

Let me just say that this whole issue is penny-wise and pound foolish, because municipalities simply will not have the money to maintain some of these municipal drains and farmers will not have the money to maintain some of these municipal drains, and you are playing with a very serious situation which is probably going to erupt two or three years down the road. It will then cost more money to come in and undo the damage that you've created than you think you may have cut from the budget.

Just to give you an idea of what an unwise decision this really is: The budget of the provincial government is \$77 billion annually. Do you know how much the government wants to take out of this program? Seven million dollars. When you've got a budget of \$77 billion, I think rural municipalities and farmers who have taken part in the municipal outlet drainage program are worth at least \$7 million. How piddly, how penny-pinching and, frankly, how cowardly is the way you tried to do it.

I know the minister, when asked to comment, said that, really, he had no control over this; this was being done by the minions in the Ministry of Finance. If that's true—and I've heard that the minister offered up that rationale—then it says to me that this is a government that really doesn't take agricultural and rural issues very seriously at all.

1600

I want to deal with the issue of research. I want to repeat the promise that was made by the McGuinty

government, that research knowledge needs to be applied to the agricultural industry, that research is important, that the government was going to make research work for farmers.

We have the Ontario swine improvement strategy. The swine improvement strategy, as all farmers know but perhaps other Ontarians don't know, is a not-for-profit, industry-run organization dedicated to providing genetic improvements to swine herds so that farmers get the benefit of some of the increased productivity, some of the improvement in the herd. It is the only organization in Ontario charged with evaluating pigs and the quality of swine herds under the Canadian swine improvement program. A government study conducted by KPMG concluded in June that the swine improvement program was meeting or exceeding the terms of its contracts with the provincial government.

So here you actually had a program that was a success and was being recognized as a success by outside independent evaluators. This was research that was working. And what did you do? You cut it, with no notice, no consultation, no work with farm organizations or farmers. You completely contradicted what you said in the election. You cut a research strategy that outside, independent evaluators said is working and is working very successfully.

Then there's the whole issue of Beef Improvement Ontario, the BIO strategy. Once again, that's an industry-operated organization dedicated to providing genetic and management information services to the beef industry, right from the grower to the packer. This one is particularly hard to understand, because this one occurs in the middle of the BSE crisis, when you've got not only the Americans but other beef-consuming countries that want to know more and more information about your beef herds, that want more and more information about your capacity to not only protect and sustain but improve your beef herds. What does the McGuinty government do? They cut the single most successful strategy. Beef farmers out there across the province—the minister knows this, because even beef farmers in northern Ontario—first of all, were surprised. They were flabbergasted that a government would cut this program, cut this kind of research initiative, in the context of the BSE crisis. Once again, an independent, outside evaluator looked at the BIO program and said that it was, in fact, exceeding the criteria, exceeding the expectations that were set out by the government.

I want to talk just briefly about Ontario dairy herd improvement. Dairy herd improvement lost \$1.4 million, cut by the province—once again, a cut of a research program which was proven to be effective and efficient in terms of what it was doing for Ontario's dairy herds. No consultation, no discussion; just another one of those faxes in the middle of the night: "This program is gone. This money is gone."

I want to refer to the BSE crisis. I was at the international plowing match earlier this fall. In fact, I've been going to the plowing match since about 1993. I

remember some of the tough decisions that Bob Rae made. I remember Bob Rae going to the plowing match. But do you know what? I don't remember Bob Rae being booed. I remember Mike Harris, as much as I detested the agenda of Mike Harris and the Conservatives, going to the plowing match. I remember a lot of criticism of him, but I don't remember Mike Harris being booed. I remember Ernie Eves being at the plowing match a couple of years ago, but I don't remember Ernie Eves being booed.

This year, for the first time in my memory, the Premier of Ontario was booed at the International Plowing Match. Not only that—and the minister knows this—but after a circus of cabinet ministers was brought up on stage to speak, one of the representatives of the International Plowing Match went to the microphone and said that it was the first time in his memory that cabinet ministers came to the International Plowing Match and had nothing to say, no announcement to make for the farm communities of Ontario. You guys are making history over there.

Then we saw the almost-emergency announcement on BSE that happened after the fact. You know, when the Titanic is going down, you run around and rearrange the deck chairs very quickly and put up the podium and say, "We have something to announce." I say to the minister—and I don't bear any malice toward the minister—it looked terrible. It looked like, after the horses had left the barn, after the fire was fully in effect, you suddenly realized there was a problem.

Maybe I can make a hint to the minister here: Sometimes when you don't have enough people in your own caucus supporting your position, that's when you have to start to rely upon opposition members to start to support your position. I say this to Mr Peters with sincerity: I think that's a strategy you're going to have to employ, because it's very clear that with all of your urban colleagues in the cabinet, you don't have much support.

When the news media repeats the story that you didn't know about some of these cuts, that you didn't know they were happening and that in fact the decisions were being made by minions in the Ministry of Finance and your office wasn't being kept informed, that suggests to me that you'd better reach out to some of the opposition members, because you're going to need some allies in the battles that are yet to come.

I just want to go over the BSE crisis once again. I think the minister probably spoke to a lot of farmers at the plowing match. He has probably spoken to a lot of other beef farmers. The minister must know—it doesn't matter if you're from eastern Ontario, southwestern Ontario, central Ontario, northeastern Ontario or northwestern Ontario—that most beef producers probably have about another five or six months left. Most of them have completely exhausted their own equity, have taken second mortgages on their homes or farms, have arranged lines of credit and exhausted those lines of credit. They're in debt in terms of their suppliers, whether it be for feed or other products. So, in many cases, they're about six months away from losing it.

The minister should also know that it won't just be the actual producers; this will have a ripple effect from the original producers to suppliers and so on in rural communities.

Farmers were very clear about what has to happen. Yes, there has to be some emergency assistance, but they're saying, "Look, it's going to take six, seven, eight years to climb out of this." Their equity has been so exhausted, all their financial means have been so exhausted and they are so far into debt that they're going to need at least seven or eight years to climb out of this. What they're expecting from the minister and from this government and from the Liberals in Ottawa is a strategy of low-interest loans that will allow them to spread this impact over the seven or eight years.

That's going to be the test that the minister faces over the next six months. You're going to have to persuade your cabinet colleagues who want to give physicians a 35% or 36% pay increase that the beef industry in rural Ontario is going to have to have access to low-interest loans if they're going to be able to dig themselves out of the BSE crisis.

1610

I say this to be helpful to the minister. This will be the next test. This will be your test to determine whether or not you're effective. If you can't come up with a strategy of low-interest loans to help farmers spread the burden, to spread the difficulties that they are carrying now over five, six or seven years, then it's going to be over for too many of them.

I actually wish the minister well in terms of persuading some of his urban colleagues in the cabinet that farm issues, rural issues, rural municipal issues have to be taken seriously. But I have to tell you that what's happened with the rural drainage program, what's happened with the BIO program, what's happened with the swine improvement program isn't encouraging.

You didn't consult. You've cut the research. You've cut the budget. In too many cases, the attempt was made to do this in the middle of the night in the hope to duck under the radar screen and under the media screen. It may have succeeded in a couple of instances, but it's not going to succeed in the longer term.

You need some help. You need to start reaching out to some of the opposition members to be your allies in what is already a difficult job and, I predict, will become more difficult.

Hon Steve Peters (Minister of Agriculture and Food): I appreciate the lectures that I've received from both sides of the House. I think I'll start with the NDP. The NDP is the government that closed two agricultural colleges in this province: closed New Liskeard, closed Centralia. This is the government that cut meat inspectors. They went from 130 meat inspectors to 80 meat inspectors in 1993.

Then, I really appreciate the lecture from the Tories. They talk about the member's commitment to agriculture. I took an opportunity to review Hansard. The member who stands as the critic and the defender of

agriculture spoke to agriculture five times between 1995 and 1998, at a time when the budget was slashed. Judge not lest ye be judged. In 1996-97, \$12.8 million cut from the agriculture budget; in 1997-98, \$31.4 million cut from the agriculture budget; in 1998-99, \$62.8 million cut from the agriculture budget. Where was the great defender of agriculture within his own government? He wasn't there; he was silent. That silence showed that he supported those cuts to agriculture, and that's not appropriate.

We've heard that this budget has been reduced by 20%. Well, \$64 million of this budget was bridge funding that was taken out of the budget; \$26 million related to the ending of the Healthy Futures program, and the government had already announced the ending of the Healthy Futures program; \$41.5 million related to one-time BSE support. To listen to his comments that we've cut the budget—we've had difficult decisions to make. We did have some decisions to make that I know have not been popular, but I chuckle at the former minister and some of his comments.

Let's talk genetics programs. Perhaps the member doesn't remember the letter that he wrote to me. He wrote to me on April 8, 2004, talking about conflicts of interest in the Ontario swine industry. The member sent me a copy of an e-mail dated March 25, talking about the fact that OSI was standing in the way of private sector genetic research. The member wrote to me and said, "I think we all agree government programs should not compete with the free market and should maintain the focus on research for which they were intended." Well, come on. You can't have it both ways, to stand up and be this defender, and yet on April 8, he wrote telling me to cut support for OSI. Very unusual.

The municipal outlet drainage program: Again, I chuckle at this member and where his defence was for this program when it was in place within his own government, because they cut \$1.2 million from the drainage program. You cut it, Ernie. We've met with the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, we've met with countless municipalities and we're working on the development of a new program for the municipal outlets drainage program.

I contest the comments from the leader of the third party, because this was not downloading. We've kept in place the \$1.5 million, paying 50% of the cost of the drainage superintendents. This was a program where the dollars flowed to the farmers. This is one-third funding to the farmers, so I don't necessarily agree with his comment that it was downloading.

But as well, I speak to the other programs we had in place that had to be cut. It was even during the time when Mr Hardeman was the minister. Those three organizations were very well aware that they had to be on the road to self-sufficiency. Actually, that seed was planted by the NDP government. It was the NDP government that started and led those three organizations to move toward self-sufficiency.

I question as well the comments about support for BSE. The previous government and our government

recognized the need, that we had to come to the table in a time of crisis. And we have been there. Over \$92 million in unbudgeted money has flowed to farmers in this province. Part of that \$92 million was \$7 million that we've invested in the increase of slaughter capacity. Because one of the challenges we face in this province is that we can't eat our way out of this crisis. There is one way that every one of you can help, though: Make that conscious decision when you go to the grocery store—not just with beef, but with any product to ask if it's an Ontario product. Ask if it's a Canadian product. That's a way that you can help. Do what I did last night at a restaurant here in Toronto. I asked the waitress, "Are we eating Canadian beef?" Do you know what? Part of the meal was Canadian beef. It wasn't all Canadian beef. So ask that question. That's a way that every one of us can be of some assistance to the farmers of this province, to support agriculture.

We have been there. We've worked toward increasing slaughter capacity in this province, and I think that's extremely important. These are long-term investments, not short-term investments. We're going to make sure, with the additional \$30 million that we have available to us—and I thank Premier McGuinty. Both parties should understand the process that exists of having to go before Management Board and ultimately to cabinet to gain approval. The government was there: the Premier was there with support in the BSE crisis in this province.

That \$30 million a year for the set-aside program: We are working with the Ontario Cattlemen's Association to make sure we get this program right. One of the challenges we face with made-in-Ottawa programs is that we don't often have the flexibility to ensure that we can develop a program that best meets the needs of the farmers in a particular province. But we're working with the Cattlemen's Association to ensure that we get it right.

I want to comment as well on some of the issues that were raised, and I know some of my colleagues are going to raise this as well. The former Minister of Agriculture, Mr Hardeman, again talks about his commitment and that we need to make sure we have people on the ground. Who is the minister who put the final nail in the coffin of the agricultural offices in this province? Ernie Hardeman. In December 1999, with a stroke of the pen, the Ag offices were closed in this province.

I hear as well the temporary leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition say we're going the close rural schools and rural church halls etc. Well, where was that honourable member when regulation 170 went before the cabinet? Where were the members of the rural caucus on the other side when regulation 170 went before cabinet? Non-existent. You didn't speak up and say anything in that regard.

Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): We were speaking.

Hon Mr Peters: You may have been speaking, but nobody was listening. We're listening. The Minister of the Environment has made the commitment that we're going to find a way to fix regulation 170. You didn't do

it. We heard the member from Lanark-Carleton earlier in the year introduce legislation that we need to stop the assessment of maple syrup operations as industrial operations.

Interjection: What did we do?

Hon Mr Peters: We fixed it. Who started it? The Tories started it. The Tories started that problem, and we cleaned it up. We made that commitment to the maple syrup producers in this province. We've cleaned it up. We're moving forward on regulation 170. We're cleaning it up.

1620

I heard the member talk about not signing the agricultural policy framework. Well, perhaps the member should pick up the phone and call John Gillespie from the Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council, because we met extensively with the Agricultural Commodity Council before this province signed the agricultural policy framework to make sure we would get it right, to make sure this was going to be a deal that would best benefit the farmers of Ontario.

We heard a question today, a concern about the CAIS program. We were able to include in the signing of the APF an annual review of the CAIS program to address some of the concerns the honourable member raised. We heard from the cattle industry that negative margins had to be included in the signing of the APF. We were able to negotiate with the federal government and have negative margins included in the APF.

The APF, over a five-year period, is going to bring \$1.7 billion into this province to support the farmers of Ontario, and we're there with our share to support those farmers. We're also there to ensure that we are there supporting rural Ontario. I challenge the comments that were made on the other side. As the Premier pointed out earlier today, we have been there supporting rural Ontario through education and other initiatives.

Thank you very much for this note. The NDP, from 1990 to 1995: a 28% cut to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food budget, \$132 million. So, combined, over \$100 million from the Tories and \$132 million from this government is \$230 million. We've had to find approximately \$10 million in savings. We're cleaning up a mess that was started with the NDP and accelerated with the Tories. These comments that we're not committed to supporting agriculture—I chuckle at the other side, and I can't use some of the words.

We've had the chicken farmers here today. This government demonstrated its clear commitment to the chicken farmers, to the whole supply managed sector. We had a representative in Geneva. We were there defending the interest of supply management in this province, to ensure that message got through. We were there, and we will continue to be there for the supply managed sector.

I heard a member earlier talk about tobacco. Tobacco is a challenge. We all know the harmful health effects of tobacco. Nobody's denying that. Even though some members say that second-hand smoke is not an issue, we know that second-hand smoke is an issue.

We have been left with a major fiscal mess, but we made a commitment to work with the farmers and those communities to help them transition to alternative crops, and we're going to honour that commitment. It may not be as quick as everyone would like. There are a lot of things we would like to have done right when we took office, but we weren't able to. But we are going to be there to help the tobacco farmers in this province. We're going to be there to help those communities.

Ladies and gentlemen, many of you don't realize that, yes, tobacco is a health issue—we're not denying that—but 96% of all the tobacco grown in Canada comes from five counties. Yes, it is an economic issue in those counties, and we're conscious of that. We're going to help those farmers in those communities make that transition.

We're not laughing at the farmers of this province. I laughed at your government or the previous government and what you did to the farmers of this province. Farmers need to be treated with respect, and we're going to do that. There are always going to be challenges, but we are going to work with the agricultural community. We can all do something.

The agricultural community is not a significant part of our population, but it is an important part of our population: 650,000 jobs; \$30 billion a year to the economy of this province; \$8.5 billion in exports; 40% of the food processing in all of Canada is here in the province of Ontario. The automotive industry may be the industry that drives the economy of this province, but it's agriculture that feeds it, and we need to be conscious of that.

So I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, and those of you at home who are watching, to make that conscious decision when go to a grocery store: Make sure you are there to support farmers. You can send that message by buying local, by buying Ontario, by buying Canadian.

We know that agriculture can play a role as we move forward on our health care initiative, on our education initiative. You just heard the minister talk about getting junk food out of the schools. One of the examples he cited was the great initiative of the Dairy Farmers of Ontario. We already know the apple producers in Ontario are supporting school apple programs here in Toronto. We can do more. We need to build partnerships. We need to get ourselves out of silos as ministries. We need to get ourselves out of silos in what we do in partnership with the industry. We need to work together, and we're going to work together.

There are some difficult decisions, and one of those decisions is that we will not support this resolution. That's not a message, because I can't believe this member would put that resolution on the floor knowing the damage he and his government did to agriculture.

I want to conclude with what the Ontario Federation of Agriculture said in December 1999, while Ernie Hardeman was the Minister of Agriculture, while the Ministry of Agriculture had already been inflicted with over \$100 million in cuts. This is Jack Wilkinson: "The government is 'gutting' a system that has served us so

well for so many years in many parts of the province. For many farmers, this is nothing more than a further erosion of ministry services in their communities."

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Nepean-Carleton, I can't hear it either. If you'd be quiet, it would help.

Hon Mr Peters: Don't talk about commitment to agriculture. Don't be judging when you can't judge yourselves. Look at yourselves in the mirror. And you the new members, ask what your government did to the Ministry of Agriculture. You were not friends of farmers. We are friends of farmers. We're going to work with the agricultural community, and we're going to make sure that everybody works with the agricultural community.

Ms Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I think we're having this opposition day because rural Ontarians are being treated as second-class citizens by this Liberal government and we've had enough of it. We're standing up for them right now, for the farmers.

Interjection.

Ms Scott: You are. Did you consult the people of Ontario, the municipalities?

Interjection.

Ms Scott: It's 2004, Steve.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Ms Scott: It's 2004. I just want to know what municipality you consulted with before you cut the municipal outlet drainage program. Did you consult with anybody? Did you say it was OK? We're asking for it to be immediately restored. That's the problem. You're hurting farmers at the worst time. You're hurting municipalities.

I spoke today about the CAIS cheques and why they're not flowing. They need to flow right away. They're not flowing fast enough and there could be even further delays, adding months on to the programs.

In the platform, you said "We will guarantee a strong Ministry of Agriculture and Food."

Interjection.

Ms Scott: As my friend from Nepean-Carleton said, what other minister is here? What value do you place on rural Ontario at the cabinet table? You've done nothing but hurt rural Ontario. I was not elected in those previous years, but I have lived in my riding all my life. I have not heard such an uproar as exists today in agriculture on the government supports that are available to them. David Windrem, a farmer, has phoned—I thank the Minister of Agriculture for offering to help the farmers in my riding who need their CAIS cheques flowing—and has contacted my office, and he still has not received a cheque.

I cannot emphasize enough the crisis that exists in rural Ontario. They are humble people. They want to stay in business, small business. They're closing their doors. They don't want to ask for money unless it's necessary. They're in a dire crisis. They need the cheques, and they need the cheques now. The reasonable time—it needs to be now. I can't emphasize that enough. The minister has been helpful, but we need to get the cheques out the door now. Six months is too long a wait. Farmers are reasonable, and that's just too long to wait.

1630

In addition to those two things I mentioned, what about the increased taxes, the increased hydro rates, the increased red tape while delivering all of this? You're hurting rural Ontario. When you say you're all for rural Ontario, why did you cut the Leslie M. Frost Centre with one week's notice? Why did you close those doors? You didn't consult with anybody.

Look at the local hospital boards. They're not supplying enough money to the rural hospitals. Your integrated health networks—we're put in with Scarborough. What do we have in relation to Scarborough? Our voice won't be heard in rural Ontario on our hospital boards. That's just it.

We have so many members today who want to speak to this motion. I was very disappointed when the minister said his government would not support this motion. I ask everyone here—

Interjection: They won't support the motion?

Ms Scott: They won't support the motion. I want all the rural members to be in this House and put it on record that you're not supporting the wishes of rural Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Well, I'll let you folks sort it out, but the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound got up first.

Mr Murdoch: I'm sorry. I didn't see you down there. She can go ahead.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. The member for Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): Thank you to the member.

As I was listening to the member from Oxford, I had a really difficult time. Something very unparliamentary passed through my mind. As a farmer, I can recall the impact of the cuts that we experienced under the Tory government.

They cite things such as drainage. But we heard from our constituents and we listened. I can't say the same thing happened when the OMAF offices were closed. There was no consultation. Farmers lined up at your doors. The 40 offices remained closed. There was no way we could get them to open up again. There was no consultation for it, and nobody heard the farmers.

Until then, a farmer could go to a local OMAF office and talk to a specialist about their particular problems and get an answer. After that, farmers had to take fax sheets and a 1-800 number in order to talk to anybody. Gone was the opportunity to talk face to face with specialists such as Pete Johnson. Gone was the opportunity to have someone come out and do a field visit. Gone was the opportunity for the community and the farm organizations to have the support that they had in the past. Federations of agriculture, 4-H, community organizations all lost opportunities and support. Suddenly there was a scramble by these organizations to find something as simple as a meeting room.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, the member for Simcoe North, please.

Mrs Van Bommel: They couldn't find anything that would help them to come together, and in the past the OMAF offices had provided that as well. So we lost our specialists at the local level. We lost our meeting rooms. We lost our support for events in the community.

That government, in the last few days, keeps telling me how they're the friend of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Well, I can tell you that I was a member services representative for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I was that way before I came here, and they were no friend of OFA at that time.

When the OMAF offices were closed, suddenly the member services representatives for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture started getting calls that used to go to OMAF. Farmers wanted to talk to somebody. They didn't want to just get a 1-800 number. They didn't want to just get a fax sheet or something on-line. We were making calls on farmers who weren't even members, but we had to do that because that was the obligation we had to our communities and to our industry.

I can remember one call I got. The general public started to use the Ontario Federation of Agriculture member services representatives. I got a call from someone who asked me where they could buy the cheapest gardening tools. It had nothing to do with us in agriculture, nothing to do with us in the federation, but people no longer had somewhere to turn because the OMAF offices were closed; they were gone.

I have to commend my colleagues at the OFA.

Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): You're in government now. You're not opposition.

Mrs Van Bommel: I don't care. I know what it was like. I lived it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: Would the member please take her seat. Heckling's not allowed, but it is tolerated. But when it's simply yelled out, it becomes rather annoying. Please, keep that in mind.

Mrs Van Bommel: I just want to say that I want to commend the member services representatives for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, because they jumped into the gap when all the OMAF offices were closed, and they have done so continually without any real support from that government.

We want to talk about downloading, and that came from the Tory government as well. They downloaded the farm rebate tax program on the municipalities. No longer were farmers able to get their rebate from the government. They had to rely on the municipalities. When they did that, they also changed the regulations and created an absolute disaster out there in terms of classification of farmland. Suddenly farmers had to apply every year to have their farm registered as farmland. No longer were they able to simply continue until there was a change in their enterprise.

A lot of farmers did not understand the process. There was very poor communication about how that was done.

Suddenly farmers were finding that at the end of the year, in September and October, they had lost their classification. Instead of being able to pay 25% of the property tax rate, they suddenly had to pay 100%. But what they found out was that there was no appeal any more. The appeal date had been back at the end of March and they had completely missed it. No one had contacted them to tell them that their classifications had changed. They just simply ended up paying 100%—no appeal mechanism whatsoever.

It became a real problem for farmers who were purchasing farmland. When you purchased farmland, it automatically flipped back to residential. If you did it at the wrong time of year, you had no opportunity to appeal it. You had no opportunity to bring it back to farmland classification. You simply paid the 100% residential rate, and you had to bear that for a year. That cost most farmers thousands and thousands of dollars.

The Tory government didn't exactly have a stellar history in terms of agriculture. In the early 1980s—and I hear members talking about how terrible it is out there for farmers right now with the financial crisis they're facing. I know that very well; I went through that in the early 1980s. That was at the time between 1980 and 1985 when the Tories did nothing to help farmers—absolutely nothing. It was the worst financial crisis in farm history since the Depression and they did nothing.

Farmers were forced off their farms. Some had to declare bankruptcy. They devastated rural communities. The impact on small business in our community was immeasurable. Some of those farmers were able to recover, but for others it struck a blow that left them in a position where they never returned to agriculture, they were so completely devastated.

It left a permanent mark on all of us. It's something we will never forget. Our families and our neighbours watched us go through it, and they were helpless to do anything about it. They told us that we were bad managers. There was no emergency funding for us at the time. There was nothing similar to the BSE program. Some of us, like I said, went through this. We survived; others didn't.

I think our government is doing everything it can to help farmers through this crisis. We recognize it. Like I said, I know very well and I'm not going to allow anyone to forget it—not in this assembly, not ever.

1640

Mr Murdoch: The first thing we've got to do is put this whole debate in perspective. We're the opposition; you're the government. It's an opposition day. You people have to learn that. You keep saying "the government." Yes, we were, and yes, we made mistakes. We're not the government anymore. Get that through your heads. You've been here a year, and you haven't figured out that you're the government. What is wrong with you guys? This is the whole thing that's wrong with this. You guys are the government.

I'm not out to get the Minister of Agriculture. I think he's got a difficult job and he's trying to do some things.

Actually, Ted Arnott and I had a really good question today and we didn't get it on. We were going to ask for all consent, but we didn't do it. The program you have for our calves: Are we going to keep them till Christmas or not? We can't wait till then, Mr Minister. You're going to have to get up—we need that money now. Guys are feeding their calves now. The sales are on in my area—in Keady every Tuesday. It's going on in Wiarton; there are four sales up in Wiarton. We need to know whether we're going to get that money for our calves, or are we going to feed them over the winter. It can't wait till Christmas. It has to be done now. That was the question we had. I'm sorry we didn't get it on, Minister, but I need you to look into that and I don't need you to tell me it's going to be around Christmas. It won't work.

Let's get back to what we're debating here. I'm sorry, I had to bring that in or we wouldn't get it on. We're debating about agriculture and rural Ontario. That's why we're here today and we're the opposition. You can keep coming back and saying, "You guys didn't do this," and, "You didn't do that." Well, we're over here. Now we're trying to tell you that if you don't start doing some of these things, you'll be back over here next time. This is where you're going to end up if you don't start listening to us.

I don't agree a lot with the leader of the NDP, but he you told you that you're going to have to start working with us. This is what this was all about. Your leader said, "We're going to work with everybody." He has not done that. You guys are just following him around like collie dogs. That's what we call you in the country. You're told to sit over there. You're told to come, and you come. You're not out there arguing. Where were our rural and northern members when they closed the Frost Centre? Not one word was said. You could have come out. Just because the Premier's office says that you're going to do this or you're going to do that—you guys from northern and rural Ontario can speak out. You can get up and say, "No, this isn't right." You can tell the people of Ontario this isn't right.

No consultation on the drainage. That was another one. I don't know what happened, Mr Minister. I know you work for us, but what happened there? All of a sudden you just closed that down, and then nobody said anything. Where are the rural members? Say something, for God's sake. Get up and say, "This is wrong," because you're not always right and you're not always going to be right over there. If you don't start listening to the opposition sometimes, you'll be sitting over here before you know what happened. Three years come pretty quick. You can make your mistakes like we did. We certainly made some. But there's no sense telling us about it when we're trying to tell you.

This is opposition day; it is not a government day. It's opposition day, and we're trying to tell you some of the things you made wrong. I'm worried. Where are the rural and northern members over there? Don't become collie dogs. Don't follow the leader's office all the time. They're not always right.

Mr Hardeman: No, they're never right.

Mr Murdoch: Somebody said "never right." The odd time they might be right. I want to tell you, you've got to start sticking up for your ridings or you won't be here. If you don't start sticking up for you're ridings, then you're going to lose, because it's your ridings that are suffering. Remember that.

This is what bothers me. Another one of your Premier's promises—you guys didn't make all those promises; they came out of the Premier's office—was that we were going to change the system here, that we were going to be allowed to speak out when it affects our riding. But you haven't been allowed to do that, or you would have said something about that. Somebody would have got upset about the Frost Centre. Nobody got upset about it. Somebody would have got upset about the drains. Somebody would have said, "That's not right. You just can't do that without bringing it forward to the OFA and people like that who need to know." Another one was—I'm going to get the hook in a minute because we have so many people who want to talk on this, and that's OK.

The gas tax is another one. Where's rural? Where are you out there? The big cities are going to grab all of this. We all pay our taxes. We all pay for that gas, and you're going to give it all to the big cities. Rural Ontario and northern Ontario are going to get none of that. So come on there in rural Ontario, wake up and start pounding. Somebody start telling them, "You're not going to do that." You let the bully out, the big bully in the health thing, but you guys aren't telling anybody anything. So start waking up over there. Start speaking out for your ridings and quit this partisan politics, because it won't work.

Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I want to bring a bit of a different perspective to this debate, as one who represents a part of the province, northern Ontario, that has an agricultural community that is pretty distinct and different. As my good friend from Sudbury would know, the challenges faced by people in the agricultural industry of northern Ontario—Earlton, Timmins, Sudbury or wherever it might be—are quite different.

I want to bring forward to this debate some of the issues that a number of people have raised with me in the agricultural community and in the riding of Timmins-James Bay, but also in the Timiskaming riding.

I have great fortune. The agriculture critic for the federal NDP shares an office with me, so we get to talk about this quite a bit. Charlie Angus, who a number of you know was elected to the federal House this past election, is our federal agriculture critic. He's really at his wits' end about some of the issues and difficulties that are facing the northern communities.

The first thing I want to put straight out is that we can all agree that what has happened in the beef industry regarding the BSE situation has been absolutely tragic. Similarly, we're seeing the same kinds of things happen in other parts of the industry as far as we can see.

One of the things I think we need to figure out how to deal with is—and it's partly provincial, but a big part of

it is federal, and I ask this question as a layperson on the agricultural side—when I walk into the store and buy a piece of beef, why do I still pay the price that I do when I know my farming friends are getting a heck of a lot fewer dollars per pound when they're selling the beef to the abattoirs? What the heck is going on?

The beef farmers are telling me they're basically starving. They're having to sell meat on the hoof for far less than it's costing them to buy the beef, raise it and do what they need to do to bring it to market. Yet when the average consumer goes into the store to buy their beef, they're paying virtually the same price, if not more, than they were paying prior to the time the whole BSE thing came out.

I think there's something going on between the price the farmer is getting for the sale of his or her cattle and what we're having to pay when we get to the store. All I know is that I'm paying, but the people who are producing the beef are getting the short end of the stick. That is having a tragic effect on farms in northern Ontario, because, as you know, there is a very lively beef industry in northern Ontario. In some cases they're part-time and have to work somewhere else to make ends meet, and in some cases they're full-time, but in both those scenarios, they're really having a tough time trying to make ends meet, and they're saying that something has to be done.

I can't throw this all at the feet of this government. It wouldn't be fair, because partly it is what's happening within the industry. I think government has to figure out, at both the federal and provincial levels, what we need to do to make sure that the price we pay at the counter fairly reflects the price the farmer should get as he or she sells their cattle to market. It seems to me we have to do something.

I know my right-wing friends—I admit I have an ideology; I am on the left—say, "It's market economics, and we should not intervene in any way, shape or form. Market conditions determine that this is the price the farmers are going to get when they sell their beef and this is the price you're going to pay when you buy the product." I just say that I support that in most cases. A market economy is by far a better way of doing things than having government intervention in everything. Even though I'm a social democrat at heart, I also believe there is room for a market economy within social democracy. But I think there is a role for government to play when things have gone awry.

I ask the minister across the way—I know he has taken up his time in his debate, and I think that according to the rules he can actually—no, because it's not a real debate. You can't actually come back at the end. But it would be interesting to get your parliamentary assistant or somebody else to report to us in this House what you're prepared to do with your own powers as a provincial government and what we can do collectively as a Legislature to convince our federal counterparts to deal with that issue. It is a tragic issue.

Why should a beef farmer, he and she and the family, who works hard to run that business find themselves in a

situation of selling beef at an unreasonable rate that doesn't even reflect what they're paying for their investment, and people walk into the supermarket or meat shop and pay far more than it's worth?

In fairness to the supermarket and the meat shop, it ain't them either. Let's get real. It isn't, for the most part, the person who owns the individual meat shop in a community who is to blame. It's the people in between, and we need to find a way to get at that.

1650

I think there's something really wrong in a system that allows that to happen. We all agree that people should be allowed to make a reasonable return on their investment, be it a farm, be it an abattoir, be it distribution or sale, but what is reasonable? Obviously, somebody is making far more money than I think they're entitled to make.

Justement, j'avais l'opportunité de parler à un agriculteur dans la région de Kapuskasing. Ça fait deux ou trois semaines qu'on parlait exactement de cette situation. Le monsieur et la madame se trouvent dans une situation où cette famille, la deuxième génération au nord de l'Ontario, va perdre leur terre agricole.

Ce monsieur et cette madame, assez âgés, qui doivent avoir plus de 70 ans à ce point-ci, se trouvent dans une situation où leurs garçons et une des filles, qui est mariée et qui reste encore dans la région avec son mari, veulent continuer la tradition de la famille pour être capables de rester dans l'industrie elle-même. C'est quelque chose qu'ils aiment beaucoup faire. C'est une passion pour eux de travailler dans cette industrie qu'ils aiment. C'est le seul emploi où on sait qu'on peut se réveiller un matin pour travailler avec les banques, et la prochaine journée avec des outils. On est avec la terre. On fait tout. C'est un des emplois les plus complets dans cette province.

Si on pense que pour quelqu'un qui est responsable de la terre, comme un agriculteur, c'est un job qui est facile et simple, on a besoin de revisiter ses opinions. Comme le ministre le sait bien, c'est un ouvrage qui est très complexe. Il faut avoir une connaissance de la matière dans l'industrie elle-même et on a besoin de connaître la mécanique. On a besoin de connaître tout le domaine agricole. On a besoin de connaître le système de finances et le système de distribution. Il y a beaucoup à savoir dans cette industrie, et c'est une passion avec certains de demeurer dans cette industrie.

Le monsieur et la madame dont on a parlé, justement, et je ne vais pas utiliser leur nom—bien, on va l'utiliser : M. et M^{me} Génier. Eux autres sont à un point où ils disaient, « Écoute, on est au point où on ne peut plus rester dans l'industrie. Il nous a fallu vendre nos troupeaux parce que, franchement, on ne peut plus faire de l'argent avec ce bœuf. » Ils sont dans une situation où, s'il n'y a pas de revenus qui rentrent, c'est bien simple, hein? S'il n'y a pas de revenu à la fin de la journée, même si les terres nous appartiennent puis on n'a pas d'hypothèque contre nos terres, il faut payer le fardeau de ce business à un point.

Maman et papa disent, « Écoute, on ne pourra plus continuer », et là ils se trouvent dans une situation de

vendre le terrain. Le problème est que, quand on vend le terrain, le prix qu'on va rechercher ne reflète pas la réalité de ce qu'on a payé et l'investissement qu'on a fait pour toutes ces années dans cette terre. J'ai bien peur que, avec le temps, on voie de moins en moins de personnes dans l'industrie agricole au nord de l'Ontario. Je pense que c'est quelque chose qui va complètement dans la méchante direction, telle qu'on voit au sud de l'Ontario.

The other issue that was raised—again, I was talking to my good friend Tony Martin, whom many of you would know here, who was in this Legislature about a year ago and who was recently elected to the federal House. I was talking to Mr Martin, I guess, about two or three weeks ago; we were having a bit of a chat, reminiscing and finding out how things are there.

I just want to say he's very happy with the arrangements in Ottawa, compared to Ontario. I've got to say they're much more generous on the Hill than they are here at Queen's Park. Dalton McGuinty is a piker when it comes to comparing him to the wages, benefits and pensions of one Paul Martin, let me tell you, along with myself and any other member of this Assembly.

But he was telling me he was really taken aback when he, along with Charlie Angus, our federal member from Timmins-James Bay, attended a meeting with a number of people in the Sault Ste Marie area who are in the agricultural industry. He said he was really taken aback and floored by the degree to which they were angry with the provincial Liberals who we know, because I know, during the last term that the Conservatives were in power, had the opportunity to go to the plowing match and attend a number of different events in the agricultural community. The Liberals courted quite successfully, I would say, the agricultural community of Ontario, to the chagrin of the Tories. I was trying to do the same, just so you guys know. I wasn't going there on your behalf, but I've got to say I was really taken aback, because I know the response I was getting from people in the agricultural industry in Timiskaming, Timmins-James Bay, Algoma and other ridings across northern Ontario.

Of course, the Tories held a certain core of those particular individuals, but a number of people moved over and voted Liberal, and they were really upset, from what both Tony and Charlie were telling me.

Do you know what the issue was? Tile drainage. That was the thing that set them completely off. They were saying that for us in northern Ontario, the cost of being able to deal with tile drainage, as it is being proposed by way of what this government has done, is really going to bankrupt some of them. They will not be able to stay open. They were just at their wits' end.

I was expecting two federal members to go to this meeting and come back and tell me about how they were dealing on the federal side. What they were telling me was that, yes, there are things that Charlie is working on federally, but he was really taken aback, along with Tony, by the degree that people were upset with this government. They were saying, "Listen, they promised a

whole bunch of things that would be done for the agricultural community and they have not been done. We feel that basically we've been sold a bag of goods." They were really looking for some way to express their displeasure and were doing so at that particular meeting. It took me a bit aback, because I really didn't expect that from the agricultural community.

I've got to say—and I don't mean this in any other way than it really is going to come out—people in the agricultural industry are pretty straight shooters. They don't really get caught up in politics to the degree that people do in other areas. They've got better things to do. They've got to run farms. In the morning, they've got to get up; the cows have got to be milked, the chickens have to be taken care of. Whatever you've got to do has to be done. Mother Nature doesn't wait for you. So people don't have time to play around with silly political games. But what was really surprising was the degree that that was happening.

I said, "I'm just going to check things out and call a couple of my friends in the agricultural community with whom I've been dealing over the years," who may not necessarily vote NDP; some of them do but some of them don't. I talked to a number of people who are prominent in the agricultural industry in my part of the province, and it was the same resentment. They were saying "Gilles, it's a good thing you called me, because I was about to call you." We need to do something about that, and we have been working toward those aims. I've just got to say to the government members, you'd better be careful because there's a group of people out there who are not very happy with you.

My good friend Mr Bartolucci was here just a second ago and is probably watching this debate on TV in the back. I have to say, one of the things we have to deal with in the north is this whole issue of access to dollars when it comes to capital in the marketplace, when it comes to not only farmers but all those people in northern Ontario who are entrepreneurs and are trying to get projects off the ground. The difficulty we have now in northern Ontario is not the lack of ideas, it's not the lack of resources, it's not the lack of skills, it's not the lack of opportunity—all of those things exist. It's all there in northern Ontario. But the difficulty in agriculture, as in other parts and industries of the northern Ontario economy, is the whole issue of getting access to dollars, getting access to capital. There is a very small pool of people you can go to in northern Ontario who have the dollars to back up your project if you are trying to raise money to get a project up and running in northern Ontario. You're really in competition with a number of people trying to go after the same people and their dollars to invest in your enterprise.

When you go to the bank, the banks, quite frankly, have made it very clear that unless you've got a rock-solid application for a business loan, they will not touch you. The banks in this province have said, "We are basically trying to stay away from the northern Ontario business part of our portfolio. We're trying to get it

down. We want to deal with an economy that's hot," and where they know they have a better chance of making dollars, and in their minds—I think that's wrong; they're very wrong-minded—it's in southern Ontario. Not that the south doesn't need to have access to capital, but we in the north sure would like to do some of the same.

My point, to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, is that we need to finally do what this government said it was going to do—and I supported it in the last election because it was part of our platform—and that is to move the northern Ontario heritage fund over to what it should do, what it was designed to do and should only do, and that is to lend money or do loan guarantees to businesses in northern Ontario. The heritage fund should in no way, shape or form be into capital infrastructure. I thought it was wrong for the Harris government to have made those changes. I said so to the government when they were there. They had their particular views. They tried it and it didn't work. I'm just saying to this government that that's got to change because, quite frankly, there is going to be a bigger problem in northern Ontario as we move forward.

For example, we know that in the lumber industry, the wood basket is getting tighter and tighter. As time goes on, forestry operations are having a more difficult time to keep their mills filled with lumber. As a result, one of the amendments this government is putting forward in Bill 106 is going to make it that eventually, I predict within about a year or two, we're going to start seeing sawmills in northern Ontario closed and moving their wood into larger supermills in parts of northern Ontario. So communities like Kirkland Lake, White River, Dubreuilville and others that are now having a difficult time will be put in very tough shape.

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I think that before we allow those things to happen, which is a debate for another time, more specific to this motion today, we need to be able to deal with the issue of supporting entrepreneurs that are looking at ways of diversifying the northern Ontario economy. One of the ways you do that is to support the agricultural community, because there are all kinds of opportunities for agriculture.

For example, what is the possibility of somebody saying, "Listen, we want to get into the distribution of meats in northern Ontario," that some entrepreneur could be financed to get into the business of collecting meats that are grown in northern Ontario and sent for slaughter and distributed from northern Ontario? There is no reason why something like that couldn't be done. There is opportunity for expansion in the agricultural industry of northern Ontario. If we had the money, maybe we could look at doing some of that more effectively.

What about the whole issue of being able to look at the food industry and see if there are any possibilities in that industry to take some of the products that we produce in northern Ontario and put them into the food chain by way of some types of facilities in northern Ontario? There's the whole issue of being able to add

value to what we do. It makes no sense to me that we have to take all of our products from northern Ontario all the time and send them somewhere in southern Ontario to transform them into whatever, either food products or whatever it might be. If the heritage fund was there to do what it was originally intended to do, I think there would be a much better chance for that to happen.

L'autre question, c'est l'opportunité d'avoir des politiques en Ontario qui pourraient aider ceux qui regardent des opportunités dans l'industrie agricole qui ne sont pas les industries qu'on a d'habitude. Par exemple, on a eu une expérience à Opatatika, un village au nord de Kapuskasing, où on a essayé, il y a une couple d'années, peut-être trois ou quatre ans, de commencer une industrie de champignons. Ils ont investi beaucoup d'argent local pour être capables de bâtir cet édifice et pour récolter les champignons qui sont produits à l'intérieur de la facilité. Ils ont eu des problèmes, des problèmes qui, finalement, ont causé sa fermeture. On n'a pas en Ontario l'assistance à ceux dans l'industrie agricole pour les aider avec le marketing de leurs produits à travers le nord et même pour avoir accès aux marchés hors le nord de l'Ontario, soit dans le sud ou autres endroits canadiens, ou même dans les États-Unis.

Ils étaient parmi les producteurs des meilleurs champignons qu'on aurait pu produire dans une telle industrie. Ils avaient un produit de qualité. Un problème pour eux autres c'était, comme j'ai dit un peu plus tôt, le problème de capital. Ils se sont trouvés, dès le début du projet, toujours dans une situation de ne pas avoir assez d'argent pour être capables d'opérer leur plant et de survivre les hauts et les bas, les cycles qu'on trouve dans cette industrie. Mais il y a aussi toute la question de dire, « On a besoin de soutenir et d'aider ces entrepreneurs afin de développer le marché », de dire, « Est-ce qu'on pourrait mieux fournir les marchés du nord de l'Ontario avec des produits qui sont produits à Opatatika? Est-ce qu'on est capables de prendre ce produit et en trouver un marché, même hors le nord de l'Ontario, pour s'assurer qu'il y a un marché qui va survivre et qui va être capable de supporter cette industrie? »

C'est intéressant à noter que le père Noël—pas le Père Noël, Santa Claus, mais le père Noël d'Opatatika—travaille maintenant un an et demi avec la communauté et avec les personnes dans la communauté, des volontaires, pour faire rebondir cette industrie. Le père Noël a pris en main ce projet qui essaie de faire repartir cette facilité pour le bénéfice du monde d'Opatatika, pour donner une opportunité aux gens de la région de trouver de l'ouvrage et pour donner la fierté qui vient avec ça à la communauté. On les souhaite, les bons et les biens, être capables d'avancer, mais quand je parle à M. le père Noël et autres, une des affaires avec lesquelles ils sont pré-occupés, c'est la question de développer le marché et d'avoir le financement nécessaire afin d'aller en avant avec leur entreprise.

A couple of other things I just want to say before my time runs out, and that's the whole issue of making sure that we have policies in this province to support those

people in the agricultural industry. It is really important—and I give the minister some credit because I know the minister. He's been here for a couple of terms now. He's a hard-working person who cares about the industry, who cares about his ministry. I don't take that away from him for two seconds. I recognize he's got a heck of a hill to climb because I'm not convinced his cabinet colleagues give him the kind of support he needs. The reality is, you've got a minister who's trying to do the right thing, but I'm not convinced the Premier's office and other people around him are giving him the support he needs, frankly.

We need to recognize that the agricultural industry is one of the key industries of this province, as the minister well knows and is basically, I know on numbers of occasions, trying to educate people in his own group. Some of his cabinet colleagues have to understand that we have to take this industry much more seriously, because there are some very serious problems coming down with water regulations, tile drainage and a whole bunch of other things that are, quite frankly, going to be very troubling. If there's anything I can do—and certainly those people in the industry can—to assist the minister to lobby P and P—

Mr John R. Baird (Nepean-Carleton): We're here to help.

Mr Bisson: I'm dead serious. We are there to help—dead serious.

Listen, all kidding aside, I'm trying to make this very non-partisan. I'm saying we are all here for but one reason: We were elected by the people who voted for us in our ridings to come here and represent them. They expect us—

Mr Baird: Some of us were appointed.

Mr Bisson: Some were appointed. Oh, yes, you're right. We're not going to go there.

Mr Baird: Brad Duguid.

Mr Bisson: Yes. We're not going to go there.

The point I make is that we're all elected to come here to represent our constituencies, and we've got to do what we can to assist those people in our ridings to do their jobs. I'm just saying, in all seriousness, if there's anything we can do to assist to put more pressure on the Premier, to help organize the agricultural community in some kind of way—I know it's difficult for you as minister to do that because you can't be seen as organizing protests outside Queen's Park, but we'd be glad to do that for you if you think it's going to help.

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: I'm dead serious, because that's how democracy works.

Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services): Move your car.

Mr Bisson: I've got to tell you the story. Do you know why that car was there? Insurance rates in this province went up to the rate that I could not afford to reinsure it last spring, and I had challenged the Premier of Ontario to the following: Once he puts in public auto, I will move that car.

It is rumoured that the Premier of Ontario climbed a tree late one night with a chainsaw and cut the branch just enough so that the tree was sitting there with just enough weight to fall. That tree was felled and fell on my car and broke it. I've got to say, it's a shameful way for the Premier to deal with the bad public policy of not going to public auto insurance. You'll be glad to know the car is being towed tomorrow.

Interjections.

Mr Bisson: Listen, guys, if you can't laugh at yourself in this business, you can't laugh at anybody else.

I just want to close again on a very serious point, and that is, this industry is in a lot of trouble. There's just no other way of putting it. There are families that are basically staring down the creditors at the door. They're having a heck of a time trying to stay afoot—afloat, I should say, and some of them afoot. We need to do everything we can to try to support the industry in some way to assist them.

I have to say again to the Minister of Agriculture, anything we can do to help you convince your cabinet colleagues to be more supportive of your call to do things, we'd be more than glad to help you along.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It's a pleasure, coming from a rural riding, to speak on this opposition bill.

Let me say that while I was listening to the member of the third party asking the minister to consider getting allies from the other two parties in opposition, I can reassure you that as a member of this caucus from a rural constituency, indeed all our constituencies are committed to working with the minister to bring folks in the farming community in this province as much as we can.

Just to indicate to you, it's not just agriculture when we talk about rural Ontario; we need to look at the bigger picture: the \$31 million for keeping small rural schools open, which were on the verge of being closed by school boards—

Mr Baird: How's the hospital in Campbellford doing, Lou?

Mr Rinaldi: It's doing just fine. They're doing fine.

Mr Baird: It's not doing fine. They're closing 13 beds.

Mr Rinaldi: There's the \$30 million for BSE that we came to the rescue with when it was needed, and the funding for the school bus transportation in rural Ontario to help those kids get to school. We're committed to rural Ontario.

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Let me talk a little bit about cuts. When we talk about budget cuts that the member wants us to restore, I can speak from personal experience. In my riding, which was held by a member of the now opposition, he made a commitment while I was the president of the local chamber of commerce. We had one of the agricultural offices in the province of Ontario, and that previous member happened to run that facility before he became a member of this Legislature. His comments to the local

community were that it would be over his dead body that that office would ever close. Well, I'm delighted to say that we don't believe in superstitions and those types of things, or the member wouldn't be with us today—he's not a member, but he's still here—because the offices were reduced to next to nothing under the former minister.

They're telling us to restore the cuts from our budget. Well, they destroyed a lot of agriculture. We're talking about restoring faith. In the previous administration, not only with agriculture but indeed with a number of services across the province, they slashed, and when people were bleeding to death, they threw some cash at it to try to stop the bleeding really quick. I can tell you what the farming community, which I meet with on a regular basis—and I had the honour of having the minister join me for a whole day in my riding, talking to stakeholders. We know they are in dire straits; there's no question about it. Nobody's going to deny that fact. But what they are telling us is that they realize that just throwing money at it is not going to fix it. What they are looking for are sustainable solutions.

Let me give you an example. To deal with BSE, as a first step, we've increased slaughterhouse capacity. Yes, it's a small step and we've got a long way to go, but they're telling us that's the right way to go: Don't stand and just throw money at a bad situation, but look for ways to build a system to deal with agriculture in a way that's sustainable not from day to day, but from year to year.

I can tell you the other thing that I hear from the farming community, and we're trying to work very closely with it. For the first time in a long time, we have a minister who's been there for a year. I was looking for some information just recently. I believe with the former government, the minister changed every year, or less than a year. That's almost as often as we change our socks and our clothes and all that stuff. So the farming community didn't really know who to turn to. But we do have a minister who listens, we have a minister who goes out. As I said, I was privileged to have the minister meet with all the different groups in my riding, the local federation of agriculture, the Northumberland Federation of Agriculture. He met the Christian Farmers and some folks who were devastated by a hailstorm on Canada Day that caused roughly \$10 million worth of hail damage to the apple crop in Durham and Northumberland. The minister was there to meet with them, to look at solutions, how to best address those things. He was there to listen. He talked to some other stakeholders who had a real interest—not just to farming, but to rural Ontario as a whole.

I guess what I'd say in winding things down is that we're talking about restoring budgets. Let me just highlight the budget of 2000 under the former government. To quote of the minister at the time, "Indeed, the 2000 budget was good news for all Ontario farmers." That's what the minister said. Let me tell you what the farmers said: "This is a do-nothing budget. We're still paying on everything we were paying on before.

Basically, I'm disappointed." That came from Don McGugan, president of the Lambton Federation of Agriculture. "Budget Missed Opportunity to Help Farmers"—Northern Daily News.

I could go on and on about this budget that the member wants to restore. Boy, they're certainly short-sighted. I'm certainly disappointed they even come out with this motion if they want us to support it. I'm not prepared to support it.

Mr Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): This debate really is exposing what I consider a disappointing litany not only of broken promises but promises as yet undelivered, like the BSE set-aside program and the \$30 million as well for our cattlemen.

Ottawa announced close to half a billion dollars. Alberta immediately ponied up a quarter of a billion for cattlemen. Farmers went to the ploughing match—no announcement. The Premier said there was no money. A few days later we see \$30 million, and farm families may well have to wait until Christmas to see any of that. And Ontario, unlike Alberta, Saskatchewan or Manitoba, does not have those set-aside application forms out. How do you get the money with no forms?

Promises as yet undelivered, like the \$50-million election pledge to compensate tobacco farmers in Brant, Oxford, Elgin and Norfolk. Just this week, we heard Andy Mitchell, the fed ag minister, move on the \$71-million commitment previously made by Bob Speller, the former minister. Ontario is the tobacco-growing province. Ontario just declared war on tobacco and has jacked up taxes twice. Where is the \$50 million?

There was a hog crisis in 1998. Farmers came out looking for support. Our government had cheques in the mail in 30 days. My tobacco farmers and cattlemen have been waiting a lot longer than that.

As with that hog crisis, the personal loss, the emotional havoc I see in families farming tobacco and farming beef is incalculable. During the campaign, agriculture and food was described by this government as a lead ministry. We've seen a summer of budget cuts and endless ongoing difficult consultations. Farmers are asking, "What happened?" OMAF cut their budget by 20%. That's the biggest cut of any ministry in the Ontario government, and that's a government that is increasing spending.

Elimination of the municipal outlet drainage program: that's \$7 million. Terminating genetic research funding for beef, dairy, hogs: that's a \$3-million cut. The list goes on. Too many farmers are destined to fall through the cracks in the case program. That's the one that our minister would not sign. The Ontario Agricultural Commodity Council has proposed that the transition money—there's \$173 million—be used for SDRM, MRI and BSE support. Again, there's no response from this present government.

This government truly has turned its back on farmers, announcing that OMAF is being replaced by MOE for nutrient management compliance. We're seeing the same trend with source water protection. Over the last year,

I've met with trailer park owners, woodlot owners and sawmill operators, all from rural Ontario. MPAC is putting them out of business. By the same token, fruit and vegetable operations, egg hatcheries and corn dryers are facing that same assessment and taxation challenge. Woodlot owners are concerned that they are going to have that farmland comparison removed to derive their land value. Again, taxes go up.

Mrs Liz Sandals (Guelph-Wellington): I am rising to speak on the opposition day motion by Mr Hardeman, the member for Oxford, and a former Conservative Minister of Agriculture. I would like to inform the House that, in fact, the head office of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food is actually in my riding. It's quite a large new building, I think started by the NDP and finished by the Conservatives.

There's something very interesting. There's a "for lease" sign outside the headquarters of OMAF. You might ask why. Why are we trying to lease part of the OMAF office? The truth is that shortly after the building was opened, a lot of it was found to be unnecessary. Why? Well, it was found to be unnecessary because the member for Oxford, the agriculture minister of the day, cancelled a very significant program which had used a significant amount of space in this particular building. The member who has put forward the motion criticizing us, the member from Oxford, on his watch cancelled all the field offices in the province of Ontario.

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Now, what were agricultural field offices, often called extension offices? They employed people who were referred to as ag reps. These were agrologists on the ground who actually worked to help local farmers improve their agricultural practices, to update them to make sure they were using the most modern practices. The member from Oxford was responsible for cancelling all those field offices and turning them into a 1-800 number, essentially.

You would think, by listening to the members of the opposition, that farmers were critical of us. Well, listen to what they had to say about this move by the member from Oxford. Jack Wilkinson, then the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, said:

"The government is gutting a system"—the Conservative government—"that has served us so well for so many years in many parts of the province. For many farmers, this is nothing more than a further erosion of ministry services in their communities.

"In some areas, the office has not only supported the extension work that has been so critical in making Ontario a leader in many areas of agriculture and technology transfer, but it has played an integral role in supporting farm and community organizational events."

That's what the agricultural community had to say about this member's record.

This member would also like us to think about the municipal outlet drainage program. It's interesting that the government that he was a part of cut the interest part of this program by half, from about \$3 million to about

\$1.5 million. In fact, when the furor arose—I've got one urban municipality and two rural municipalities—I thought I would look and see what my rural municipalities were actually getting from this program. One of my rural municipalities got an average of \$4,500 over the last six years. My other rural municipality got zero, zilch, nothing from this program. There were some municipalities that got \$180,000 per year on average over the last six years.

In fact, this is one of the things that was wrong with this program. It was not consistent in its application. We found that some municipalities were getting significant large amounts and other municipalities, rural municipalities, were getting nothing. So what we're doing is looking at this program and restructuring the delivery of services to make sure it makes more sense.

What about BSE funding? We've heard a lot of complaints from this member about our funding of BSE programs. Well, before the federal government got in the act, we consulted with the agricultural community. What they told us was that one of the big problems, now that the border's been closed, is that we have a lot of older animals on the farms and we can't get these older animals to slaughter because there's no capacity to have these animals slaughtered. We spent \$7 million on assisting the industry in building new permanent slaughter capacity for older animals. We'll be able to have about 7,000 more older animals per year slaughtered. The agricultural community tells us that this is very important.

In addition to that, we are providing \$30 million to our farm community in matching federal funds to make sure that we have additional assistance. I was very proud that the Premier announced that at the OMAF headquarters when he was visiting my riding.

In fact, I'd like to correct the record on one thing that the NDP leader said. He said that when we went to the plowing match, we had no announcements. That's just not factually correct. In fact, at the plowing match we announced \$31 million in additional funding for rural communities, because rural communities have told us that it's important to try to keep rural schools open, and we did make that very significant announcement when we visited the plowing match in Mr Murdoch's riding. So I totally reject the premise of the motion by the member from Oxford and I absolutely will not be supporting it, because we are doing good work for our rural communities, for our farmers and for agriculture in Ontario.

Mr Wilson: I just want to urge the government, in the three minutes I have, to be more pro-American. In the 14 years I have been in here, I don't think we've had anybody get up and talk about our relations with the United States. I suppose we leave that up to the federal government. But you're not going to get the BSE crisis solved, you're not going to get the border open, particularly the Liberal Party in Ottawa, if it keeps up its anti-American stance. I see that Carolyn Parrish, the MP, was at it again last week. So that's one thing farmers are telling me.

I and Bill Murdoch were at the Grey County Federation of Agriculture's 64th annual dinner last Saturday.

Just a couple of months before that I was touring farms in Simcoe county and was at a federation of agriculture barbecue hosted by Stephen Hall in Adjala-Tosoronto township, and the message there was very clear: How do we get the borders open? How do we help our beef farmers, our lamb producers and our other livestock producers who need to sell live animals into a free market across the border?

Having the border open is also important for almost every other industry. The fact of the matter is that 85% of the goods produced in my riding of Simcoe-Grey are transported to the United States of America. So that's my one plug: Do whatever you can to talk to your federal cousins and get us more favourable relations with the United States.

Finally, I just want to say: I have a number of community halls in my riding. I know the minister talked about it today. People should understand that that was a reaction from Walkerton, where we had to move quickly to bring in tough regulations to improve drinking water quality in the province. It has hurt dramatically our community halls. I've mentioned a number of them in the riding in remarks in the House in the past.

The fact of the matter is, I was in cabinet just before the election. We were planning to find the money to help these community halls. That's the truth. I hope that, rather than just diluting the regulations or extending the deadlines, you'll come up with a just a little bit of money. You would be heroes politically across rural and small-town Ontario, and with a number of church groups too, because a lot of churches rely on these community halls.

So I just say, community halls and better relations with the United States of America—let's get the BSE crisis solved. Improve the Ministry of Agriculture. Stop gutting it, when you promised the opposite, and do what's right for rural Ontario.

Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): It's my pleasure to rise today to remind people that Huron-Bruce is the largest agricultural producer in the province of Ontario. We are also the most rural riding within the province of Ontario. So I feel that when I speak, I know of what I speak.

What I would like to do, if I could have your indulgence, members of the House, is go backward before I go forward and talk about some of the things that I experienced in my first term—

Mr Dunlop: Carol, you're in government.

Mrs Mitchell: Well, there seems to be some revisionist history going on, so I'd like to clear the air on a few things. I know some of the gentlemen in the opposition share the same background as I do, and I'd like to talk about the first year that I was warden of Huron county, in 1999. That was the first year of the download to the rural municipalities.

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Our budget in Huron county went from \$26 million to \$65 million in one year. That was a result of many services—and I use ambulances as an example, and public health—being downloaded to municipalities. The

rural municipalities simply begged the provincial government at that time to stop the downloading. We were ill-equipped to deal with the services that were coming down to our rural municipalities. Our rural way of life was threatened by the constant downloading, and I can tell you that there was no consultation that happened during the whole downloading process. You received a phone call and—

Interjections.

Mrs Mitchell: Gentlemen, I have so much to share with you.

While I'm on ambulances, I just want to add this: I was appointed by the province to sit on the land ambulance transfer committee. The member who brought forward this motion today was also a member of that committee.

For two years, we talked every month about how the ambulances were going to be downloaded, while the ambulances were continuing to be downloaded, and I can tell you that after the two years of committee meetings, in the third year, the official opposition didn't even call the meetings because, really, we had talked about it for two years. What did we talk about? We talked about the Hamilton dispatch. We talked about cross-border billings. Those were two of the things that I remember the most.

I can tell you that our government has dealt with the Hamilton dispatch. I use that as an example just simply so that there's an understanding of how our rural municipalities were affected. I thank the committee members for the participation that they brought forward, because I know the comments that were made. Month after month, we heard it. How were we going to deal with it? I know that the member—who comes from a rural municipality, as well as the same background—and the wardens all met. Month after month, this downloading was dealt with. Our rural municipalities don't have the tax base that our urban counterparts do, but what I heard month after month was a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach: "We're not interested in the rural municipalities and what they contribute to the community of Ontario." There was no respect given to our rural way of life.

I can go on about the water, how we were moving toward user fees.

I have so much more to do and I know that many people will want to hear this some more, but I believe that we need to share our vision of where we're going in our commitment to rural communities, because I can tell you that our commitment to our rural communities and our agricultural community remains strong and is strong.

Over the last several weeks, the Ontario government has made very positive announcements which affect the agri-food sector. We have joined the BSE recovery. We put \$30 million on the table because we know how we have been affected in our rural communities.

Interjections.

Mrs Mitchell: I'm not done yet, so just wait.

We recognize that our maple syrup was an agricultural production and, therefore, we adjusted the property tax.

Some \$4.6 million to upgrade or replace our aging infrastructure; 18 agriculture facilities for education, laboratory and research; signed with the federal government for foreign animal health protection, which we know is so important; and provincial transitional funding in order to assist Ontario municipalities.

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

Mrs Mitchell: I thank you for the time today. Unfortunately, I've run out of time. I have so much more that I would like to say about the commitment we have made.

Mrs Julia Munro (York North): I'm very pleased to be able to join in the debate this afternoon and, particularly, to support this motion.

I'm quite shocked, as a matter of fact, at the number of government speakers who have chosen today to speak about the previous government. It seems to me that, as I recall as a member of the government, I never wanted to use up my time on previous governments' initiatives. I was very proud of the kind of initiatives that we undertook, and I took every opportunity to speak about them.

I'm afraid it demonstrates the lack of substance in this government's initiatives that so many of its members would choose to speak about the former government rather than be proud of what this government is doing. But perhaps I can understand that.

As the member for the York North riding, of course I was particularly shocked at the introduction earlier in the year of Bill 27, with regard to greenbelt protection. It seemed to me that there was a willingness on the part of the government to look at protecting green spaces but very little about protecting farmers. As the months have gone by since then, I think there has been growing disillusionment with regard to the initiatives put forward by this government.

In the few brief moments I have, I want to talk very quickly about the municipal outlet drainage program, because this is of particular significance in a part of my riding, that of the Holland Marsh. As many will know, this was introduced by the government without consultation or any advance warning.

Ron Bonnett, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, said that Ontario farmers who count on municipal drain outlets to handle water from their tile drain systems are in for a big surprise. I would just point out to the member from Guelph-Wellington that there is a difference between a tile drainage program, which was a lending program, and municipal outlet drainage—two very different things for farmers.

Drains are an essential part of rural infrastructure and have been there for decades. They need to be engineered, installed and maintained. This is an essential part of the business of farming. So, over those many decades, the farmers, the municipalities and the province have worked together to create a well-built, intricate web of public and private drains. Without this, farmers will continue to invest in outlet drains, but certainly we will see that there are fewer of them who will be able to do this. Capacity will shrink, standards will fall and maintenance will suffer.

In my riding, the Holland Marsh is one of Ontario's most important vegetable-growing areas, and of course it has a vast network of canals and drains. So this is certainly not good news for the farmers in my riding.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): I'd also like to thank Mr Hardeman, the member from Oxford, for bringing forward this important opposition day motion to give voice to agriculture and to the ridings we serve. In Durham region, which I represent, it's the second-largest industry.

Many of the members who have spoken today have addressed the issues. What I want to do is pay respect to the agricultural leaders in my riding of Durham, and they are eminent list:

Don Rickard, past president of the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair just last year;

Jim Rickard, chair of the Ontario Apple Growers and chairman of the Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission;

Harvey Graham, past president and a leader for many years of the Ontario Cattlemen's Association;

John Wolters, representative of Scugog on the region's agricultural advisory committee and past president of the cattlemen's association;

Tim Sargent, a representative on the Durham agricultural advisory committee;

Joyce Kelly, former secretary of the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies, past president of the women's institute and a great aid to agriculture in our area;

Ted Watson a member of the Durham region agricultural advisory committee and an active farm leader in our area;

Kirk Kemp, a young person, a board member of the International Dwarf Fruit Tree Association;

Karen Yellowlees, the long-time secretary for the Durham Region Federation of Agriculture;

Jacqueline Vaneyk, past president of the Durham Region Federation of Agriculture;

Ted Eng, president, Durham Region Federation of Agriculture;

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Dave Davidson, a councillor on the Ontario Cattlemen's Association;

Dale Mountjoy, vice-president of the Ontario Corn Producers' Association, Region 4;

Anna Bragg, the first woman president of the Ontario Corn Producers' Association, who just lives down the road;

Hubert Schillings, of White Feather Farms, a director of the Ontario Egg Producers;

Charles Stevens, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association, also a board member of AGCare;

Walter Beath, the first chair of Durham region, past president of the cattlemen's association and still an active member in our community;

Henk Mulders from Link Greenhouses, a greenhouse operator and a young entrepreneur, showing that the true spirit of agriculture in Durham is alive and well;

Kevin Werry, from the Dairy Farmers of Ontario;

Tom Morawetz, the past president of the Ontario Retail Farm Equipment Dealers' Association, Evergreen Farm and Garden Ltd;

Sandy and Fred Archibald, from Archibald Orchards and Estate Winery—truly value-added agriculture in my riding;

Paul MacArthur, a professional agronomist in Durham region;

Irwin and Alissa Smith from Ocala Winery, also inventive and entrepreneurial members of the agricultural community;

Mr and Mrs Tom Barrie—Tom is the soil and crop improvement representative;

Mr and Mrs Eric Bowman, dairy farmers and very talented agricultural leaders;

Shirley and Gerald Brown, dairy and now cash crop;

Brian Caswell;

Mr David Gibson, from the apple growers' association;

Arnold Kerry, from Utica Farm Equipment;

Dave Frew.

The list of leaders in Durham region whom I consult with regularly are all concerned about the plight of agriculture. I could go on, but the list, I think, has been addressed. The issues have been addressed. What's missing is real leadership, and a cut of 20% from the Minister of Agriculture sends a signal and worries the farmers of the Ontario.

Mr Peters, do the right thing: Stand up for your ministry at the table in cabinet.

Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I too want to thank our agriculture critic, Ernie Hardeman, for presenting this motion today.

The Minister of Agriculture, after our lead speaker, said he felt like he was getting a lecture. Then he turned and started to give us a history lesson, because the only response they could have is to try to say, "What you didn't do ..." or "What you did do..." But the question today is, what are they doing? What is the Ministry of Agriculture and this Liberal government doing for rural Ontario today?

Now, municipal politicians in my riding say that they're doing nothing. They have never been so upset with a government as they are with this one. But don't listen to me and don't listen to the people on my side of the House. Let's see what Jim Brownell, member of provincial Parliament for Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh, says. I quote from the Chesterville Record:

"Brownell Apologetic For Record.

"There hasn't been much that has put farming on the pedestal since we were elected to government....There hasn't been one thing."

"I don't think they understand the struggles, outside urban Ontario."

"Individuals sitting in ivory towers thinking of things'...."

"Brownell said that he and other rural MPPs in the Liberal caucus were caught off guard when the Ontario

Ministry of Agriculture killed funding for municipal drains July 27.

“Jean-Marc Lalonde (of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell) was as dumbfounded as I was. I was floored.”

So you don't have to listen to us on this side of the House; you need only listen to their own members who have said publicly that their government has done nothing for farmers in this province. That is the public record of those members.

Now I want to talk about some other issues, because our members have articulated very well what this government has failed to do. What it has done is try to blame other governments for what it's failing to do. But the province only has one government at a time, and this is the government. It's the one that must act and help farmers at a more critical time than we've seen in 40 years.

Some of the other things where this government has failed in regard to rural people: First of all, it started right in their own throne speech. Not once did they mention the word “rural” in their throne speech. We should have known then that there would be no focus, no care, no compassion for rural Ontario.

We've got the Ministry of the Environment that wants to shut down sawmills because they want to term sawdust a contaminant, a hazardous material—

Interruption.

Mr Yakabuski: I wish somebody could shut that BlackBerry off. I hope it's shut off before they shut down all the sawmills in Renfrew county, because the employees of Renfrew county depend on those sawmills to make their living.

What about regulation 170 that this government is in process of implementing? Before they say that it was the previous government that brought it in, every Liberal member voted for that regulation and Bill 175. They wanted it strengthened. So they can forget about that line of attack against the previous government. This is the government. They've got to stop thinking they are still in opposition. I know you enjoyed it when you were in opposition, because you could get up and be critical. But do you know what? Once you have the mantle of leadership placed over your shoulders, you've got to carry it. Now carry it.

Mr Dunlop: It's my pleasure to close off our caucus's debate on this tonight. I'd like to begin by thanking our agriculture critic, Ernie Hardeman, for a job well done.

I've been travelling to plowing matches for the last 15 years, on and off, across the province of Ontario. The one thing I've never seen before is the Premier of our province booed by the agricultural community. I think that says it all about this government's stand and its priorities. This government simply does not view agriculture as a priority. It's plain and simple. They don't care about the rural communities and it's been said over and over again.

Let's see some of the sneaky things they've done through the summer months; for example, the job losses we have seen across this province. The Frost Centre: It is

shameful how that was handled, completely shameful. It has hurt the economic viability of a community and put 30-some people out of jobs.

Let's talk a little bit for a moment about some of the people who are having very difficult times in our rural communities and have to have their spouses go out to work at other jobs. We've just seen the Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia, the Rideau Regional Centre and the southwest regional centre in Chatham all decimated with the closing, in 2009, of those centres. Do you know what? This government has decided to close those centres with no plan. There are over 2,000 jobs at stake and there are over 1,000 residents.

The Minister of Community and Social Services says, “Believe us. We have a plan.” We asked her what the plan is. There is no plan but they are going to develop a plan. In the meantime, we have 1,000 residents who have no idea where they are going. I'm getting literally hundreds of e-mails in my community alone. We've got over 2,000 employees from OPSEU and across our province who are doing an excellent job, and they have no idea what's going to happen to their jobs except that they've been told the places are closing down. That's the type of sneaky thing that's done. It isn't done when the House is sitting; it's done in the middle of summer or before we come back. That's another thing.

We get talking about the gas tax. I just cannot believe my ears when I hear that the gas tax is only going to urban municipalities with transit systems. Does everybody in the province of Ontario not pay taxes when they buy gasoline?

Interjection: Yes, we do.

Mr Dunlop: So why would it only be going to urban municipalities with transit systems? That's completely unheard of. All of our municipal representatives, people with road systems in our small villages, small towns and our townships, need that money for their roads and bridges. We talk about how much this government cares about those small municipalities. Well, we've seen nothing.

As we close down this debate, I cannot believe that the people in the House tonight wouldn't support this resolution. It's a resolution that doesn't deal directly with the government. It just asks you to restore funding in a proper way and to stand up for the citizens who live in our wonderful province in rural Ontario. By far the vast majority of the geography of Ontario is made up of the rural citizens. They need our support and they need the support of this government. Please do not continue to make—

Mr Yakabuski: Support the motion.

Mr Dunlop: Support the motion and keep Ontario strong by keeping rural Ontario strong. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you to all who have participated in the debate, but the time has expired and I am required to put the question.

Mr Hardeman has moved opposition day number 1:

That the Legislative Assembly call upon the government,

To recognize the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's budget has been reduced by over 20%;

To reinstate full and future funding to the municipal outlet drainage program, which has been cut and given only temporary transition funding;

To reinstate full and future funding to the genetic research programs of the Ontario dairy herd improvement, Ontario swine improvement and beef improvement organizations, so that Ontario food quality and safety will continue to excel;

To provide BSE funding to Ontario's ruminant industry quickly as is being done in other provinces; and

To call upon Premier McGuinty to fulfill his campaign promise to support the farmers of Ontario by doing these things immediately.

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

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1801.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

All those in favour will please stand one at a time and be recognized by the table.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted
Baird, John R.
Barrett, Toby
Bisson, Gilles
Dunlop, Garfield

Jackson, Cameron
Klees, Frank
Kormos, Peter
Marchese, Rosario
Martiniuk, Gerry

Prue, Michael
Runciman, Robert W.
Scott, Laurie
Sterling, Norman W.
Tascona, Joseph N.

Flaherty, Jim
Hardeman, Ernie
Horwath, Andrea
Hudak, Tim

Munro, Julia
Murdoch, Bill
O'Toole, John
Ouellette, Jerry J.

Wilson, Jim
Witmer, Elizabeth
Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please stand one at a time and be recognized by the table.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne
Bartolucci, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bountrogianni, Marie
Bradley, James J.
Brotten, Laurel C.
Brownell, Jim
Cansfield, Donna H.
Caplan, David
Colle, Mike
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Di Cocco, Caroline
Duguid, Brad
Duncan, Dwight
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Fonseca, Peter
Gerretsen, John

Gravelle, Michael
Jeffrey, Linda
Kular, Kuldip
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Levac, Dave
Marsales, Judy
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McMeekin, Ted
McNeely, Phil
Milloy, John
Mitchell, Carol
Parsons, Ernie
Patten, Richard
Peters, Steve
Phillips, Gerry
Pupatello, Sandra

Qadri, Shafiq
Ramal, Khalil
Ramsay, David
Rinaldi, Lou
Ruprecht, Tony
Sandals, Liz
Sergio, Mario
Smith, Monique
Sorbara, Greg
Takhhar, Harinder S.
Van Bommel, Maria
Watson, Jim
Wilkinson, John
Wong, Tony C.
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 26; the nays are 52.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being past 6 of the clock, this House is adjourned until 6:45 of the clock.

The House adjourned at 1804.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon / L'hon James K. Bartleman
Speaker / Président: Hon / L'hon Alvin Curling
Clerk / Greffier: Claude L. DesRosiers
Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffière: Deborah Deller
Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Lisa Freedman
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Algoma-Manitoulin	Brown, Michael A. (L)	Hamilton East /	Horwath, Andrea (ND)
Ancaster-Dundas-	McMeekin, Ted (L)	Hamilton-Est	
Flamborough-Aldershot		Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Hon / L'hon Marie (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse, ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative		
Beaches-East York /	Prue, Michael (ND)	Hamilton West /	Marsales, Judy (L)
Beaches-York-Est		Hamilton-Ouest	
Bramalea-Gore-Malton-	Kular, Kuldeep (L)	Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and	Dombrowsky, Hon / L'hon Leona (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Springdale		Addington	
Brampton Centre /	Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Huron-Bruce	Mitchell, Carol (L)
Brampton-Centre		Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Brampton West-Mississauga /	Dhillon, Vic (L)		
Brampton-Ouest-Mississauga		Kingston and the Islands /	Gerretsen, Hon / L'hon John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, minister responsible for seniors / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées
Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Kingston et les îles	
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)		
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kitchener Centre /	Milloy, John (L)
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Kitchener-Centre	
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Don Valley East /	Caplan, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy House Leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Don Valley-Est	Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Don Valley West /		London North Centre /	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Don Valley-Ouest		London-Centre-Nord	
Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey	Eves, Ernie (PC) Leader of the opposition / chef de l'opposition	London West /	Bentley, Hon / L'hon Christopher (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	London-Ouest	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Mike (L)	London-Fanshawe	Wong, Tony C. (L)
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon / L'hon Steve (L) Minister of Agriculture and Food / ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation	Markham	Takhar, Hon / L'hon Harinder S. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga Centre /	
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga-Centre	Fonseca, Peter (L)
	Cansfield, Donna H. (L)	Mississauga East /	
Etobicoke Centre /		Mississauga-Est	Peterson, Tim (L)
Etobicoke-Centre		Mississauga South /	
Etobicoke North /	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Mississauga-Sud	
Etobicoke-Nord		Mississauga West /	Delaney, Bob (L)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Broten, Laurel C. (L)	Mississauga-Ouest	
Glengarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Nepean-Carleton	Baird, John R. (PC)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Niagara Centre /	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant	Barrett, Toby (PC)	Niagara-Centre	
Haliburton-Victoria-Brock	Scott, Laurie (PC)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
Halton	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)
		Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)
		Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)
		Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Stormont-Dundas- Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon / L'hon Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon / L'hon Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Ottawa West-Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest-Nepean	Watson, Hon / L'hon Jim (L) Minister of Consumer and Business Services / ministre des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises	Thunder Bay-Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Ottawa-Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Thunder Bay-Superior North / Thunder Bay-Superior- Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa-Vanier	Meilleur, Hon / L'hon Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Timiskaming-Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon / L'hon David (L) Minister of Natural Resources / ministre des Richesses naturelles
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Timmins-James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Parkdale-High Park	Kennedy, Hon / L'hon Gerard (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Toronto Centre-Rosedale / Toronto-Centre-Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon / L'hon George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Parry Sound-Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Toronto-Danforth	Churley, Marilyn (ND)
Perth-Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Trinity-Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Vaughan-King-Aurora	Sorbara, Hon / L'hon Greg (L) Minister of Finance / ministre des Finances
Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	Waterloo-Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Prince Edward-Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	Whitby-Ajax	Flaherty, Jim (PC)
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	Yakubuski, John (PC)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Sarnia-Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon / L'hon Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Sault Ste Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Windsor-St Clair	Duncan, Hon / L'hon Dwight (L) Minister of Energy, Chair of Cabinet, Government House Leader / ministre de l'Énergie, président du Conseil des ministres, leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon / L'hon Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon / L'hon Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)	York South-Weston / York-Sud-Weston	Cordiano, Hon / L'hon Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
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Scarborough-Rouge River	Curling, Hon / L'hon Alvin (L) Speaker / Président		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe-Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St Catharines	Bradley, Hon / L'hon James J. (L) Minister of Tourism and Recreation / ministre du Tourisme et des Loisirs		
St Paul's	Bryant, Hon / L'hon Michael (L) Attorney General, minister responsible for native affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / procureur général, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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Laurie Scott, Monique M. Smith,
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Kevin Daniel Flynn, Frank Klees, Peter Kormos,
David Oraziotti, Mario G. Racco, Elizabeth Witmer
Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Donna H. Cansfield, Kim Craiton, Bob Delaney,
Ernie Hardeman, Linda Jeffrey, Rosario Marchese,
Norm Miller, Mario G. Racco, Mario Sergio
Clerk / Greffier: Douglas Arnott

Public accounts / Comptes publics

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Présidente: Julia Munro
Laurel C. Broten, Jim Flaherty, Shelley Martel,
Bill Mauro, Julia Munro, Richard Patten,
Liz Sandals, Norman W. Sterling, David Zimmer
Clerk / Greffière: Susan Sourial

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Règlements et projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Tony C. Wong
Gilles Bisson, Marilyn Churley, Jeff Leal,
Gerry Martiniuk, Bill Murdoch, Tim Peterson,
Khalil Ramal, Maria Van Bommel, Tony C. Wong
Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

Social Policy / Politique sociale

Chair / Président: Jeff Leal
Vice-Chair / Vice-Président: Khalil Ramal
Ted Arnott, Ted Chudleigh, Kim Craiton,
Peter Fonseca, Jeff Leal, Rosario Marchese,
Ted McMeekin, Khalil Ramal, Kathleen O.Wynne
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

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