



Legislative Assembly  
of Ontario

First Session, 38<sup>th</sup> Parliament

Assemblée législative  
de l'Ontario

Première session, 38<sup>e</sup> législature

**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

**Tuesday 30 November 2004**

**Mardi 30 novembre 2004**

Speaker  
Honourable Alvin Curling

Président  
L'honorable Alvin Curling

Clerk  
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Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430  
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation  
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement  
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A2  
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430  
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 30 November 2004

## ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 30 novembre 2004

*The House met at 1330.  
Prayers.*

### MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

#### WATER QUALITY

**Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound):** I realize this isn't question period, but I rise in the House today to pose a couple of questions to the Minister of the Environment.

Minister Dombrowsky, if a tragedy had occurred in your riding, a tragedy that resulted in several deaths and thousands of illnesses, would you have expected your constituents to have a say in how to avoid similar disasters in the future?

Minister, if a regulation had been drafted as a direct result of this tragedy, but the regulation was deemed overbearing and far too costly by rural municipalities, and the government decided to hold public consultations to hear concerns, would you have expected a consultation in your riding so that people who were directly affected could have their voices heard?

I suspect that your answer to both questions would be yes. So why did you deny the people of my riding and the people of Walkerton a public consultation on regulation 170? I thought that after you and Mr Jim Merritt, the chair of the Advisory Council on Drinking Water Quality and Testing Standards, received my letters requesting a local consultation, the two of you would have had a meeting of the minds. But I guess not. The consultations are over, and I have been informed that no more public sessions will be scheduled.

Minister, my constituents and I are left to wonder, what if: What if this tragedy had occurred in your riding? Would you have demanded that Mr Merritt hold a consultation for your constituents? I suspect I know the answer to that question as well.

#### CONTAMINATED PROPERTIES

**Mr Dave Levac (Brant):** Just a short time ago I came to the House with a serious situation that took place in my riding: a fire on a brownfield site, an escheated property. I made mention to the Attorney General that I thought something needed to be done about this.

I'm standing today to report to this House that something has been done about it. I appreciate very much the

actions of the Attorney General and the interministerial committee that's been struck to deal with escheated properties, specifically brownfields or fields out there that are questionable in terms of their economic viability.

My challenge was that someone's going to get hurt. The reality is that as soon as that came to the Attorney General's attention, he gave me a call and said, "What can we do to help?" "We need the government of Ontario to take some action on brownfields. We need the government to take action on escheated properties." We were given those assurances by the Attorney General, and, lo and behold, the interministerial committee has already met and is talking about ways in which we can make these escheated properties safer for people, not only in my riding but for the province of Ontario, and I'm deeply indebted to him for doing so.

We also want to make note that the city of Brantford, through its city council, took action immediately. The building has now been razed; it's down to the ground. People are safe in that community, that particular property.

I look forward to the continued work of this province with the municipalities in the province. The challenge has also been put out, and the federal government has answered the call. We're going to get three levels of government finally addressing brownfields all together.

#### WATER QUALITY

**Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):** I also rise today on the subject that my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound was speaking about, and that is regulation 170/03.

They did have hearings in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. They heard about it in spades, the disastrous effects the full implementation of this regulation will have on rural Ontarians. People like Gunther Borck, Gerry Belisle, Roger Imhoff and Angela Burgess let them know what the consequences of this implementation would be.

This government has decided to postpone the implementation of that regulation. What we need to see are real, substantive changes to that regulation, if not a complete redoing of the whole shebang. It is disastrous for rural Ontario and will result in economic hardship like you've never seen.

When Justice O'Connor was given his mandate to come up with new water regulations for the province of Ontario, he was not constricted by financial concerns, but a government showing leadership must take that into

consideration. We simply can't put regulations on rural people that they cannot afford without any regard to the hardship that will result for them.

There must be changes. The minister has to stop dithering and delaying, put her shoulder to the harness and get to work on this.

#### TOMMY DOUGLAS

**Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre):** It is a true honour for me, on behalf of New Democrats here at Queen's Park, to pay tribute to a great visionary, a great populist, a great democratic socialist and, according to last night's CBC contest, the greatest Canadian, Tommy Douglas.

Folks across this great country chose as their greatest Canadian a man who fought for public ownership and public institutions. They chose Tommy Douglas, the former leader of the federal New Democratic Party, the former Premier of Saskatchewan and the father of Canada's universal health care system. They chose someone who brought in a bill of human rights, brought electricity to rural Saskatchewan, introduced public auto insurance and set the model for crown corporations across this country.

Today it's hard to find a politician, and indeed a Canadian, who does not identify at some level or in some way with the great Tommy Douglas. In choosing Tommy Douglas as one of the greatest Canadians, Canadians have sent a message that public ownership of public institutions, from health care to auto insurance to telecommunications, is integral to the fabric of this country.

It is a fitting tribute on the 100th anniversary of Tommy Douglas's birth.

We should all take that message and continue to fight against privatization and the profit motive to keep the vision and legacy of that great Canadian democratic socialist Tommy Douglas alive.

#### MICHAEL SIYDOCK

**Mr Tim Peterson (Mississauga South):** It is with great sadness that I rise in the House today to pay tribute to OPP Constable Michael Siydock, who passed away on Friday, November 26.

Constable Siydock was on duty Friday evening when he collapsed while investigating a motor vehicle accident. He died of natural causes.

Constable Siydock was with the Ontario Provincial Police for seven years, serving on the Toronto and Port Credit detachments. Prior to becoming a police officer, he worked as a conservation officer.

Constable Siydock died while doing what he enjoyed best: serving the community and those in need.

On behalf of the provincial government, we thank Constable Siydock for serving the people of our province for the past seven years. Our condolences go out to his wife, Elizabeth, and children, Donald, Stephen and Laura.

1340

#### CATTLE FARMERS

**Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford):** Today the President of the United States starts his visit to Canada in this great province.

Rural Ontario sees this as very positive and important, because lately we've heard some positive things from Mr Bush about Canadian cattle once again crossing the border. This certainly is good news for our farmers and agribusinesses.

What isn't good news, however, is that this government has once again shown its disregard for the agriculture industry by not even bothering to get a face-to-face meeting with Mr Bush. The best this Premier is trying for is a few words during a state dinner.

The Premier and the minister should be fighting for a meeting to impress upon the American delegation that this issue is of the utmost importance and the border must be opened to live cattle as soon as possible. Instead, farmers will just have to be satisfied with passing conversation in a crowded room, if that.

To me, this is just one more example of this government's incompetence on this portfolio. Not only are they so far behind in processing safety-net funding through the CAIS program that farmers are still waiting for money for 2003; they also chose to put BSE money in half-thought-out programs like the mature animal abattoir fund. Two of the four abattoirs that received money from this program were not even capable of fulfilling the obligations of their contracts at the time they were awarded. Now the biggest problem ever to hit Ontario agriculture will not even be discussed with the President when the government had the perfect opportunity.

Let's hope that, as beef is being served at the dinner, maybe it will jog the Premier's memory that there is a real problem with a very important industry in the province he's supposed to be running.

#### HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland):** I would like to take the opportunity to put an end to claims made by the MPP from Nepean-Carleton yesterday, implying that I've been trotting around the country threatening to close hospitals. I have no idea where he got that information, but his facts are unsubstantiated and simply untrue. I fully support the hospitals in Northumberland, and I want to see them open and providing the best health care to our community.

Let me tell you, I have been trotting around the countryside: I've been meeting with CEOs, I've been meeting with board chairs, I've been meeting with leaders of those communities, like the mayors, to make sure they have proper health care.

The McGuinity government has invested over \$12 million in health care in the riding of Northumberland, including an increase of over 20% in community access centres; base funding for Northumberland's hospital of

\$585,000; Campbellford Memorial Hospital, \$125,000; and \$667,000 to the Campbellford district mental health centre.

It's sort of ironic, because the only time you would have seen newspaper headlines reading, "Hospitals Closing in Northumberland," was under that government when they closed two hospitals: Campbellford and Cobourg.

The McGuinty government is dedicated to working with the hospitals and communities to be sure they continue to provide core services to everyone in Northumberland and in the province of Ontario.

### CURRICULUM

**Mr Jim Brownell (Stormont-Dundas-Charlottenburgh):** Last week the Education Quality and Accountability Office announced that performance on standardized provincial math testing for grade 9 students has improved this year, and I'm delighted about that.

I'm happy to announce that 68% of students in the advanced mathematics program either achieved the standard or surpassed it. But we continue to see too many students having difficulty with the applied program, in particular with applied math.

This government is addressing that fact. We understand that students are different. Students learn differently and have varying difficulties and abilities. That is why we're making changes to the curriculum for the next school year.

As the Minister of Education has stated, we have to act now. Instead of putting up roadblocks like the previous government did, we're working to break down walls to help all of our students. We will revise the grade 9 applied curriculum to make sure there are two different math courses, and not just in name.

### DOCTORS' SERVICES

**Mr Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans):** I rise today to speak about the plan that will bring more doctors into Ontario and give Ontarians in underserved communities better access to family doctors. To quote the former NDP Premier of Saskatchewan, Roy Romanow, "This is a fundamental transformational change and is something that all of the evidence in my report indicates should be implemented." He goes on to say, "I think the government is on the right track. I believe that the government of Ontario has the support of the public."

We agree, but Howard Hampton of the Ontario NDP, on the other hand, seemed to have an odd fondness for the status quo. The NDP is not interested in transforming health care in Ontario. When the NDP had the chance, the only thing they did was cut off Ontario's supply of doctors. I remember the days when Howard Hampton said, "Roma-now, not Roma-maybe," but yesterday he flip-flopped and said, "Roma-never."

We agree with the old Howard Hampton: We have to move forward now. The one million Ontarians without

family doctors, the 142 underserved communities, seniors and northerners, cannot wait another day. The day after Tommy Douglas, the founder of medicare, was named the greatest Canadian, it is a wonder seeing today's NDP try to stand in the way of taking the next great step forward in providing health care to Ontarians. It is becoming more and more obvious that the NDP is nothing more than a tired party of the status quo, with no new ideas, dreams or solutions to offer Ontarians.

### ANNUAL REPORT, PROVINCIAL AUDITOR

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the 2004 annual report of the Provincial Auditor.

### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

JAY LAWRENCE AND BART MACKEY  
MEMORIAL ACT (HIGHWAY TRAFFIC  
AMENDMENT), 2004

LOI DE 2004 COMMÉMORANT  
JAY LAWRENCE ET BART MACKEY  
(MODIFICATION DU CODE DE LA ROUTE)

Mr Rinaldi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 153, An Act in memory of Jay Lawrence and Bart Mackey to amend the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 153, Loi modifiant le Code de la route à la mémoire de Jay Lawrence et Bart Mackey.

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

Mr Rinaldi?

**Mr Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland):** What this bill does is ask to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit persons from occupying the outside of a truck or the delivery body of a commercial motor vehicle, or being towed while the vehicle is being driven on the highway. We have laws in this province that prohibit people from driving a vehicle without seat belts—they'll be fined points—yet we allow people to ride in the back of a pickup truck with no restraints.

### STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

#### CHIEFS OF POLICE

**Hon Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services):** Two weeks ago I rose in this House to pay tribute to a group of men and women who protect our communities and work to make Ontario safer. They are the front-line police officers of this province who risk their lives every single day: the

people we turn to when we're in trouble, the people who are there for us when we need them most. Today it's my privilege and pleasure to pay tribute to the leadership of that group of people, the chiefs of police and senior police leaders, on the occasion of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police Queen's Park Day. It is a worthwhile occasion. It gives us as politicians the opportunity to hear the concerns, understand the needs and continue to build partnerships with the people who manage police services across Ontario.

In a little over one year, we have seen just how much the partnership between the McGuinty government and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police has accomplished to improve community safety. That partnership began in December of last year with the announcement of the Green Tide Summit, a joint initiative to combat marijuana grow operations and the threat they pose to our communities, to our children and to our economy.

### 1350

We stood together with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police on the lawn by Mount Sinai Hospital in June to announce legislation that, if passed, would make mandatory the reporting of gunshot wounds by hospitals and other designated health care facilities.

On October 13, together with the OACP and the OPP, the McGuinty government announced the first step in its plan to protect our children from Internet crimes of luring and child pornography. Just six days later, I stood together with Chief Ean Algar of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police to announce that the McGuinty government would introduce legislation as a first step to combat grow operations.

This occasion also serves to remind us of how important it is for us to provide the support these chiefs need to do their jobs, and members of this House have an important role to play in that regard. Thanks to the work of the officers and the goodwill of our citizens, Ontario is a safe place to live, and the McGuinty government is committed to making it even safer.

In honouring this commitment, we continue to work with the chiefs to provide the tools they need to ensure the safety of the community. This government is tough on crime and, more importantly, tough on the causes of crime. That's why we established a specialized task force in Toronto to target gun violence, particularly among gangs. The work of the anti-guns-and-gangs unit has already begun. Several large-scale police investigations have resulted in a significant number of criminal charges being laid and the seizure of many firearms.

That's why we are providing significant additional funding to fight Internet-based crimes against children and sponsoring a two-year pilot project to help the Toronto Police Service monitor and track down sex offenders. That's why we're fulfilling our commitment to invest in putting an additional 1,000 police officers on the street.

Our commitment to the safety of the people of Ontario is especially concerned with the issue of domestic violence. The McGuinty government's domestic violence

action plan, announced in April, is a multi-faceted response to a serious problem. It includes public education and training to mobilize communities to break the cycle of domestic abuse, and training for police officers, crown attorneys and others working in the criminal justice system to better assess risk in abusive situations.

Two weeks ago, I announced the introduction of the Ontario domestic assault risk assessment pilot project in Ottawa and the North Bay area. This is a tool that will identify domestic violence offenders who are likely to reoffend and thus help us protect women and their children from further abuse.

We continue to work with the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police on initiatives to enhance community safety. The association is effective in promoting the interests of its membership and is a worthwhile partner for the government in securing community safety. You have no doubt heard Premier McGuinty say in this House that no single one of us is as strong as all of us working together. The McGuinty government's partnership with the Ontario Chiefs of Police is a clear example of just what working together can accomplish.

Today, on the occasion of their annual Queen's Park Day, I am pleased to salute the hard-working men and women who make up the association, who give so much to maintaining the safety of our communities and whose efforts on behalf of the communities they serve make us all proud.

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** Responses?

**Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North):** I would like to make a response to Mr Kwinter's comments. First, I'd like to warmly welcome the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police to Queen's Park. Police chiefs, deputy police chiefs and other representatives of the association are meeting with MPPs throughout the day to raise some very valid issues that the McGuinty government needs to address.

I was pleased to meet this morning with 16 OACP representatives from across the province, including their president and a member from my riding, Mr Paul Hamelin, the chief of the Midland Police Service; Toronto police chief Julian Fantino; and OPP deputy commissioner Jay Hope. I would like at this time to congratulate Jay on his appointment as the deputy commissioner, along with John Carson. It's a very great distinction for both of them.

Our leader, John Tory, participated in each of the two meetings I attended this morning. The OACP made it very clear they want to work in partnership with legislators. Unfortunately, co-operation from the McGuinty government appears to be lacking at this time. I'm sure police leaders were happy to hear from our leader, John Tory, that our caucus will continue to support the police because it's the right thing to do. John Tory assured police leaders that they don't need to feel alone and that our party wants to help them do their job.

I thought I should get a few of the OACP's issues on the record in the House today, starting with the broader issue of autonomy. Police leaders are ultimately held

accountable for community safety decisions that impact their communities. When the minister recently announced the termination of option 4, he took away from police leaders the decision about what's right for the community. However, he also made this move without any real consultation with our police chiefs.

It's a sad day at Queen's Park when I read a letter from a police chief saying that he was informed of a decision through the media. I have a number of comments on some of these topics. One is from the chief of the Kingston Police Service:

"You will recall when we met on July 20, 2004, regarding option 4, I stressed three very important points. Option 4 has been a line item in our budget. If the initiative were to be cancelled, we would require sufficient notice regarding the impact on our budget. If option 4 were to be cancelled, how would the minister reimburse the Kingston police service for the lost revenue? What was the position of the Ontario Association of Police Services Boards, which represents the governing bodies for our police services?"

From the Peterborough police service:

"Today I was informed through the media that you have chosen to cancel all option 4 programs in the province of Ontario effective January 1, 2005. I am appalled that this announcement was carried out through the media, without advance notice to the police services involved at the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. Quoted comments attributed to you have called into question the integrity of my police service because I chose to utilize a traffic education program."

These are just two of many letters I've received, copied from Minister Kwinter, on this very important issue.

Police chiefs are also concerned about their autonomy in relation to the role of police services boards. The Police Services Act prohibits police services boards from interfering in the day-to-day operations of police. But now, police chiefs are worried about police services boards and how councils are manipulating the makeup of these boards.

Ontario's police chiefs also want action from the government on the following issues: vacant positions on police services boards; the lack of availability and training of justices of the peace; the impact on front-line policing of more police in courtrooms; lack of a minimum sentence for cultivating a narcotic when 80% of the product is exported to the United States; exemption from any mandatory retirement legislation that comes forward from your government, as you promised.

Police leaders do not seem to be convinced that Dalton McGuinty will deliver on his promise to put 1,000 new police officers on the street. Because of budget constraints, some municipalities will not be able to participate in any kind of cost-sharing arrangement with the McGuinty government in order to pay for the new police officers. It was mentioned to me this morning that municipalities will be lucky to get even 200 more cops on the street before the next election. I have said many

times in the House that the \$30 million the McGuinty government offered the police services of Ontario to put 1,000 new police officers on the street is a pittance. It's going to cost \$200 million over the mandate of your government, and you're putting in \$30 million. It's simply not enough.

*Interjection.*

**Mr Dunlop:** To the minister from Sudbury, the fact of the matter is, we put 1,000 new police officers on the street and we would have continued to do that today, because we keep our word. We keep our election promises. You should look at the mandate of the previous government to see how many we kept. You have not kept your promises and you know you haven't, and you're going to live with it on October 4, 2007.

I appreciate the opportunity to respond today.

**Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: It's my pleasure today to introduce, in the gallery, Danika Hawthorne's dad, Brent Broadhurst, and great-uncle Robert Broadhurst. They are here visiting Danika today.

**The Speaker:** That's not a point of order, but welcome.

**Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre):** New Democrats are pleased to join in this welcome of Ontario's chiefs of police to Queen's Park. Indeed, New Democrats look forward to meeting with these chiefs later this afternoon.

**1400**

We want to make it very clear that it has become increasingly challenging for police leadership across this province to maintain adequately staffed and adequately resourced police services in ever more challenging times. Our police officers, women and men, are out there serving their communities, protecting property and protecting life and, more often than not, doing so at great risk to themselves.

I say that we should be exceptionally proud of our police officers, because I believe and New Democrats believe that the quality of policing here in this province of Ontario is as high as you're ever going to find anywhere in this world—make no mistake about it. Never have police officers been so well trained, so disciplined, so committed, and never have police officers had to work under such difficult circumstances.

Chiefs of police across this province, big city through to small town, are perpetually engaged now in heated and protracted battles with police services boards and councils over the most simple question, the most fundamental question, of adequate resources, adequate financing, so they can maintain some minimum standard.

I say to the minister: This recycled and now increasingly tired announcement of 1,000 new police officers has reached the point of annoyance, because you're not talking about 1,000 new police officers; you're talking about 50-cent cops on a good day—more likely 40- or 30-cent police officers. You know full well that it's the rare community in this province that can afford to pick up the huge additional costs that would be imposed upon

them were they to accept your rather meagre offer—a modest proposal indeed.

New Democrats are increasingly concerned about the health and safety of police officers, who, in circumstances of understaffing, are called upon to do tasks in inadequate numbers. We're concerned about the tools or, more importantly, the lack of tools available to police officers to do their jobs, tools that are becoming increasingly sophisticated as the criminal utilization of technology becomes increasingly advanced.

Minister, you talk about specific endeavours to control Internet predatory conduct by pedophiles, among others, but you know full well that to acquire the hardware and the personnel to deal with the IT, the information technology, and the high-tech demands is a scenario wherein police forces have to acquire yet more and higher levels of funding. If this government is serious about its commitment to police officers, then this government will immediately move to focus on the needs of communities across this province, all the way from Niagara to Toronto and to Peawanuck and Attawapiskat in northern Ontario, and ensure that police officers are there in adequate numbers, with adequate levels of training and resources, including the hard tools they need to do their job.

It's not enough to support the initial training of new police officers; municipalities are finding it increasingly difficult to ensure that their police officers are regularly involved in the upgrading and retraining that is necessary to maintain skill levels. This government talks a big game and indeed imports rather glib comments like, "It's not just about crime; it's about the causes of crime." I say to you that people have a right not only to be secure in their communities but to feel secure in their communities. One of the ways you do that is by listening to police officers and their chiefs of police across this province and ensuring adequate levels of staffing and police forces, from the very far north to the south, the east and the west, and ensuring that the police forces have the resources. That means that this government has to make a commitment to real investments in those police forces.

Enough announcements, enough recycled announcements, enough already; what we need is hard cash. We need action, we need commitment and we need a sincere movement on the part of this government to reinforce policing across the province.

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

**Mr Jim Flaherty (Whitby-Ajax):** My question is for the Minister of Culture. There was a promise made by the Liberals opposite when they were seeking office to improve tax credits for the film industry. That promise, of course, has not been fulfilled; it's another broken promise. We look to see why the promise was broken and

the government says, "Our tax credit is competitive as it stands right now," but then today we have the auditor's report released and tabled here. It says, "No statistics were compiled to demonstrate the impact caused specifically by the tax credits." So who is correct? Is the auditor correct that there are no data, that in fact there is no measurement, of the impact of the media tax credit, or is your government correct when it says that the "tax credit is competitive as it stands right now"?

**Hon Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs):** I thank you for the question. We have received the Provincial Auditor's report, and the Ministry of Culture adopted the auditor's recommendation that we work collaboratively with OMDC and the Ministry of Finance to develop more specific performance targets and look at ways of improving measuring the performance of these tax credits. I am pleased that the auditor's report noted that the OMDC has cleared a backlog of applications, and processing time has also been reduced to 15 weeks when it used to take six months or a year. So there is a major improvement there. We are committed to ensuring that Ontario remains the film and TV industry leader in Canada.

**Mr Flaherty:** The auditor didn't say that the statistics were not specific enough; he said that there were no statistics compiled—nothing. Yet your government goes around telling people who work in the film industry that the tax credits are competitive. More than that, it said yesterday, "Our analysis tells us that the major impact on this industry right now is the value of the Canadian dollar." That's what your government says. What does the Auditor General say? He says, "No statistics were compiled to demonstrate the impact caused specifically by the tax credit initiatives as opposed to other factors, such as the value of the Canadian dollar or the availability of production facilities." The Auditor General says you have no data in support of what is being said by your government about the industry being affected by the Canadian dollar. Is the auditor wrong or did your government fail to disclose data to the auditor?

**Hon Mrs Meilleur:** I will refer the question to the Minister of Finance.

**Hon Greg Sorbara (Minister of Finance):** I have to tell my friend for Whitby-Ajax that I am almost reckless hearing his questions. You see, his leader is out there saying, "We've got to dramatically expand the tax credit." He's referring to an auditor's report condemning the management of tax credits during the period when he was in government. Most of the analysis—

*Interjections.*

**Hon Mr Sorbara:** Oh, they don't like to hear that.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** The member for Oxford is not even in his seat and is disrupting the proceedings.

Could you wrap up in 10 seconds?

**Hon Mr Sorbara:** I just want to tell my friend from Whitby-Ajax that our recent analysis in the ministry, long after this auditor completed his work on tax credits, has

to do with the dramatic rise in the value of the Canadian dollar over the course of the past three or four months. There's no coincidence, and I'll finish later.

**Mr Flaherty:** We hear now from the Minister of Finance that there are data. I assume he'll be bringing those data forward to this House and to the film industry of the people of Ontario so that they can see those data the Auditor General did not see.

It's worse than that. It's not just the broken promise, the untrustworthiness; it's the incompetence of the government. There are three entities now, the Auditor General tells us, with their hands all over this tax credit that are supposed to know something about it: the Ontario Media Development Corporation, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Culture. The Auditor General tells us: "We also observed that it was not clear how the responsibilities associated with establishing and monitoring performance standards and targets were to be shared among" the three. Not only that, there wasn't even consensus about what was to be measured. This is shocking.

1410

You're out there, Minister of Finance, telling the industry it's about the Canadian dollar and that their tax credit is competitive. Your three ministries can't even get along and decide what to measure. Will you just stand up and admit that your government is in disarray? You're incompetent on this issue.

**Hon Mr Sorbara:** I'll give that suggestion, sir, all due consideration.

We're talking about the auditor's report. The period that is reported on was from April 1, 2002, to December 31, 2003, as I recall, during most of that period. But that's not the real issue.

I want to tell my friend from Whitby-Ajax—and I think he will acknowledge this—that this industry is incredibly important to Ontario. Hard-working men and women, very talented men and women, have created, over the course of the past 15 years, a very strong film and television industry in this city, province and country. I want to tell my friend that we will make sure on this side of the House and in this government that that industry is competitive. The issue is not just tax credits; it's the value of the dollar and other things that this government will do to ensure that. I want to assure my friend that that is the case.

#### OMA AGREEMENT

**Mr Robert W. Runciman (Leader of the Opposition):** I have a question for the Premier. Premier, in the midst of the election campaign last year, you spoke at great length about the need to bring stability to our health care system. You made 36 separate promises on health care. Then you ran an ad saying Ontarians needed to work, build and dream together. I guess we shouldn't be surprised to find yet more evidence that your words mean nothing in practice. From your hated health tax to the privatization of health services to your war on hospitals,

now you've deliberately chosen to pick a fight with doctors.

Yesterday, the head of the OMA said that your behaviour was unacceptable and would do nothing to attract and retain doctors in Ontario. Premier, I agree with Dr Rapin. Is this what you meant by working and building together?

**Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Inter-governmental Affairs):** I'm delighted to receive the question, of course, but I would think that the OMA would be wondering about the member opposite's new-found allegiance to the Ontario Medical Association, given the member's particular predisposition toward that group in the past.

I want to quote from something he said in this Legislature. He said: "There is a term I could use to describe the OMA, but I will not use it. It is not polite. I will just say it equates to ladies of the night, and I do not have a very high opinion of those individuals."

So I was just wondering about this new-found allegiance, support, and perhaps love, for the Ontario Medical Association. I'm just wondering about this transition. Perhaps he may want to speak to that in his supplementary.

**Mr Runciman:** The Premier's staff had to go back about 20 years to find a quote like that, but the reality is, unlike the Minister of Health, who's running into mysterious people called Larry the doctor to support his case—it reminds me of Jimmy Stewart and Harvey the rabbit. You know, nobody else sees these people.

Premier, patients, physicians and the public at large are deeply concerned about one fundamental issue: the ability to find a doctor when they need one. Your rhetoric and bluster aside, there is an acknowledged doctor shortage. The doctors have been retiring early, leaving the province or leaving the profession altogether.

Not so long ago, you used to talk about trying to fix that. Now you're steamrolling doctors into accepting a deal in which they truly have no choice, and your minister says he'll pass regulations to make it happen—no say by doctors, no debate by the House; your way or the highway. Premier, is this what you meant by working and building together?

**Hon Mr McGuinty:** We are delighted to be championing an agreement that will make Ontario's family doctors, according to statistics provided by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the highest-paid family doctors in Canada. Yes, we are proud of that agreement. We look forward to moving on that. It will also make our specialists the second-highest-paid specialists in all of Canada, and we look forward, again, to moving on that course.

I know the member opposite will also be interested in hearing what Roy Romanow is saying about this particular approach. He says:

"Canadians should keep a watchful eye on what is unfolding in Ontario.

"The government has clearly embraced the kinds of changes and a longer view of things required to

strengthen and sustain the future of our most cherished social program....

“At this point in history, well over 80% of Canadians are onside, clear about their values and how they are best expressed through medicare, waiting and hoping for change.”

We are the harbingers of that change.

**Mr Runciman:** I wonder if the Premier asked Roy Romanow about privatizing a whole range of services in the province and people suffering. I don't think he looked for advice there.

You don't provide meaningful answers in the House. You're denying doctors the right to vote on your take-it-or-else offer. I'm telling you, doctors will be voting, and they'll be voting with their feet. This is dumb, wrong-headed and illustrates the incompetence of your government. This Liberal government has done more to encourage doctors to leave Ontario than anyone in modern history. You're starting to make Bob Rae look good. That's the reality.

Premier, in your force-fed offer there are pilot projects involving after-hours care, geriatric and palliative care, as well as 16 joint OMA-government committees, and you're asking doctors to join voluntarily. Given that you've already poisoned this relationship with the doctors, why would any doctor voluntarily join anything under this agreement, considering your callous and arrogant treatment of their profession? Why would they volunteer?

**Hon Mr McGuinty:** Just to remind the member opposite, we devoted nine laborious months of negotiation with the OMA—120 meetings. We also had four side tables and 44 meetings that flowed from that. What we've arrived at is an agreement that meets the needs of Ontario patients, which is the single most important responsibility we share with doctors.

I say to Ontarians at large, who could be against a plan to bring more doctors into underserved northern and rural communities? Who could be against a plan that encourages and incents doctors to practise together in teams with nurse practitioners, nurses and other health care professionals so they can bring more comprehensive family care to Ontario patients? Who could be against paying doctors to spend more time with seniors, against paying doctors to spend more time working on home care and in our nursing homes? Who could be against paying doctors and providing incentives that help us reduce our wait times? That's the plan we placed before the people of Ontario, that's the plan we placed before doctors, and together we're going to move ahead on that plan.

#### WATER QUALITY

**Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River):** I have a question for the Premier. In May 2000, rain washed animal waste from a nearby farm into a municipal well in Walkerton. This resulted in E coli contaminating the municipal water supply, causing seven deaths and thousands of illnesses from contaminated water. The

O'Connor report, which examined this tragedy, concluded that a combination of inadequate groundwater mapping and inadequate enforcement was a major contributor to the disaster.

Here we are, four years after these tragic events and 14 months after your government assumed power, and the Provincial Auditor bluntly warns today that overall, the Ministry of the Environment does not have adequate procedures in place to restore, protect and enhance groundwater resources. Premier, will Ontarians have to go through another Walkerton-like incident before your government finally takes action to protect Ontario's drinking water?

1420

**Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs):** I'll refer it to the Minister of the Environment.

**Hon Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of the Environment):** Our government very much welcomes the report of the Provincial Auditor. He has highlighted an issue that has been very important to our government.

I'm very proud that just two weeks ago the Minister of Natural Resources and I announced \$12.5 million that will begin the good work with conservation authorities to establish groundwater protection across Ontario. Conservation authorities have welcomed this. We recognize that we are committed to implementing all of Justice O'Connor's recommendations. We are plowing new ground every inch of the way. We have very willing partners across the province because, like this government, the people of Ontario believe it's absolutely essential to implement a framework that will ensure that water in Ontario is safe to drink.

**Mr Hampton:** It's interesting to read the Provincial Auditor's report and then go back to your budget, because page 12 of the budget says very clearly that the Ministry of the Environment is going to take another cut, a cut of at least 12%. Your own budget shows that.

I want to go back to the auditor's report. Everyone agrees that thorough groundwater mapping is the very foundation of good source water management. It's interesting that you mentioned you want to get started on this, because the auditor says there are 36 watershed areas that need to be planned. What's your government going to do? It's only going to plan six of 36, and you're only going to have this done by 2007-08. You haven't even established a time frame for the other 30 watershed plans.

Minister, will you admit to Ontarians that your 12% cut to the Ministry of the Environment budget is doing less to protect water, not more?

**Hon Mrs Dombrowsky:** I'm very prepared to admit to the people of Ontario that this government is spending more at the Ministry of the Environment than any government for the last 10 years.

I'm very surprised that the honourable member, who was part of a government that cut the Ministry of the Environment—it was funded at \$824 million in 1991; they cut it by almost \$500 million—has the audacity to

stand in this House and suggest that our government is not committed to (1) the environment or (2) protecting water across Ontario.

With respect to the comments around source water protection, I would direct him to the draft legislation that has been posted on the Environment Bill of Rights registry. It's very clear on the framework we intend to put in place. There will be a local component. Source water protection committees will be in place, and they will be based on watersheds across the province.

**Mr Hampton:** Your officials were forced to admit to the auditor that you're only going to do watershed planning in six out of 36, and it won't be done until 2008. Your own budget, on page 12, says that the Ministry of the Environment is going to take another 12% cut—more of what the Conservatives did.

I want to go back again to what the auditor found. He said that your regular MOE inspections found that in only 5% of non-compliance cases were there any threats to human health. However, more rigorous SWAT team assessments of non-compliance found threats to human health in 25% of these cases. It seems to me that there is clearly a desperate need to hire more investigators to do more water investigations, not cut the Ministry of the Environment's budget by 12%.

The auditor says you can't do the job now, but you're going to cut 12% more from the budget. Is that what Dalton McGuinty meant when he said, "Choose change"—cut more, do fewer water inspections, place Ontario's water at greater risk?

**Hon Mrs Dombrowsky:** What Dalton McGuinty meant when he said, "Choose change," was that we are going to invest in our environment in the province of Ontario. I'm very proud to say that our most recent budget increased spending at the Ministry of the Environment by 12.5%. I'm very proud to say that our government has increased the number of water inspectors by 25%. We've hired 33 more water inspectors in the province. I'm very proud to say that our government has improved the standards. We've increased the standards. If you're a water inspector in Ontario, there is a rigorous standard that has to be met.

That is keeping our commitment to the people of Ontario that we want to be sure that, when they turn on the tap, their water is safe.

#### EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

**Mr Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River):** To the Premier: The McGuinty government, like the Conservative government, is going to cut the budget but then promise to do more.

Premier, today's auditor's report reveals that workers are having their basic rights on the job violated, while your government does next to nothing. Over the past five years, the Ministry of Labour has admitted that there were 51,000 violations of the Employment Standards Act, yet out of those 51,000 violations, only 18 violations were prosecuted. That's less than 0.05% of violators

being prosecuted. Can you tell me something: Why is the McGuinty government letting 99.95% of the bad bosses off the hook when they violate workers' rights?

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

**Hon Christopher Bentley (Minister of Labour):** I too asked that question when I took a look at what was happening with the Ministry of Labour, and then when I turned to page 240 of the auditor's report, he has a chart that notes the 1991 concerns that the auditor had at that time and how they don't appear to have changed much in the employment standards area, with the most recent report up to December 31.

One of the things he talks about is that prosecutions have been virtually non-existent, creating little incentive for employers to comply with the act. We changed that in April when we introduced Bill 63. At the same time, we launched an enhanced enforcement initiative and an enhanced awareness initiative.

The fact of the matter is, there were next to no prosecutions of employment standards during the time of the NDP and during the time of the Tories who followed. We're changing that. We followed that up in July with a new ticketing regime to make it easier to prosecute where the facts warrant it.

**Mr Hampton:** Minister, you mentioned Bill 63. That was before committee, and you could not find one labour representative nor any employer representatives to support your bill. They all see it for what it is: superficial paper that will do nothing.

I want to go back to the budget again, because the Ministry of Labour is going to take a further 12% cut. Once again, your government promises to do more, but then when you look at the fine print, you're going to cut the budget. Today's auditor's report also reveals that only 15% of workers who are owed wages actually get their money. Even in Alberta, they double that success rate. Today's auditor's report also reveals that as many as 30% of workplaces found to be unsafe weren't coming into compliance. Yet we hear the same story: You're going to cut the budget, but you promise to do more. How do you provide more effective enforcement when you're going to have less budget and less resources to do it with?

**Hon Mr Bentley:** Actually, more resources are going into the Ministry of Labour, but because we're enforcing the memorandum of understanding between the WSIB and the Ministry of Labour, the inspectors that we're hiring are being fully paid for by the WSIB. That's why in July we were able to announce 200 more health and safety inspectors, because they'll be fully paid for by the WSIB, so it doesn't come out of the pockets of the people of Ontario. Those inspectors will make sure that our workplaces are properly inspected and our laws are properly enforced.

It was interesting, as well, that the member made reference to the fact that monies owing under the Employment Standards Act have not been collected. That was the problem during the NDP years. Collection rates of monies owing under employment standards have

rarely been better than 20 or 25%. That's why we're changing the process.

We announced the enhanced enforcement initiative last April. It includes proactive inspections and determination to more effectively collect monies owing—

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** Thank you. Final supplementary.

1430

**Mr Hampton:** Your ministry officials tried that line on the auditor, and the auditor didn't buy it. Taking money out of the pockets of injured workers and then saying you're going to do better enforcement in terms of unsafe workplaces doesn't cut it. It also isn't going to do anything for employment standards. It's not going to do anything for those workers who are owed overtime, those workers who are owed vacation pay or those workers who simply haven't been treated fairly on the job.

What did Dalton McGuinty mean when he said to workers, "Choose change," and now we find that the Ministry of Labour budget is going to be cut a further 12%? The auditor says you can't do the job as it is. What's a further 12% cut going to do, Minister? How many workers are going to be hurt as a result of that?

**Hon Mr Bentley:** Unfortunately, the honourable member isn't doing his math. The ministry is actually spending more money, but because the money is being recovered fully from the WSIB, it means less money is coming out of the public coffers: more money, more inspectors.

I was fascinated that the honourable member said we were taking money out of injured workers' pockets. We didn't take it out. In 1994, it was the NDP who took money out of workers' pockets when they cut inflation protection for injured workers, and the Tories followed that up in 1997 when they did even more. The member should be ashamed for talking about taking money out of injured workers' pockets, because he and his party did it in 1994. Now we have to try to fix the mess they left us, and we're going to do that.

#### VISITOR

**Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I would like to introduce the Speaker's aunt, who is sitting up in the gallery. She's 96 years old and is here from Jamaica to check on her nephew to make sure he's doing a good job.

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** A good point, but not a point of order. New question.

#### HYDRO GENERATION

**Mr John O'Toole (Durham):** My question is to the Minister of Energy. During the last election, you and the Premier promised the people of Ontario that you would shut down Ontario's coal-powered plants by 2007. You said, "No more coal." In today's Windsor Star, your hometown newspaper, you're quoted as saying, if I may, that coal reserves will be needed if, "God forbid, some-

thing happens to the Beck generation station" at Niagara Falls. Furthermore, in the Ottawa Citizen you admitted that the intermittent wind power strategy will not work and will require coal backup systems.

Minister, this is a classic McGuinty Liberal flip-flop. You now know that you have not been telling the people of Ontario the truth over the past 14 months. Will you stand in your place today and finally admit to the people of Ontario that this was an irresponsible and ridiculous election promise?

**Hon Dwight Duncan (Minister of Energy, Government House Leader):** Our government is on target to close the coal plants and reduce the air emissions that have caused an alarming increase in the rate of childhood asthma and have caused 1,800 premature deaths in this province, as recounted by independent sources.

The commitment that we are on target to make is on schedule and we are moving toward it. We're bringing on new and cleaner electricity. I remind the member that we announced the Niagara tunnel initiative earlier this year; we announced 395 new megawatts of clean, renewable power; we have proceeded with the CETI negotiations—that is, the Conawapa project in northern Ontario—which is more good news.

We believe it is in the interest not only of the people of this province but of anyone downwind from major sources of coal that it is appropriate to remove the coal issue from our air quality. This government made that commitment, and we're moving toward achieving it in a prudent and responsible fashion.

**Mr O'Toole:** This is one more classic example of Liberal obfuscation.

Minister, why did you tell the Windsor Star what I've just quoted? You tell the people of Ontario and the House, on the official record today, something totally different. It reminds me of the complete election platform by the now Liberal government, saying one thing to get elected and doing something quite opposite.

You know you did this to win votes. You made these promises knowing they were irresponsible. You've given out sweetheart deals to your buddies in the wind industry. This is a fundamental demonstration of incompetence and mismanagement of the very highest order. Minister, it's simply a choice of whether you have actually not done your homework or a matter of your having been ill-informed. You can't squirm out of it any longer. Will you admit to the people of Ontario that you have failed and broken promises on every issue of the energy file, as on many other files as well?

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** Order. I want to warn the member to be careful with his language as he describes certain proceedings here.

Minister?

**Hon Mr Duncan:** No, we're keeping our promises on the energy file. Let me tell you about incompetence. Incompetence is saying that Pickering A unit 4 will cost \$400 million and it cost \$1.2 billion. Incompetence is about opening the energy market and then slapping it

down with a price freeze that cost Ontario consumers and taxpayers a billion dollars. Incompetence is about not improving the supply in Ontario over eight years, to the point where our reserves were down to the dangerous point of 11% two summers ago. Incompetence is about not facing the challenge of the energy file head-on.

Our government is committed to improving the quality of air in this province by reducing and eliminating the emissions associated with coal. We're on target to do it, we're going to do it and we're going to do it in a responsible fashion, for the future of this province and the people who live in it.

#### AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

**Ms Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East):** My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. More than 23,000 highly skilled Ontario workers and their families depend on the aerospace industry to provide well-paying jobs. In fact, we're joined here today by some of these working women and men from Toronto's Bombardier-de Havilland plant. They're up there in the gallery. They are here because Bombardier, as you probably know, will soon decide where it's going to assemble the C series of jets. These hard-working CAW families want those jobs here in Ontario, but that's going to take action from your government, action we haven't yet seen. Ontario's aerospace industry cannot succeed unless the provincial government steps up to the plate and gets involved. I want to know, Minister, what is your plan to bring the C series production to Ontario?

**Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade):** I have been talking to Bombardier and I have met with aerospace industry officials over the past number of months. I met them at the Farnborough aerospace show in London and we talked about the future of the industry. In fact, the industry is on a rebound worldwide, and that's good news for production here in Ontario and good news for workers in Ontario who are looking forward to better years. They have gone through a difficult period over the last number of years, particularly after 9/11. I say to the member that we will be discussing matters with Bombardier, that we will be in discussions around what they are proposing. We have talked to them and will continue to talk to them about what the future might hold for Bombardier in Ontario, in Canada.

**Ms Horwath:** Minister, talk and meetings are a good first step, but as we all know, the clock is ticking away on this issue. That decision is going to be made very soon. The status quo is simply not good enough. Ontario stands to lose a multi-billion-dollar industry. The Quebec government has already stepped up to the plate to build their industry, offering tax incentives, loan guarantees, export credits, residential value guarantees, research and development funding and many more things. Meanwhile, Ontario is letting new investment in that kind of industry take flight by failing to provide leadership and a strategy. Will you commit now to an aerospace strategy that will

bring the C series jet production to de Havilland and aerospace jobs to Ontario, something more than just a wing and a prayer?

**Hon Mr Cordiano:** I remind the member that we are in discussions with Bombardier, among other companies in the aerospace business. We're talking with respect to what the future holds for the industry. I have to tell you, the future is a very promising one for the province of Ontario. The climate for investment has never been better for this province. In fact, as a result of the huge investment that Ford Canada made in this province, we've seen a huge vote of confidence for this economy.

1440

I say to the member, I'm very optimistic about the prospects for Ontario and for the aerospace industry in this province, as the prospects increase and become brighter for all workers in Ontario, because, I'll tell you what, this government is taking action. We are moving in a positive direction. We're taking action with respect to investments we've made in the auto sector, key investments that will be providing high-paying, high-value-added jobs, and it will be no different in the aerospace industry.

#### AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

**Mr Bruce Crozier (Essex):** My question too is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. I'm interested in the auto industry in Ontario. I have a great deal of interest in the auto industry. In my riding of Essex and those of Windsor-St Clair and Windsor West, the auto sector is incredibly important. Companies like Ford, DaimlerChrysler and General Motors provide good jobs. The auto sector is a linchpin in the Ontario economy.

News reports from the Globe and Mail and the New York Times and figures from Ward's Automotive tell us that Ontario production in the auto industry will surpass Michigan for the year 2004. This says great things about the auto sector in Ontario. What is your view of the state of the auto industry in Ontario, Minister?

**Hon Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade):** I'm very proud to report to this House that Ontario is indeed poised to become North America's leading jurisdiction when it comes to auto production. I'm also delighted and proud of the fact that our auto workers deserve a lot of credit for their very high skill level. In fact, they are the best auto workers in the world, second to none. And I'm proud of this Premier—

*Interjection.*

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** Member from Nepean-Carleton, for most of question period you've been behaving excellently, but in the last 10 minutes it has deteriorated. Please come to order.

Minister?

**Hon Mr Cordiano:** There is just too much good news they are not willing to listen to.

I have to tell you, I'm very proud of this government's and this Premier's commitment to the auto sector.

Through our automobile investment strategy, we will continue to make sure that Ontario is on the cutting edge when it comes to auto investment.

**The Speaker:** Supplementary.

**Mr Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge):** There's been a lot of talk about the high dollar and its effect on exports; timely because the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters are at Queen's Park today.

In my riding of Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, we have many companies that have grown and have started exporting out of Ontario. Ecotech, an innovative design, engineering and manufacturer of industrial water purification systems, export their knowledge and promote products internationally.

Ontario, the leading auto-producing jurisdiction in North America, is a wonderful accomplishment. Minister, I've heard a lot about your auto strategy and had the opportunity to join with you in Oshawa at the truck plant a couple of weeks ago. How will your strategy keep our industry competitive in the face of increasing global competition and changing market conditions?

**Hon Mr Cordiano:** I'm happy to say that, even as the market is changing for autos, Ontario will continue to be at the forefront of competitiveness.

I want to cite a report that was handed down by Scotiabank yesterday. It stated that parts shipments rose 7%, year over year, through September 2004, roughly double the increase of US suppliers. I quote from the report: "The Canadian auto parts industry continues to gain market share in North America, despite strong headwinds from a soaring Canadian dollar."

We are positioned to do better things in the future and continue to be at the forefront of competitiveness, and it is through our auto investment strategy that we'll continue to make investments in key areas with respect to skills development, research and development, energy savings and environmental technology.

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker:** Order. I'm having a difficult time hearing the minister. The member from Whitby-Ajax and the member from Don Valley East are having a discussion. Will you all come to order, please.

**Hon Mr Cordiano:** I'm beginning to think it grates on the opposition's ears when there is good news in Ontario. That's sad.

**Interjection:** They should be happy.

**Hon Mr Cordiano:** They should be happy, and they should be applauding the auto sector and auto workers.

I'm just delighted to say to the House that the industry is at the forefront of competitiveness and will continue to be as a result of the key investments we're making in the auto sector.

#### GREENBELT

**Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln):** I have a question for the Premier. Last night, I joined about 800 concerned citizens at the greenbelt public information session in Caledon. Last week it brought out a similar crowd in St

Catharines, probably the most emotional and heated public meeting I have attended in recent memory. My colleagues from Durham report the same from the hearings in Oshawa.

If you listen to the feedback from these hearings, there are serious, broad-based and fundamental concerns with your legislation and the lack of science underlying your greenbelt map. Your government is telling concerned citizens that it wants to pass the bill before December 16, leaving a maximum of four days for MPPs to review hundreds of submissions from across the province. The haste with which you are proceeding with this legislation is unnecessary and irresponsible. We believe in protecting green space, but to do so based on science. Premier, will you extend the deadline for consultations and send this legislation to committee hearings in the new year?

**Hon Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs):** No, we will not extend our time frame. We're moving ahead with a very important piece of legislation. It's more than passing strange, just a little rich, to have a request for more consultation from a member of the former Conservative government in Ontario, which broke all records when it came to ramming legislation through in this Legislature.

There have been significant opportunities for people to comment on the general thrust of this policy. We've had hearings now with respect to the specifics. We look forward to moving ahead. We're talking about creating something here that will be durable, that will be beneficial for generations yet to come. We're talking about preserving in perpetuity 1.8 million acres of green space to enhance not only the quality of our lives but of generations yet to come.

**Mr Hudak:** Certainly that partisan response will be cold comfort to the thousands of people who have expressed their concerns about the legislation and have asked for additional time for consultations and committee hearings.

It's not just me, Premier. The Wellington county planning committee is recommending to the province an extension of the December 16 deadline because of the last-minute inclusion of Wellington. The Durham region chair, Roger Anderson, in the Toronto Star was critical of the province's December 16 deadline, with just four days for comments. Mayor Rod Finnie of Erin, Ontario, expressed his displeasure with those tight time frames. In a similar article in the Wellington Advertiser, even municipal affairs civil servants seem to agree that the time frame is simply unreasonable.

When Erin town manager Lisa Haas asked Victor Doyle, your civil servant at municipal affairs, "How can you review comments and have a final plan by December 16?" Doyle reportedly said, with a wry grin, "Good question."

Premier, I'll ask you again, will you respond to municipal leaders, farmers and concerned taxpayers, extend the time frame for consultations and send the bill to an all-party committee for consideration in the new year?

**Hon Mr McGuinty:** To be clear, I know that the member opposite and his party do not support the preservation of green space; I understand that. They have been very clear about that in the past and they're very clear about their position on that today. But we believe that we have a responsibility to proceed with this very important public policy initiative, and it has support from a number of groups.

The member opposite quoted from some municipal officials, as will I. Bill Fisch, the chair of York region: "We're very pleased about it. York region will be picking up more than a thousand acres ... of new parkland." Larry Di Ianni, Hamilton mayor: "The government is doing what it said it would. We have a little of both, protection for sensitive lands and space for growth." Neil Rogers, president of the Urban Development Institute says that "the deal should mark the end of a long and acrimonious period between the industry and the provincial government that predates the Liberals."

We are moving ahead with this in a responsible and conscientious way, and we are doing it for all the right reasons, because we feel that we have a responsibility to generations yet to come—not just ours—to preserve green space in perpetuity.

1450

#### GOVERNMENT CONSULTANTS

**Ms Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt):** I have a question to the Minister of Community and Social Services. The Provincial Auditor noted in his annual report that there are ongoing problems with the computer system at the Ontario disability support program. Of course, this is the computer system put in place by Andersen Consulting, now Accenture.

The auditor noted that the computer system lacks internal controls, fails to meet ministry needs, fails to meet recipients' needs and causes unexplained errors and omissions, and yet Accenture, the creator of this abysmal computer system, is still on your government's payroll until at least October 2005.

Minister, you had so much to say about Accenture when you were in opposition, and all of it was negative. Why are they still on your payroll?

**Hon Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues):** We've had a very interesting year of discussions with the last government's favourite company, Accenture. Let me just say that we have had some very fruitful discussions. The company is not legally liable for any of the work.

The last government entered what they called a common procurement process, which in the end the Provincial Auditor said, very clearly, absolutely did not work. This government—the people of Ontario—have a billion-dollar system they are now stuck with and don't have a legal leg to stand on. That's what we have to thank the last government for.

Let me tell the Speaker and, through the Speaker, the people of Ontario, that in this past year we have moved

mountains to make a system that is more accountable and reliable to the people who need it the most; that is, the people on social assistance who deserve the appropriate amount of support when it's required.

**Ms Martel:** I'm glad you're having fruitful discussions with Accenture, except the program still doesn't work and they're still on your payroll.

Look, the Provincial Auditor pointed out that a number of the problems he identified in this new report were also identified in the 2002 Ontario Works report. These were the same problems that the auditor pointed out in his 1998 report, when he investigated this boondoggle.

Andersen Consulting, now Accenture, has done very well by the taxpayers of Ontario. They were paid \$66 million more than the \$180-million cap set for the project, their staff were paid more than the rates for people doing comparable work in the public service, they got paid for savings to social assistance that didn't result from their work and they're still on your payroll. When are you going to cut Anderson-Accenture loose so the Ontario taxpayers can stop being ripped off?

**Hon Ms Pupatello:** What is really important to note is that of all parties, the NDP, who ran the biggest debacle of a government in the history of Ontario, should rightly ask these questions of the former government. I had many questions of the former government. How dare they spend taxpayers' money with such unaccountable methods as they did in the social assistance system? I ask the people of Ontario to note with interest—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** Order. I'm having difficulty hearing you, between the member from Trinity-Spadina and the member from Nickel Belt. Could I have—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker:** Order. We'd like to proceed with question period.

Minister?

**Hon Ms Pupatello:** Thank you. The people of Ontario have a right to know that, unlike the last government, we've actually put people in place to check things like overpayments, to make sure we have on our social assistance system people who are very vulnerable and need the right level of help. We actually have people doing that work now, an area that was completely ignored by the last government, despite the Provincial Auditor pointing that out repeatedly.

All I have to say to the last gang who thought they were so smart is, they made an absolute mess of our social assistance system.

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**Ms Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West):** Mr Speaker—

*Interjections.*

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** It's your party that is holding up your time. Member from Don Valley West.

**Ms Wynne:** My question is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Report after report has identified the lack of affordable housing as a key obstacle to overcoming poverty for many families in the province, but more particularly in Toronto. According to the city of Toronto's report on housing and homelessness, over 65,000 households are on social housing waiting lists and a third of families in Toronto fall below the affordability level of the average rent. Many of those live in our ridings of Don Valley West and Don Valley East, as you know.

The Daily Bread Food Bank has found that almost two thirds of food bank users spend an alarming 67% of their income on rent. Clearly, for many in our city and in our ridings, market rental housing is not affordable.

For most of the last decade, the previous government stood by and did nothing as housing became less and less affordable for the least fortunate among us. For most of the last decade, the previous government took the position that housing was not the business of the provincial government. Minister, in contrast to the previous administration, would you outline what this government is doing to promote the construction of affordable housing?

**Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal):** There is an enormous contrast. In fact, over 3,200 units of affordable housing have been approved by our government. An additional 2,100 affordable housing units have been made available to municipal providers, with \$85 million in the 2004-05 budget. The former government allowed a lot of the federal money to languish in bank accounts; we've unlocked those federal dollars. We've provided additional flexibility by extending program deadlines, changing the procurement rules and broadening pilot eligibility.

We are currently consulting with our municipal stakeholders and other housing providers on a new housing program in Ontario. Most importantly, we are in an advanced stage of negotiations with our federal partners on a new affordable housing program that will include new flexibilities. This will allow us to meet our commitments to match the federal dollars and deliver those much-needed affordable housing units.

**Ms Wynne:** Thank you for an answer that indicates you're making a start on this critical shortage. Among the most interesting meetings I've had in recent months was with Mike Labbé of Options for Homes, a non-profit group that uses a truly innovative model to promote ownership of affordable housing for lower-income Ontarians and Canadians by leveraging, rather than simply spending, government subsidies. Indeed, under the Options for Homes approach, people who would otherwise find themselves strapped to meet the monthly rent are able to benefit from the dignity of home ownership with a level of subsidy that's consistent with the Canada-Ontario affordable housing agreement. What is this government doing to promote the inclusion of innovative approaches like Options for Homes, which promote construction of affordable housing across the province?

**Hon Mr Caplan:** It's an excellent question. In fact, on November 8, I joined with John McKay, my counterpart from the federal government, to make an historic announcement: funding for 382 units of affordable ownership housing units in three pilot locations in Scarborough, Pickering and Markham. These projects are built by Options for Homes, Mike Labbé's group, and will provide permanent, affordable housing for Ontarians who need it. Options for Homes and home ownership alternatives are not only building these homes, they're building communities in partnership with the McGuinty government. We are very proud to be partners in this regard.

I intend to make affordable home ownership a significant component of the new round of the Canadian-Ontario affordable housing program. I encourage developers, non-profits and community organizations to come forward with creative ideas so we can make the dream of home ownership a reality for so many Ontarians.

#### HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington):** My question is to the Minister of Health. You have been the minister now for 14 months. During that time, you've attacked health professionals like—

*Interjections.*

**Mr Jackson:** Apparently your caucus is very proud of your attacks on chiropractors, physiotherapists and optometrists, they're very proud of your declaring war on two thirds of hospitals in our province, and they're extremely proud of your treatment of Ontario's 22,000 doctors with your take-it-or-leave-it attitude, which can no longer be referred to as any form of negotiation, ever, in our province.

**1500**

Your regional staff of your ministry have informed my local hospital, Joseph Brant, and, I can only assume, others, that they may not be eligible for any of the \$107 million you've put aside for reducing and shortening waiting lists in our province for cataracts and hips and knees. Why are your staff threatening patients in my community?

**Hon George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care):** It's only the honourable member who can turn every story to suit the storyline he wants to work. Here's the very clear reality: We have \$107 million to invest in a wait time strategy for the balance of the fiscal year 2004-05, which only has four months to go. Obviously, therefore, in seeking out from Ontario hospitals to see who has capacity available, we have to take into consideration who has the nurses ready to roll, who has the capacity in their operating rooms to be able to fulfill the services, who has the capacity from a fiscal standpoint to be able to manage these challenges.

We have a limited amount of resources, and one of the limited resources we have on this point is time. Therefore, obviously, for the balance of fiscal 2004-05, we will be targeting these resources at the hospitals in

our province best suited to meet the demands of patients. At the end of the day, it's not about your hospital or your hospital; it's about the capacity of our health care system to be able to meet the important patient needs of Ontarians. What are we talking about? More cataract surgeries, more hip and knee surgeries, more cardiac—

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

**Mr Jackson:** Minister, the one person who doesn't have limited resources is you. According to the estimates of your own ministry, you feathered your own nest by expanding your own administrative staffing complement by 7% in this year's budget, and yet you're asking the citizens of Burlington to live with one half of 1% for their entire hospital. Burlington has a population of 150,000 people. There are a considerable number of people from the ridings of Stoney Creek, Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot and Oakville who attend Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital.

This hospital has always been performing under the expected cost per weighted case for patient care consistently throughout its history, yet you're telling this House that they will not be eligible for funding under your program because your bureaucrats deem them to be inefficient, when in fact they are. Minister, will you assure those communities that all patients—

**The Speaker:** Thank you. Minister.

**Hon Mr Smitherman:** All patients in this province have equal access to the fund. It's necessary to spend the funds well and to make sure the services can be fulfilled. Those are the criteria we subjected all hospitals to, as is fully appropriate. But what I find interesting is that the honourable member has so quickly forgotten his own propensity to spend public tax dollars on hotel rooms and steaks, and challenges me on the issue of administrative costs.

The very clear reality is that we are a government that is determined to make progress on the important patient needs of the people of Ontario. That's why we've invested \$107 million in a wait time strategy for the balance of this fiscal year: more cataract surgeries, more hip and knee surgeries, more cancer surgeries, more cardiac, and a 20% improvement in our access to MRIs and to CT scans. That is our record: more services for Ontario's patients.

#### ROAD MAINTENANCE

**Mr Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay):** My question is to the Minister of Transportation, but I must say, the answer of the Minister of Health was unbecoming of a minister.

My question to the Minister of Transportation is the following: You will know that in the last Parliament your Premier, then-opposition leader Dalton McGuinty, along with your transportation critic and myself, opposed the Tory government's move to privatize winter road maintenance. I will note that in the Provincial Auditor's report

issued today, yet again—for about the fourth or fifth time, I must say—the Auditor says that this particular move to privatize winter road maintenance did not ensure effective oversight and evaluation of the performance of contractors engaging and maintaining provincial highways, and that the appropriate corrective action was not taken. Will you today admit that winter road maintenance privatization was a mistake, and will you keep your government's promise from when you were in opposition to cancel the privatization of winter road maintenance?

**Hon Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation):** Let me tell you, I really appreciate the work of the Provincial Auditor. I have a background in finance, and I know how much work has gone into it.

We are going to look very seriously at all the recommendations the Provincial Auditor has made and determine our cause of action as we move forward. Some of these contracts are long-term contracts, so we want to make sure right now that we monitor those contracts properly and make sure that they give us value for money.

#### VISITORS

**Mr Mike Colle (Eglinton-Lawrence):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: In the visitor's gallery we have Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Tilley from the Salvation Army, who is here to remind us that the Christmas kettle appeal for the Salvation Army is underway in all of our communities across Ontario. Hopefully, we can all get behind the Salvation Army and the amazing work it does for those in need in this province. Let's hear it for the Salvation Army and the good work it does.

**Hon Jim Watson (Minister of Consumer and Business Services):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I just want to point out that former school trustee Mary Lou Fleming from the great city of Ottawa is in the gallery.

#### PETITIONS

##### FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

**Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey):** I have a petition to save the Banting homestead.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada's first Nobel Prize recipient; and

“Whereas this great Canadian's original homestead located in the town of New Tecumseth”—Alliston—“is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

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

“That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe-Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s private member’s bill entitled The Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

I want to thank all those from the Alliston Dairy Queen and Brisco Furniture who have signed this petition, and I’ve also signed.

#### ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

**Mr Dave Levac (Brant):** “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is no established province-wide standard to deal with anaphylactic shock in Ontario schools; and

“Whereas there is no specific comment regarding anaphylactic shock in the Education Act; and

“Whereas anaphylactic shock is a serious concern that can result in life-or-death situations; and

“Whereas all students in Ontario have the right to be safe and feel safe in their school community; and

“Whereas all parents of anaphylactic students need to know that safety standards exist in all schools in Ontario;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty government support the passing of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students,”—my bill—“which requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan.”

I sign my signature to this petition and give it over to Nicholas.

#### VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

**Mr Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound):** I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly which is from the Meaford Fire Department.

“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’ve also signed this.

1510

#### HOSPITAL FUNDING

**Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex):** “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the funding formula used by the Ministry of Health provided only a 1% increase for Four Counties Health Services in Newbury; and

“Whereas Four Counties Health Services has a projected deficit of \$1.7 million; and

“Whereas the plan to balance the budget of Four Counties Health Services by 2006 recommends the closing of all beds at the hospital; and

“Whereas the continuing viability and operation is of critical importance to the quality of life of all citizens in the hospital’s catchment area;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, request a review of the budget/funding and consultation with the hospital board/administration/community to reflect the needs of our rural hospital and community.”

#### VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

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

“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 pro-

fects the right of firefighters to volunteer in their home communities on their own free time.”

Needless to say, Mr Speaker, I support this petition and have affixed my signature to it.

#### IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS

**Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North):** I have a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding access to trades and professions in Ontario.

“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 am more than pleased to support this petition.

#### DISTRICT OF MUSKOKA

**Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka):** I have a petition to keep Muskoka a part of northern Ontario, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the district of Muskoka is currently designated as part of northern Ontario; and

“Whereas the geography and socio-economic conditions of Muskoka are very similar to the rest of northern Ontario; and

“Whereas the median family income in the district of Muskoka is \$10,000 below the provincial average and \$6,000 below the median family income for greater Sudbury; and

“Whereas removing the district of Muskoka from northern Ontario would adversely affect the hard-working people of Muskoka by restricting access to

programs and incentives enjoyed by residents of other northern communities; and

“Whereas the residents of Muskoka should not be confused with those who cottage or vacation in the district; and

“Whereas the federal government of Canada recognizes the district of Muskoka as part of the north; and

“Whereas this is a mean-spirited and politically motivated decision on the part of the McGuinty government;

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

“That the McGuinty government maintain the current definition of northern Ontario for the purposes of government policy and program delivery.”

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

#### ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

**Mr Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls):** I’m pleased to read in the following petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is no established province-wide standard to deal with anaphylactic shock in Ontario schools; and

“Whereas there is no specific comment regarding anaphylactic shock in the Education Act; and

“Whereas anaphylactic shock is a serious concern that can result in life-or-death situations; and

“Whereas all students in Ontario have the right to be safe and feel safe in their school community; and

“Whereas all parents of anaphylactic students need to know that safety standards exist in all schools in Ontario;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned,” request “that the McGuinty government support the passing of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students, which requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature to this petition.

#### FREDERICK BANTING HOMESTEAD

**Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey):** A petition to save the Banting homestead:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Sir Frederick Banting was the man who discovered insulin and was Canada’s first Nobel Prize recipient; and

“Whereas this great Canadian’s original homestead located in the town of New Tecumseth”—or Alliston—“is deteriorating and in danger of destruction because of the inaction of the Ontario Historical Society; and

“Whereas the town of New Tecumseth has been unsuccessful in reaching an agreement with the Ontario Historical Society to use part of the land to educate the public about the historical significance of the work of Sir Frederick Banting;

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

“That the Minister of Culture endorse Simcoe-Grey MPP Jim Wilson’s private member’s bill entitled the Frederick Banting Homestead Preservation Act so that the homestead is kept in good repair and preserved for generations to come.”

I want to thank the good people at the Alliston Dairy Queen and Briscoe Furniture for circulating this petition. Of course, I agree with it and have signed it.

#### TUITION

**Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill):** I have a petition on behalf of University of Toronto students from the Mississauga, Toronto and Scarborough campuses. The petition reads:

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government took a historic step forward by funding a tuition fee freeze for two years; and

“Whereas a majority of Ontarians support increased public funding for colleges and universities as well as reduced tuition fees; and

“Whereas increasing student debt through income-contingent loan repayment schemes or raising loan limits only increases the cost of post-secondary education for students from modest means; and

“Whereas per student investment in Ontario still lags gravely behind the vast majority of jurisdictions in North America;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, are supporting the Canadian Federation of Students’ call to increase funding for colleges and universities and reduce tuition fees for all Ontario students, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to (1) reduce tuition fees for all students in Ontario, (2) increase public funding for post-secondary education to at least the national average, and (3) implement an upfront, needs-based grant system for Ontario full-time and part-time students.”

#### ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK

**Mr Dave Levac (Brant):** “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there is no established province-wide standard to deal with anaphylactic shock in Ontario schools; and

“Whereas there is no specific comment regarding anaphylactic shock in the Education Act; and

“Whereas anaphylactic shock is a serious concern that can result in life-or-death situations; and

“Whereas all students in Ontario have the right to be safe and feel safe in their school community; and

“Whereas all parents of anaphylactic students need to know that safety standards exist in all schools in Ontario;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, demand that the McGuinty government support the passing of Bill 3, An Act to protect anaphylactic students, which requires that every school principal in Ontario establish a school anaphylactic plan.”

I sign this petition, as I will the rest of them, and hand this over to Danika.

1520

#### LESLIE M. FROST CENTRE

**Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka):** I have a petition to save the Leslie M. Frost Centre, and it says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Leslie M. Frost Centre is Ontario’s leading natural resources education, training and conference centre, aimed at fostering an understanding of natural resource management, with a focus on ecosystems and how they can be sustained for future generations; and

“Whereas the McGuinty government refused to consult with municipalities and other user groups before taking this drastic action and continues to operate in a clandestine manner; and

“Whereas this move will hurt the people and economies of Muskoka and Haliburton, especially those in the local tourism industry; and

“Whereas the Frost Centre is a valuable resource for elementary, secondary, post-secondary institutions as well as a variety of other groups;

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

“That the McGuinty government reverse the decision to close the Leslie M. Frost Centre.”

I support this petition and affix my signature to it.

#### CHILDREN’S HEALTH SERVICES

**Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey):** A petition to the Legislative Assembly 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 multiple special needs that require a range of core rehabilitation services; and

“Whereas children with” unique “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” of 2003 “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 thank those who signed this petition, and I agree with it.

### VISITORS

**Mr Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I’d like to ask the other members to welcome over 100 kids from my riding who are here today from Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School. I’d particularly like to embarrass my son, Winston, who is here on the east side, bottom row. Come on, Winston, stand up there so I can see you. He’s not co-operating. And teachers Jennifer McCreary, Heather Medley-Fernandez and Jessica Murray, with her grade 10 civics class from Bracebridge.

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** It’s not a point of order, but they’re welcome.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### BUDGET MEASURES ACT (FALL), 2004

#### LOI DE 2004 SUR LES MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES (AUTOMNE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 29, 2004, on the motion for second reading of Bill 149, An Act to implement 2004 Budget measures, enact the Northern Ontario Grow Bonds Corporation Act, 2004 and amend various Acts / Projet de loi 149, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2004, édictant la Loi de 2004 sur la Société d’émission d’obligations de développement du Nord de l’Ontario et modifiant diverses lois.

**The Speaker (Hon Alvin Curling):** The member from Beaches-East York had just completed his speech. Questions and comments?

**Mr Pat Hoy (Chatham-Kent Essex):** I’m pleased to comment on the speech by the member from Beaches-East York. He did indeed take a whole hour, which is commendable, I must say, to speak to this budget bill, Bill 149. He made a number of points, which is his wont to do.

I want, in the few seconds that I have, to comment once again on the apprenticeship training tax credit. This

will be important for many regions of Ontario, and no less so for my own region of Chatham-Kent Essex. Very early on in my first election time of 1995, persons approached me at that date, almost 10 years ago, talking about the need to address the situation of apprenticeships.

According to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce’s 2003 skilled trades survey, within the next 15 years, 52% of skilled tradespersons are expected to retire. So we’re going to need to replace those fine jobs that exist in those various skills. As well, 41% of respondents anticipate that they will face skills shortages in their industry within five years. That was some of the message and the substance of the message that was given to me in 1995, in terms of skills training in my community and, indeed, through the Windsor and Chatham-Kent Essex area.

This plan for new funding of \$11.7 million annually by 2006-07 will expand to some 26,000 the number of young people registered in apprenticeships. This is indeed a welcome aspect of this bill. Also included in Bill 149 is a provision on Ontario property tax credits for seniors. For moderate- and low-income persons, it will increase the basic property tax amount from \$500 to \$625.

**The Speaker:** Questions and comments. Member for Toronto-Danforth, are you—member for Simcoe-Grey.

**Mr Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey):** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth):** Thank me.

**Mr Wilson:** My colleague from the NDP is rescuing me here today.

I’m happy to make a couple of comments on the budget bill. It strikes me that the government, when introducing this bill, was bragging about the fact that they’ve increased the seniors’ property tax credit by \$125. What they forget to tell seniors across the province is that in the last budget bill they cancelled the \$400 tax credit we had put in place to offset education taxes paid by seniors who no longer have children in the local schools. It’s something seniors have asked for for many years. So they’ve robbed Peter to pay Paul, and they conveniently forget to mention that seniors are actually getting ripped off by about \$275, had they stuck with the Conservative government rather than switched to the Liberal government.

Secondly, this bill removes the sales tax credit for vehicles that are modified to accommodate disabled people. I think that’s just a shame. The government says it was an underutilized program. Well, if it was an underutilized program and was costing you only a little bit of money, then you should have kept it in place. It’s obviously of great value to those disabled citizens who need a modified vehicle to get them around.

Finally, as the former Minister of Health and a seatmate of Mr Miller here, this bill removes the district of Muskoka from the designation of northern Ontario. This means, for example, that citizens in Muskoka will no longer qualify for the northern Ontario travel health grant. They won’t qualify for other incentives to bring

physicians to their area, and I know that Muskoka, Mr Miller's riding, along with many other ridings in the province, needs that extra help to attract physicians. They will no longer qualify for special road grants. They will no longer qualify for any grants under the \$30-million-a-year northern Ontario heritage fund, which, by the way, the NDP had gutted when they were in government, and which Mr Harris, when he was in government, doubled to \$60 million a year, and now the people of Muskoka won't have access to that.

**Ms Churley:** It's my pleasure to take a couple of minutes to congratulate my colleague the member for Beaches-East York, who spoke for an hour on this bill. I'm sure he could have gone on much longer had he been given the time, because there are a lot of things in this bill that we need to point out to people.

A couple of things I want to dwell on, just for this short time: This act ends the rebate for modification of vehicles used to transport handicapped people. I don't understand why you're doing that. It was this member, the member for Beaches-East York, who, because he raised it in the House on several occasions and created a stink, was able to get the rebate for Jason Chenier, who is from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell. I know he went to his Liberal member and wasn't able to get support and help that way. I give credit to our member here, who raised it and raised it and was able to get that rebate for him. But everybody deserves this rebate, and I encourage the member for Beaches-East York to keep on the government and have them rescind this really regressive step taken in this bill.

They say it was underutilized. I would say it was underutilized because enough people didn't know about it. It seems to me—I don't want to use the H word here, so I won't—that the government is bringing in a disability act here that will take up to 20 years to bring into force, and at the same time is cancelling this minuscule program that can help people right now. I would urge the government to do something about that.

The other thing I want to talk about is that the PST rebate for energy-efficient appliances, which expired in July 2004, was not renewed. This is really critical. They brought in a rebate for residential solar systems and things like that, but a lot of people need to start with the baby steps, and that's been taken away from them.

So I would urge the government to bring back these two very important rebates for people.

1530

**Mr Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell):** Just to carry on with what my colleague from Chatham-Kent Essex mentioned, this bill will definitely encourage people to follow their training. We know that in the next couple of years at least 50% of our skilled tradespeople are expected to retire, and this means we have to invest in colleges and universities.

When we look at what our government, the McGuinty government, has done since the election of October 2003—we said we would increase the number of MRIs in the province. To increase the number of MRIs, we have

to develop technicians. This bill will definitely make the money available for those people who want to develop themselves in the technical field to respond to the needs of patients in hospitals.

We said we would reduce waiting times in hospitals. Again, we have to have the money in the colleges to create the space to meet those requirements, so we had to come up with the money.

We have to develop our teachers, to respond to the needs in our province—our Minister of Education has said that we'll reduce the number of children in classes from junior kindergarten to grade 3. Again, we need the money to develop those people.

We said we would invest in the infrastructure program. Again, we need engineers. The tax breaks that people will be getting to train those people in on-the-job training we have available will be in place to respond to the needs of the people of this province.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr Jim Brownell):** Response?

**Mr Michael Prue (Beaches-East York):** I thank the members for Chatham-Kent Essex, Simcoe-Grey, Toronto-Danforth and Glengarry-Prescott-Russell for their comments, although, I must admit, in listening to their comments I was hoping that some of them might have commented on what I actually said in this Legislature for an hour. I commend my colleague from Toronto-Danforth for actually dealing with the issues I raised at that time. But I thank the other members, even though they may not have listened to my speech or may not have understood it, who at least contributed to the debate in their own way.

The member for Chatham-Kent Essex talked about apprenticeship taxes, and of course those are important. The member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell talked about the same thing, to reiterate his concern. The member for Simcoe-Grey talked about the seniors' property tax break. Of course we all have to do something—anything we can—to assist our seniors in this province.

The real issue, and what I talked about myself in that hour, was four major faults in the legislation. First and foremost was the elimination of the capital tax, which is going to take about \$1 billion out of this province over the next five to six years. The money that is going to be taken out of the province comes primarily from two sources: from the banks, which this year made well in excess of \$1 billion in profit, and from the insurance companies, which are closing in on \$1 billion of profit. That is money this province cannot afford to lose, especially if this government continues its wanton desire to tax those who can ill afford to pay, as they have done with the very regressive health tax.

I also spoke about ending the PST on handicapped individuals and their cars, ending the PST on energy efficiency and the very poor job that was done in implementing the recommendations of the securities task force of the finance committee.

**The Acting Speaker:** Further debate?

**Ms Laurel C. Broten (Etobicoke-Lakeshore):** I'm very pleased to rise and spend a few minutes talking

about Bill 149, the fall budget bill, and I'll be sharing my time with the member for Brant.

I want to focus a little bit on some of the initiatives that have been highlighted in the fall budget bill and then spend a few minutes talking about, at its heart, why we are undertaking the transformation that we are in this province.

Obviously, the main purpose of the third budget bill is to advance the plans our government outlined in our 2004 budget and continue with the process of implementing the measures contained in that budget.

The fall budget bill brings forward some specific amendments that I want to highlight today, and the one I want to spend a few minutes talking about is the amendment with respect to the apprenticeship training tax credit.

Last Friday in my riding I held a job fair, coordinated by my constituency office, working with local business people in the community, working with support groups that assist those who are looking for jobs. I can tell you, at that session I had an opportunity to talk about the new apprenticeship training tax credit and the work that our government is doing to focus more impetus on apprenticeship in this province. We received a lot of praise for that work with respect to an encouragement of apprenticeship programs when I had a chance to speak to people out there.

I'll just talk for a few minutes about what this plan contains. It contains \$11.7 million annually by 2006-07, to expand to some 26,000 the number of young people who will be able to register in apprenticeship programs. And when we talk about what will end up being a deficit of skilled workers in our province, we certainly want to look to the next generation that can come forward and meet that need.

We also need to remove, and we are as a government working to remove, the cultural and bureaucratic barriers faced by skilled, internationally trained workers by investing another \$12.5 million annually by 2005-06 to work with our professional regulatory bodies to increase access, expand training, provide work with the professional organizations, provide training and employment services, transition into Ontario's workplace and improve the information that is available to those workers so they'll have opportunities when they come and join our province.

In my first speech in this Legislature I had a chance to talk about the fact that it was not acceptable to me that we had skilled professionals and skilled workers in this province who were not able to meet their full capacity, who were driving taxis, who were doing other jobs for which they had much more training than that.

I can tell you that the stark reality of the barriers that internationally trained professionals and workers face in our province was clear to me last Friday, in my own community, as I held the job fair and had an opportunity to go around to the people who were attending and ask them, "How long have you been looking for a job? Where do you come from; what country have you

emigrated from?" Many, many of the individuals who were there told me long stories, stories that I know we've all heard, about the barriers they faced when they came to our province. We certainly need to do what we can as a province to make sure that those barriers are diminished.

I want to talk for a moment about another development, and another part of the budget bill, which is the Ontario property tax credit for seniors. With this bill we will be demonstrating our support for seniors. We have put forward an estimated \$85 million in benefits to about 685,000 senior families, which will include approximately 33,000 senior families that do not currently benefit from this credit. The basic property tax credit will increase from \$500 to \$625; that's about a 25% increase. Giving them \$125 more in their pockets this year will help the low- and middle-income seniors who live in each of our communities, and they will get those funds each and every year.

The last thing I want to spend a few minutes talking about is why we are doing this. We have embarked on a transformation of our health care system, among others, in this province. The fall budget bill indicates that we are on track in providing some greater transparency and accountability and a transformation of our health care system.

The need for greater transparency and accountability in our systems across all government was certainly highlighted today by the Office of the Provincial Auditor of Ontario. He has an entire chapter dedicated in the auditor's report that is entitled Towards Better Accountability. In his report the auditor makes mention of many investigations he has done over the years and many indications of areas where he thought improvements needed to be made.

I think we in this Legislature can all be proud that many of the new pieces of legislation that have been brought forward by our government have been recognized by the Provincial Auditor as responding to concerns he has raised for many, many years. Those include Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor, which, as he says, is largely consistent with principles that he put forward suggesting proposed amendments to the Audit Act, opening up recommendations and areas that he will be able to examine further. He indicates that Bill 18 generally addresses the areas of the current Audit Act that he felt required amendment.

**1540**

Similarly, he talks about the fact that Bill 25, with respect to government advertising, is a positive change and again a response to areas that he has raised criticism over in the past.

We also put forward pieces of legislation, Bill 86 and Bill 84, which again will increase transparency and accountability and which are currently before the Legislature.

So those, among compliments with respect to Bill 8 and with respect to the other legislation put forward in the education sector, are highlighted today in the auditor's report and give us a clear indication of the need

for transparency and accountability in our sectors across government. Those are some of the things that we are moving forward with.

The last point I want to make is how proud I was to have Tommy Douglas named as the greatest Canadian. For those of you in this Legislature who have been perhaps asleep for the last year, you would not know, but I was born in the same small town that Tommy Douglas hails from. Certainly Tommy Douglas is recognized as the greatest Canadian because he is the founder of something that Canadians value most. I'll just quote a little bit from an article by Roy Romanow today:

"In the early 1960s, Tommy Douglas and his colleagues combined a clarity of vision regarding health care with a truly uncommon strength of purpose in staring down the doctors in my province," Saskatchewan.

"Most of the medical establishment clung tenaciously to the status quo. We lived through a difficult and emotional doctors' strike, which, in the short run, divided our province.

"But Douglas and his colleagues stayed the course. They chose the untravelled and bumpy road to a better future. Today, Canada has medicare."

In that very same article, Roy Romanow, who, as we all know, has spent a lot of time helping us with our health care system, talks about how our government currently "has an opportunity to write the newest chapter to strengthen and preserve medicare." I can tell you that I am very proud to be part of a government who will be steadfast, who will have the clarity of vision that Tommy Douglas had. We will protect medicare for future generations, and I look forward to that day.

I will now share my time with my colleague.

**Mr Dave Levac (Brant):** I'd like to thank the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore for sharing her time with me and offering me an opportunity to make a comment about the greatest Canadian. I just want everyone to know and realize that, with no disrespect to Don Cherry, we had Alexander Graham Bell from Brant, and we also had Wayne Gretzky. I can't for the life of me figure out how Don Cherry—with no disrespect—beat out Wayne Gretzky. Anyway, two out of the top 10 is a great thing to have from our riding. And by the way, we had a tremendous number of other great Canadians. Dr James Hillier, who's still alive, invented the electron microscope—unbelievable.

**Mr Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln):** How about Ron Johnson?

**Mr Levac:** Who? Thank you.

Speaker, I will be very brief in terms of my support for Bill 149. I want to be sure that everyone understands that the bill itself, Bill 149, is not the be-all and end-all of tax reform; it's not the be-all and end-all of financial and fiscal responsibility. But what's important to point out is that it is part of an overall plan for our government to build a stronger, prosperous, and more modified economy. If you take a look at some of the things that we're proposing inside the bill, it's to take those plans and turn them into a reality. This is building. This is part of the building process that we're talking about.

What we also want to do is, we're transforming the health care system and the education system. What we're also doing is making sure that we have, as much as possible, greater transparency and accountability. We're taking those steps one by one, but we're adding to the plan. Bill 149 does indeed do just that. Let's take a look at some of the key components that are mentioned in 149.

**Eliminating the capital tax:** By eliminating the capital tax, we're allowing our economy to prosper and grow. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce, and indeed the meetings that I've had with the Brantford Chamber of Commerce, have indicated that a tax on a tax is very regressive, and that's exactly what a capital tax is all about. It's taxing money that's already taxed, so it's a tax on a tax and it's regressive. I will suggest that there was mention of this previously, but action was not taken on it. Now that we are doing so, we're making sure that the capital tax is eliminated by the year 2012.

Another action that we're taking here is creating the commercialization investment funds program. What's important to note is that it would provide a maximum of up to \$36 million to universities, colleges and hospitals, and the assistance to leverage up to \$120 million of new pools of seed money in order for us to spin off technology companies that are formed by faculty and staff—and students, by the way; we want to include that because they are part of that research as well.

There are many examples across the province, in particular in southwestern Ontario, in our universities, where faculty and staff members and students have spun off other industries that create great opportunities for us in the investment area.

The apprenticeship tax credit is really important. I want to suggest to you that there is a local initiative in my riding that I've been a partner of for quite some time, even before I was elected, called the Brant Skills Development Group. Industry itself formed this group in order for us, along with educators, to start addressing the skills shortage issue. We all know in this House that that is a major issue, and this government is taking steps, along with previous governments that have taken steps before, to start to identify this, but we're meeting that point where the rubber has to hit the road. We are in crisis mode when it comes to skilled trades. The trades out there are asking us for that. We've got foreign-trained skilled workers and locally trained skilled workers. We've got to get that moving for us to be more economically viable for our companies and corporations. We've just got to be able to keep up technologically.

There are several other issues about which I have made a commitment to be as brief as possible, and sometimes for politicians that's pretty hard to do. I want to end by saying that with this property tax credit that has been mentioned for senior citizens, one of the things it is important to point out is that many of the senior citizens in my riding were talking about the previous government's attempt to do a tax credit on the back of education. It was not accepted. They saw that they were responsible for education as well. They said that when

they were growing up and had their kids, they paid their fair share of taxes and they didn't want the credit. What they wanted was simply a credit for themselves, and what's going happen with this? It's \$125 more in the pockets of 685,000 low- and middle-income seniors this year, and for every single year after that.

We're proposing that it provide a fee waiver to allow most of the vulnerable to have access to our justice system in our society. There are many aspects of this bill that we could go into. All I'm going to suggest is that Bill 149 is part of an overall plan that we've laid out in terms of our being a more prosperous province. I look forward to the passage of this bill if this Legislature sees fit.

**The Acting Speaker:** The member for Sincoe-Grey.

**Mr Wilson:** I have a two-minute response.

**Ms Churley:** No, they're not done yet; they've got—

**Mr Wilson:** Sorry, Mr Speaker.

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments?

**Ms Churley:** I'm sorry.

**Mr Wilson:** Thank you, Mr Speaker; the quasi-Speaker over here has been very helpful.

**Ms Churley:** Well, they haven't used up all their time.

**Mr Wilson:** I want to comment on the comments from the members for Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Brampton, particularly the member for Brant's comments about the property tax credit, which the government is boosting to \$625. I want to remind the seniors at home that we were going to give seniors an additional \$400. We called it a \$400 tax credit—actually it wasn't a tax credit; it was going to be a \$400 grant, giving you money back from the education portion of your property taxes. We called it that, but it really could be called just a \$400 seniors tax grant.

The reason we brought that in was that not everyone benefited from our 30%, on average, income tax cut over the years we were in government, over the eight years we implemented the largest reductions in personal income tax ever in the province. Not every low-income or middle-income senior benefited during that time, because in those senior years you may not have a large income. You probably are retired and you probably have some investments coming in, if you're lucky, but you don't have a big income stream, so you didn't benefit from the Mike Harris or Ernie Eves tax cuts.

We heard that criticism from the Liberals, who were in opposition at the time, and from the NDP, saying we were leaving out middle- and low-income seniors. So whatever way you called it, whether it was an education tax credit or grant, we were going to give \$400 more. Now, of course, the Liberal government in their first budget cancelled that tax cut for seniors. They cancelled it, and now they have the gall to bring in this budget bill and only give seniors \$125 more when they could have got \$400 more. We wanted to be sure we brought in full fairness with our Mike Harris-Ernie Eves tax cuts, and made sure that seniors, who may not have a revenue stream or a very large income revenue stream in their latter years, could benefit.

So now I'm appalled that the Liberals, who believe in helping low- and middle-income seniors, are actually cancelling that very beneficial tax grant to seniors.

**1550**

**The Acting Speaker:** The member for Toronto-Danforth.

**Ms Churley:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I see you are very lenient on the time. I appreciate that.

I'm not surprised that Liberal members are raising today the fact that Tommy Douglas, former CCFer, won as the greatest Canadian last night. I think it just goes to show how much Canadians value their health care system. I'm friends with Shirley Douglas, Tommy Douglas's daughter, and I have to say she's out there fighting the Liberals on the P3s. The Liberals said they wouldn't continue with the Tory public-private partnerships in hospitals, and Shirley Douglas is out there fighting that. I have to tell you, I don't believe Tommy Douglas would approve of what's going on under the Liberals now, in terms of the public-private partnerships that are continuing with hospitals.

I also have to say I don't think Tommy Douglas would approve of the regressive health tax that is going directly to lower-income people. That is a result of the new regressive health tax the Liberals brought in. I think we all agree that more money had to be found to put in the health care system because it is so valuable to people, but this is the wrong way to go about it.

The other thing I want to talk about briefly is that I'm surprised one of the members spoke about the elimination of the capital tax. I would say that's probably the thing, out of this massive bill, that they want to highlight least, because in the campaign that's something the Liberals campaigned against. They said they would not support the Tories' promise to keep the tax. When the tax is completely eliminated in 2012, it will take out approximately \$1 billion, and this is at the same time they are bringing in regressive health taxes for—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott):** Thank you very much.

**Ms Churley:** The previous Speaker was very lenient—

**The Acting Speaker:** And he did a much better job than I'm doing, I'm sure. However, I'm charged with the responsibility of being here now. The member for Etobicoke North.

**Mr Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North):** It is a privilege to rise regarding Bill 149, the fall budget bill, which, we appreciate, is actually quite massive. There are a number of components. We've been inundated with some of the paperwork that's gone through with it. But if you consider it from a broader perspective, there are a number of aspects included—fiscal prudence en route to transforming Ontario, transparency and accountability—all of which are really being brought to bear to better the economic prosperity of Ontario, which ultimately, as you'll appreciate, Speaker, is the foundation of a just and civil society.

As a number of my colleagues have highlighted—for example, my colleague from Etobicoke-Lakeshore quite rightly pointed out the very deep steps being made, for the first time within living memory, I might say, with regard to the apprenticeship training tax credit. There are a number of other aspects in this bill. For example, we are respecting seniors with regard to the restoration of their property tax credit. There are also initiatives for northern Ontarians, with the northern Ontario growth bonds.

In summary, in the limited time I have—45 seconds and counting—I can say it is a broad-perspective bill. It's a bill that addresses a number of different issues and pulls a number of different levers within the power the government has with regard to fiscal management and building further prosperity in Ontario, as well as making Ontario and its accounts more transparent. There are a number of things that I'll be able to speak to later.

**The Acting Speaker:** We have time for one last question or comment.

**Mr Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North):** I'm pleased to rise today and make a few comments on the speech by the member for Brant. I think it's important that we try to identify what we, as the opposition, consider the problems are with this bill, why we won't support it and why the government in all likelihood will have to time-allocate it.

There are two things I am really concerned about when we talk about building a strong economy and creating jobs and a prosperous future in our province. One is the fact that this government is now eliminating the Ontario home ownership savings plan. I believe that's been one of the most positive steps for young people building and buying their first new home. They will have to adjust to not having that.

You say that a house is \$180,000 or \$190,000 or \$225,000 or \$230,000, and people would probably say, "What's \$2,000?" Well, for a young couple, \$2,000 could possibly buy that first washer and dryer or some improvements to the house as an investment. It may be, for people purchasing their first new home, what really puts them over the top. That has been a very good incentive for the citizens of our province, as we have seen literally tens of thousands of new homes built across our province in the last eight or nine years. What is the result of that? Vacancy rates have gone up in apartments, which has been another good sign right across our province.

So that is a huge disappointment to our government. We just can't believe that they're actually doing this as we're starting to see a downturn in the economy. The loss of new construction jobs and new building permits is taking place right now. We're actually going to see a 12% decrease next year.

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

**Ms Broten:** I want to thank the members for Simcoe-Grey, Etobicoke North, Simcoe North and Toronto-Danforth for their comments.

Perhaps I'll just make reference to where my friend left off, that this is part of a comprehensive plan, a plan where we know we need to balance the budget, provide accountability and protect our vital public services. Eliminating the capital tax credit is part of a government strategy to encourage economic growth. We're doing it in a fiscally prudent fashion. So again, that's one part of our plan.

Making sure that we deal with seniors fairly and enable them to stay in their homes and demonstrate our support for them is another part of this bill. But I tell you that ensuring seniors live safely in their homes and with dignity is not something we are prepared to do on the back of the education system. Unlike previous governments, we believe in public education. We are going to ensure that public education is there in the future, and we're not going to give a benefit on the back of that system.

With respect to health care, I guess I respond that we are taking the brave step. Perhaps some day, when history is repeating itself and we are on the precipice of making a determination of whether in this province we continue to protect medicare and ensure that it is sustainable for generations to come, we won't acknowledge that we are in an historical moment. But if we look at the battles that have taken place in the history of this province and across this country to protect and foster medicare, I say to you, we are on the precipice of that.

Our government has the opportunity to rewrite the newest chapter, and we are going to take the brave step of embracing the kind of change that we need in this province to make sure we strengthen and sustain medicare for generations to come. I think Tommy Douglas would be very proud of that.

**The Acting Speaker:** Further debate.

**Mr Hudak:** I'm pleased to join in the debate on the bill and to discuss some of the shortcomings that I and, of course, our colleagues across the way in the official opposition see in the bill.

I know that members are listening raptly to my presentation, but those who may not stick around for the full 20 minutes, I tell you, we're voting against this bill. I mean, how can we support this?

**Mr Michael A. Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin):** No.

**Mr Hudak:** Well, I didn't want to spoil the conclusion of my remarks, but I know some of you have other tasks to get to.

But to cut to the chase, so to speak, I say to my colleague from Don Valley East, we will not be supporting this bill.

*Interjection.*

**Mr Hudak:** One simple reason: You're increasing taxes. You're increasing taxes several times in this bill. I'm going to have to pause here. There are three, four—what is it?—about 11 different tax increases that our hard-working researchers at PC researching services have uncovered in this bill—and my colleagues in support. There are 11 separate tax hikes.

I hate to beat a dead horse, but Dalton McGuinty did say during the campaign that he would not be raising taxes on Ontario working families. He looked into the TV camera and said, "I won't be raising your taxes." Now, maybe my screen wasn't big enough. He may have had his fingers crossed beneath the screen. Maybe I needed one of those high-definition televisions to see the little asterisk that was above his head, maybe to the right, where it said, "He doesn't really mean it. Once he gets in office, he's going to break all those promises." Maybe I missed that.

**1600**

But I wasn't the only one who missed it. I would think that hundreds of thousand of people who voted for Dalton McGuinty probably did so, thinking he was going to keep his promises, and very importantly, keep one of his major promises: not to increase taxes. But, shortly after he got the keys to the Premier's limousine, he took his campaign promises, tossed them out the window and since that time has broken, I think, more than 40 different campaign promises. In this particular piece of legislation we see a number of tax increases by the cancellation of a number of tax credits.

Let me read a few of them to you. My friend from Simcoe North just talked about the elimination of the Ontario home ownership savings plan, OHOSP. This was an important method for young people moving out of home, young married couples, individuals looking to own their own home as opposed to paying rent, to make that investment in their own property, their own real estate. This would help them achieve that own home, that Canadian dream of having their own space, their own home.

I know some members opposite have said, "Well, it's really not that much money," but it can be. It certainly is. I think for a young couple buying their first home, a young person just graduated from university or college getting her first job, buying her first home, certainly \$1,000 to \$2,000 toward that can be a substantial amount of money to help make that important first purchase.

This bill also eliminates the workplace child care tax incentive, which we equate to about a \$10-million tax hike on the backs of working Ontarians.

The workplace accessibility tax incentive would be eliminated by this bill, if passed—a tax hike of about \$7 million.

The graduate transitions tax credit—eliminated—helping graduates find those jobs, meet with their training and education: scrapped as part of this bill.

The educational technology tax credit: I know my colleague from Durham has been looking into this area, particularly with reference to medical technology and equipment. The educational technology tax credit, which helped investments in that area, would be scrapped if this bill were to pass.

The employer health tax exemption and the stock option benefits for R&D employees would also be eliminated if this bill were to pass, meaning that these employees would be paying higher taxes because the

employer health tax would cover a larger portion of their pay and benefits—nothing but a hidden tax grab by the Minister of Finance on top of assorted other tax increases. In fact, I think one of the first bills brought in by the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government was the biggest tax hike in the history of Ontario.

To go on with the tax increases in this bill, the Ontario research employees stock option tax credit is eliminated.

Provincial "sales tax ... rebate for vehicles purchased" by those with disabilities—an \$8-million saving the finance minister is clawing back from families or individuals with disabilities who are trying to purchase a vehicle to help them get to work, to social functions and to church. This is for vehicles that have been modified to help individuals who have difficulty moving around. They need a wheelchair or such to help them live as much of an independent lifestyle as possible by their condition. Bizarrely, Dalton McGuinty and the Liberal government are taking that tax credit away from these families to find \$8 million in savings, I guess, but at a substantial cost, a substantial impact on these families.

**Mr Ted Chudleigh (Halton):** Mean-spirited.

**Mr Hudak:** It is absolutely. My colleague from Halton says it's mean-spirited—absolutely mean-spirited.

I was in Sobeys in Beamsville, just off Green Lane and Ontario Street, about two or three weeks ago and a nice elderly gentleman approached me in the grocery store lineup. He didn't want to bother me, but he said he had something on his mind, and of course I said, "Let me hear what it is." His wife has severe disabilities. She has been in and out of the hospital, sadly, on many occasions. They had recently purchased a vehicle so they could transport her to her medical appointments, to her social occasions—the gentleman was retired, so it wouldn't be to work, but to important aspects that support their lifestyle in the community of Beamsville. Her medical appointments are in St Catharines or Hamilton.

Then he finds out that Greg Sorbara, the Minister of Finance in the Dalton McGuinty Liberal government, in a mean-spirited way, has taken away that tax credit which made that car more affordable for that couple, for those seniors. I think the gentleman missed it by just a few days. He wrote to Premier McGuinty, and he gave me a copy of his letter, but he was snubbed by the Premier, who basically said he wasn't going to help him. He was not going to assist this pair of seniors—and the wife has severe disabilities—to pay for the car. They had depended on this tax credit—eliminated in this particular bill.

I'll go on. The 10-year property tax exemption for new electricity generating facilities strikes me as very curious. Today, my colleague from Durham asked the Minister of Energy if he was going to break his promise of closing the coal-fired plants by 2007, a very legitimate question by the member because, as I've said and I'll say again, this government has a shocking record of breaking campaign promises, so you sort of expect they're going to break more.

I also believe that was an irresponsible promise made by a man who was so ambitious to sit in the Premier's

chair that he didn't care about the dignity of the office. He made promises he knew he couldn't keep. I am convinced of that and I believe the vast majority of Ontarians are convinced of that as well. It fits well on a bumper sticker, but I bet you that the Premier knew he couldn't keep that promise, considering the increasing demand for hydro in Ontario and the fact that there were not as many as hoped capital projects for new power supply moving through the system. The Premier knew that if he closed down the coal-fired plants by 2007, it would cause a major hole in hydro supply in the province. It's potentially 20% or more. Then, if that power were to be imported, probably a significant portion would come from the Ohio Valley, from across the border, where the coal technology is not as clean. So we would be importing power from across the border and importing the pollution that would come across Lake Erie into the province.

I do believe they thought the promise through, knew it was irresponsible and unworkable, but nonetheless put it in their campaign material to try to win votes. It's certainly a laudable goal to continue to clean up our atmosphere, one we support—a clean environment. In order to try to attract those votes, the Premier made an irresponsible promise that's unworkable, and he knew he couldn't keep it.

I believe it's a matter of time. I believe there are probably informal polls in the hydro sector, and Dwight Duncan is going to say, "Oops, you know what? We're not going to close down all the coal-fired plants by 2007, as promised. We just can't do it." He'll try to find some spin, some way of saying it's not his fault. But they knew years ago when they made that promise that they were not going to carry through on it.

Nonetheless, if there is sincerity in that promise, you'd think they would do what they could to encourage new power supply. So I find it very curious and absolutely inconsistent that this government is eliminating the property tax exemption for new electricity generating facilities. If you tax something, you'll get less of it, on principle; if you reduce taxes, you'll get more of it. If you want to encourage more hydro supply in Ontario, one way of doing so is to reduce taxes on those facilities. It's been successful in other jurisdictions. So if the government on one hand says they want to encourage new supply, why on the other are they effectively raising taxes on these hydro facilities through this bill before the Legislature today?

**Mr John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke):** That would be discouraging, eh?

**Mr Hudak:** My friend from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke says that would be discouraging. Absolutely. It is discouraging that this government continues in public with what I believe is the mirage of their power supply plans, when behind the scenes they're counting down the days when they're going to break the promise on closing the coal-fired plants.

1610

Representing Dunnville in Haldimand county, parts of western Niagara and a significant number of individuals

who work at the Nanticoke facility, I know that the devastation on an economic level that closing that facility will cause is immeasurable. I don't know if other promises were made to replace that supply in Nanticoke; I don't believe that's the case. Certainly, I believe it's bad hydro policy for the government to pursue that tack and I believe it's bad economic policy for Haldimand and Norfolk counties. I know my colleague from Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant has spoken very eloquently about that in the House and during the campaign.

Similarly, the tax incentive for new alternative renewable electricity supply is repealed retroactively to November 25, 2002. That was more than two years ago. A retroactive tax increase of over two years.

When we read through this legislation and the amendments to the Electricity Act that are part of this bill—I've mentioned a couple of initiatives that are increasing taxes on hydro supply, which seems to run against the grain of what any sensible government would do. The amendments to the Electricity Act basically open the door for the government to levy charges for water use on the owners of hydroelectric generating stations. Under the revised act, water transfers can now be taken into account when the government calculates revenue charges and water rental charges. A good question—and I hope somebody across the way responds—is, why would the government slap this tax on the water being used by hydroelectric generating stations? Is that how they intend to attract new hydro generation plants to Ontario? It seems to work absolutely the opposite.

**Mr Yakabuski:** They're working to get the price up higher and higher.

**Mr Hudak:** I'm certainly hearing what the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is saying from my constituents, who are seeing their hydro rates increase.

By the way, I seem to recall, around the same time as Dalton McGuinty promised not to raise taxes, they promised not to raise hydro rates. Boy, that one has gone out the window, big time, and the minister continues to talk about further increases in hydro rates. Certainly, higher taxation on hydroelectric generating stations seems to be absolutely at cross-purposes with what the government purports to do, which is increasing energy supply.

Speaking of hydroelectric, there's another broken promise made to the people of Niagara Falls and Niagara in particular: Dalton McGuinty and Energy Minister Dwight Duncan said here in the Legislature that they were going to build Beck 3, which would be the third generator in Niagara Falls for hydro supply—a significant source of power. There are two right now. They're moving ahead with a project that the Conservative government began, increasing the capacity of the tunnel. That's great. That's the right thing to do. But they had promised to go beyond that and build the third generator, Beck 3.

**Mr Yakabuski:** Not happening.

**Mr Hudak:** The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke rightly guesses it's not happening. I think he's

seen this sad story too many times before, where a promise is made and then, once in office, that promise is quickly broken by this government, and they try to forget it.

We had a very curious, bizarre answer as to why the Minister of Energy backed away from Beck 3, I think it was in early 2004, while Dalton McGuinty was promising it in 2003. I think it had something to do with lower water levels in the Niagara River. So I guess there was a massive and demonstrable change in the water levels in the Niagara River that only the Liberal Party operatives are aware of. Certainly my constituents who live along the Niagara River have not seen this massive lowering of the river. I guess they could walk across to Buffalo, New York, or to Grand Island now. But I guess something happened with the Niagara River, so Beck—

**Mr Yakabuski:** Is Moses parked on either side of that river?

**Mr Hudak:** Maybe Moses has a part-time job lowering the level of the Niagara River for a change, instead of the Red Sea.

**Mr Yakabuski:** Is he parting waters up in your region now?

**Mr Hudak:** I don't know, but for some reason the government has broken that promise under one bizarre story that the water levels in the Niagara River are suddenly precipitously lower than they were only one year before. It's a bunch of bunk. Another clearly broken promise by the Dalton McGuinty government.

**Mr Yakabuski:** Well, you can't say they're not consistent.

**Mr Hudak:** It's true. I mean, they are consistent. It's just saddening, and I think it pulls all politicians down, unfortunately. The broken promises continue to stack up, and we're seeing a number of them in this bill that's before the Legislature today.

I also wanted to comment on the elimination of the Muskoka region from the boundaries of northern Ontario, the Parry Sound-Muskoka riding.

**Mr Yakabuski:** That wouldn't be a political decision?

**Mr Hudak:** You know, it is absolutely a political decision. It is meant to punish the people of that riding that supported a Conservative candidate, a very good Conservative candidate, Norm Miller. It is nothing but a vindictive move by the government, and that means that people in this riding who before could access additional funding to attract doctors as part of the northern Ontario program, could capitalize on the grow bonds initiatives as part of this, could get funding, as they have for many years, from the northern Ontario heritage fund, can no longer do so. The federal boundaries include the whole riding.

**Mr Yakabuski:** They still respect those boundaries.

**Mr Hudak:** They still respect those boundaries, and in fact the federal candidate, now agriculture minister, I think, had condemned the Dalton McGuinty government for this vindictive, mean-spirited attack on the people of Parry Sound-Muskoka simply because they voted Conservative. That's one of the underlying patterns that

we've seen: a mean-spiritedness, a vindictiveness. I talked about it with Halton's comments a bit earlier with respect to northern Ontario.

Certainly the attack on parents who send their kids to independent schools—middle-class families who had been depending for 11 months on receiving their tax credit, who choose to send their children to independent schools while paying taxes to the public school system, find out 11 months into the year that their tax credit is eliminated retroactive to January 1. Maybe if they did it the next year they would disagree with it, but they could understand. But it's an absolutely mean-spirited, spiteful, vindictive attack on parents who send their children to independent schools by an 11-month retroactive tax increase.

I do believe there have been some attacks on the Ontario Hotel Restaurant and Motel Association. They had the courage—the first real stakeholder group that had the courage—to stand up to the Dalton McGuinty government when they opposed the short-lived Dalton McGuinty meal tax, which would have increased taxes on meals under \$5, was it?

**Mr Yakabuski:** Under \$4.

**Mr Hudak:** Under \$4—dramatically affecting seniors and working families.

The restaurant, hotel and motel association came up with a campaign widely responded to by taxpayers, and caused the McGuinty government to back down from that poorly-thought-out attempt to grab additional taxes from restaurateurs, seniors and working families. I do believe some of the initiatives that we've seen hence, that have come after that, are part of a vindictive pattern of this government to punish those who stand up against them.

Lately, the Ontario Medical Association, which voted fairly on a deal and voted it down by about 60%—they had fair consideration, a month-plus—I forget what the exact time frame was, but a considerable amount of time—maybe even 90 days. They voted it down after considering it, and the government now has turned around and, in a vindictive, mean-spirited manner, is maligning doctors, attacking senior doctors, negotiating in public in bad faith, and calling doctors some very unflattering terms. It's a shameful attack on our doctors and shows an unfortunate vindictiveness and mean-spiritedness underlying a number of initiatives like this bill.

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments?

**Mr Prue:** As always, it's a pleasure to comment on the speeches made by the member from Erie-Lincoln. Again, as I have to say so many times, although I do not agree always with what he says, he says it with some eloquence.

I think a couple of points that he raised here need to be spoken about again. He talked about politicians, in general, from all parties, who break their promises, politicians who betray the trust of the people who sent them to Queen's Park or to any Legislature, or to the federal government or to a city hall. When politicians

break the trust they have, or that the people have with them, then I would tell you that they have done something far worse than simply betray the people. They have broken a covenant that all politicians must have with the people who send them to any elected place of office. Your word should be your bond. What you say you're going to do, you should carry out. He is right in saying that we as politicians ought never to willingly break that bond. Even if there are circumstances that may require us from time to time to change our mind, we should tread very carefully before we break the promises we have made.

He also talked about the constituency of Parry Sound-Muskoka, and I've not yet spoken on this, but I think he is absolutely right. Parry Sound-Muskoka has for many years been considered part of northern Ontario. As part of the north, it was eligible for subsidies, for government largesse, and it was treated as a northern part of the province. To take it out of the north, for no apparent reason that anyone can fathom or understand, is to do a disservice not only to the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka but to the 100,000 or so people who live there.

1620

**Mr Lalonde:** I was listening very carefully to the comments made by the member for Erie-Lincoln. I'd like to inform the people properly in this province. When he referred to the disabled, when he referred to the seniors, first of all, this bill will not only benefit seniors in one way, not only by that \$125; seniors will benefit up to \$525 a year. A good example is the special health tax we implemented because the previous government gave us that beautiful deficit of \$5.6 billion that we have to fund. Seniors, at the present time, if they are making taxable income of \$20,100, will benefit because they are going to fall under that \$20,000, which will benefit them by saving that \$300.

Also, when they purchase their drugs under the drug program, there's a cap. If you make more than a certain amount a year, instead of paying \$2 per prescription, you pay \$6, plus \$100. This will bring down a lot of seniors in the province who will benefit from that \$2 instead of the \$6.

When we look at the disabled, it's definitely not a saving to the province of \$8 million. In the past, they were getting a tax break when they purchased an automobile. Today the McGuinty government is investing in upgrading the automobile to accommodate the disabled.

This is the answer about what we're doing at the present time.

**Mr Yakabuski:** It's always a pleasure to follow my colleague from Erie-Lincoln. He's a wise member of this House who has some very interesting ways of presenting his case. I support everything he's been saying. It's amazing, the correlation between the making of a promise and the breaking of a promise. What's that thing they used to talk about on that show, *Mork and Mindy*? A nanosecond? Apparently that's not the shortest measurement of time now. The shortest measurement of time is the time between the making of a promise and the

breaking of a promise by Dalton McGuinty. So they've got a new way of measuring time, and that's interesting.

I also found interesting, in listening to the member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, that only Liberals could find ways of defending this health tax. It appears now they're going to be out campaigning and canvassing and trying to convince the public that, by putting our hands in your pockets and removing your hard-earned dollars that you cannot afford to give us, we're actually doing you a big favour. Only Liberals would think they somehow have a valid argument in that case.

Getting back to the member for Erie-Lincoln, he talked about a number of broken promises the Liberals have embarked upon since their election last October, and the broken promises to come. He talked about the plan to shut down the coal generating stations by 2007, and we're waiting to see when that axe is going to fall because it is simply impossible for them to be able to replace that amount of energy in that short a length of time.

**Ms Churley:** I find it very interesting watching Liberals speak and then Tories speak, and look for the similarities.

One of the things I would really like to point out here is the capital tax elimination. That's a tax that, when the Tories were in power, they said they were going to bring in and the Liberals said they weren't going to do. They campaigned against it.

Now, as Michael Prue, our finance critic, the member for Beaches-East York, pointed out yesterday, I believe, when he spoke to this bill, the Liberals were like slowed-down Tories, or something like this, because the Tories are complaining that the Liberals aren't doing it fast enough—not fast enough. I see some of the Liberals glaring at me over there. You don't mean to glare at me. But it's true. You're doing the same thing, and you said you weren't going to.

We want people out there to understand what this means. As the member for Beaches-East York pointed out yesterday, we're not talking about some of our industry here, some of our car manufacturers or whatever, we're talking about the elimination of this capital tax that mainly benefited—not entirely—banks. The big banks are getting this break, the big banks and insurance companies.

At the same time, the Liberals have not clawed back the child tax credit from the federal government, which would help people trying to raise their kids in poverty, but are giving the banks and insurance companies this huge break.

And they're not keeping their promise to the film industry. I will be talking about that a great deal when I speak to this bill in a moment—we desperately need that promise kept. In the meantime, they're bringing in a huge tax break for big banks and big insurance companies. What's wrong with this picture?

**The Acting Speaker:** The member for Erie-Lincoln has two minutes to reply.

**Mr Hudak:** I thank my colleagues for their comments.

One thing that I wanted to pursue—actually Beaches-East York added to this debate, and I appreciate his kind words and share them in respect to his work in the Legislature. He's right on with respect to northern Ontario. Taking Muskoka out of the definition of northern Ontario means that the taxpayers of Muskoka—and if you look at the year-round residents, the Liberal government likes to characterize them as all living in mansion-like cottages along the lakes, but I believe there's lower-than-average income for the average person working there, significantly high unemployment in the off-season and probably an older-than-average population. Basically, what this bill does is it means that people in that area can no longer get important programs like the northern Ontario health travel grant, which, if they had to come for surgery in Toronto, helps to pay those costs, helps to defray those costs: gone under this legislation.

Special funds that recruit doctors or specialists to the Muskoka region: gone under this legislation.

Access to the northern Ontario heritage fund, which is there to spur job creation and investment in northern Ontario: that access now denied.

I know my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka was fighting like a dog to make sure projects that exist, like the Gravenhurst Wharf, continue to help bring tourism and investment into that community.

I find this highly regrettable. As I said, the federal boundaries include the district of Muskoka. In fact, the federal member for that area, Mr Mitchell, who is now the agriculture minister, a respected individual in his riding and the north, had severely criticized, lambasted, the Dalton McGuinty government's decision to take Muskoka out of northern Ontario.

I have no doubt that was a vindictive move, it was mean-spirited and it appeals to the most base instinct by saying, "If we take money away from these people, we'll send it into the northern ridings that voted Liberal." It's highly regrettable. I hope they reverse that change.

**The Acting Speaker:** Further debate?

**Ms Churley:** I have an opportunity to put my comments on the record about this bill before us today. I haven't had the opportunity, like our critic in this area, Michael Prue, to read that. Do you have a copy? I mean, it's about this thick. I couldn't believe it.

**Mr Hudak:** The ominous bill.

**Ms Churley:** The omnibus bill?

**Mr Hudak:** Ominous.

**Ms Churley:** Ominous. The ominous bill. Yes, it is ominous indeed.

**Mr Prue:** It contains little shocks of horror.

1630

**Ms Churley:** Yes, it does. As the member for Beaches-East York said, it contains little shocks of horror. He mentioned that on the day it was put before him in the House—about this thick—on his desk. He barely had time to look at it, but within that short period of time, just peering through it he found one or two little horrors at that time.

We've had it for—what?—about a week or so. I know he attended an hour-long technical briefing and he talked a bit about that yesterday. I think we need some plain language in these bills, don't you? Some of this stuff is outrageous. When I was the Minister of Consumer and Commercial Relations, many years ago now, one of the things we started working on was plain language policies throughout the government. It seems to me that, after looking at this bill and other bills just in terms of understanding them, it is hard for us. We need interpretation of them.

Mr Prue read out some of the language used in these bills, but think about the layperson trying to read this and understand what it says. I have to hand it to my colleague, our critic in this area. He did a pretty good job, along with some of our incredible staff. Of course, behind every good or great politician there are really good staff too, who spend a lot of the time, when we're in here debating and asking questions and at our community meetings, poring over this information and interpreting and advising us. I want to thank all of them, as well as Mr Prue, for the work they did on this incredibly thick bill.

As always in these kinds of omnibus bills, there is a lot of housekeeping. You really do have to plow through it to figure out what is significant and what isn't. There actually are a fair number of significant things going on in this bill, which my colleague pointed out and others will be talking about as well. I'm focusing on a couple of areas because I'm just so outraged about them.

The one I keep talking about over and over again is the elimination of the capital tax. I really want to make sure that people out there understand what this means. If you are not paying attention to this, and there is so much else going on, the backdrop here is the new health tax that has been brought in for lower income people, and the government not eliminating the clawback, and all kinds of other things—the delisting of critical medical services. This is the backdrop to this. We have to put some of those things in place when we talk about this elimination of the capital tax.

The elimination of this capital tax is completely contrary to the government's campaign promise to keep the tax. I don't know what number this broken promise is—it's up in the 30s now, maybe even more—but to me this is a really significant one because of the backdrop and because of the people who are asked to pay the price. I get angry when I see that the elimination of this capital tax will cost the Ontario treasury approximately \$1 billion when the tax is completely eliminated in 2012. Why would the Liberals oppose this in opposition and then bring it in, particularly when we find out who is benefiting from this? It's the big banks and insurance companies.

I don't have to go into detail for anybody in this chamber or anybody who might be watching about the fees that we pay and pay when we go to the bank or to a bank machine these days. Their profits are rolling in, and we can't do anything about it unless we want to go back

to the days of stuffing our money in mattresses. I've got to tell you, some days when I go to my bank machine, it's tempting.

**Mrs Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce):** If you have a waterbed—

**Ms Churley:** You couldn't do it if you have a waterbed. But seriously, those are the people who are going to benefit from this: the big banks who make billions of dollars of profits and the insurance companies. Surely they can afford to pay this little bit of extra money, given the huge ratio of profits they make, when we look at some of the poverty we see in our communities that has not been addressed.

I also want to talk at this time and within this context about the film industry. I've raised the question along with my colleagues, our critic Rosario Marchese and Michael Prue, my two Toronto colleagues in the NDP caucus. We raised it in the House, and indeed I've met with and will continue to meet with people representing the film industry: Film Ontario, a coalition of all the components who work within the film industry—they've all come together to work and to speak with the same voice to try to get the government to keep its promise to the film industry.

I plowed through this bill and asked people to look—because this would be the perfect place to do it—for the Liberals to keep their promise to the film industry and increase the tax incentives they promised to give them domestically. I raise this because they are not asking for very much. They are asking the Liberals to keep their promise, which we have in writing. They're not even asking to go to the top—say, as high a tax credit as Manitoba. They're asking to be put somewhere in the middle so they can compete.

The fact is that the film and television industry employs some 50,000 people, most of them here in Toronto, although the spinoff industry affects jobs right across the province, and a lot of them in my riding of Toronto-Danforth. Three of the major film studios in this province are situated in the port lands in my riding of Toronto-Danforth. Many of the people who work in that industry, from the carpenters to the producers to the caterers—you name it—live in the riding. They moved to the area so they're close to work. They're raising their kids there. Their kids go to school there. Do you know what? They're losing their jobs. Many of them are terrified of losing their jobs, and it doesn't have to be that way.

What people have to understand—it was very clear when we asked him the question in the House—is that the finance minister didn't understand how it benefits all of Ontario, and indeed his treasury, if that tax incentive is increased. It's one of those situations where it's win-win for everybody, because when you give that little bit extra tax incentive, what happens is more jobs, more producers, more work comes to these studios and more money goes back into the coffers. It's proven. It's on paper that at the end of the day, in very short order it actually benefits the treasury and, therefore, the bottom line of the government.

The minister did agree to a meeting with the film industry. I did meet with representatives from the industry, and we talked about what needed to be done. I know they are lobbying everybody from all parties and doing a good job of that. I know that my conversation with Mr Sorbara was a good one in terms of demanding that he meet with them. First of all he said he probably couldn't do it until after the budget. I said, "That's not good enough. They need to meet with you now." I understand that his assistant did call, or they called him immediately, and a meeting was set up in short order. I'm sure that when Mr Sorbara and others look at their data and their information, they will keep their promise, because there is no way not to. It just doesn't make sense to let the industry wither and die the way it's going to if this keeps up, if the promise isn't kept.

According to the latest government figures, the industry is in trouble. Foreign project filming in Ontario has declined by 36% or \$200 million in 2003. The number of domestic productions declined last year too. The film industry here is very worried that Ontario is becoming uncompetitive with other jurisdictions that are also trying to attract film and television productions, so they are upping their tax credits. That's what is happening in the US and provinces across Canada. When you couple that with the rising Canadian dollar and the incentives being offered by other jurisdictions, both in the US and Canada, it could be a disaster for a thriving industry here in Ontario.

When we asked Mr Sorbara the question—I believe I have his answer here—he said he didn't want to participate in an "unhealthy bidding war with upping and upping tax credits." That's not, may I say again, what the industry is asking for. They're not trying to get into that bidding war. They want to be somewhere in the middle. In fact, they have to be somewhere in the middle in order to compete. But he did say, "We are going to help generate the most skilled labour pool and talent pool ... on the continent in film and production. We're going to make sure we have a well-developed infrastructure so that everyone knows that the best films can be made in Ontario." We already have that in Ontario, right here in downtown Toronto, in my riding; that exists. We have one of the best talent pools in all of North America and indeed the entire world, and the best infrastructure.

#### 1640

What is really alarming to me, because this has not been included in this bill, is that there was supposed to be a new film studio built in my riding that we're all very excited about. It means more jobs; it would mean more jobs for people. We want that studio to be built and all the people who are employed in the industry want it to be built. But now they're saying that if this continues to fall, they will not be able to build it, that it wouldn't make sense to build it. So we have three other studios that were thriving but are starting to lose ground significantly. Something can be done about it, and we ask the minister to do so.

To date, I think part of it is not having a really clear understanding of the industry. I'm sure his staff by now

will have been working away so they can go to him and show him what indeed we're talking about here and why it would be a win-win situation to include this tax credit in this bill. Since it isn't in here, we're looking forward to the minister coming forward very, very soon with the promise that they will move forward immediately. You see, what's happening by osmosis, you could say, the ripple effect, is that once the word gets out there throughout the industry that Ontario is losing ground in this way, that it costs more to come here, they will go elsewhere. That's what is happening right now. The longer we keep this situation as it is, without this tax credit being put in place as promised, the more business is going to be lost in my riding in Toronto and indeed throughout parts of Ontario.

I think it was Mr Prue once again who said—I like this quote: “Dalton McGuinty should be a director, because his government is overseeing a perfect storm for film and television jobs. After SARS, the higher Canadian dollar and improvements to tax credits in other jurisdictions, the Liberals have turned their backs on workers in the film and television industry.” It's very well said, I'll tell you that. I agree with it.

This is an extremely serious situation. We're not just talking. Some people think that when they hear us talk about the film industry, there are these producers and actors and they'll find work; who really cares about them? Well, in fact, I do for a number of reasons. But we also have to bear in mind that this is an industry like many other industries. We're talking about, as I said, 50,000 or so jobs. We're talking about all kinds of jobs that will be lost throughout the industry if this is not done. I was really disappointed when I looked at this bill and it wasn't in there.

It makes me particularly distraught to see that big banks and insurance companies are being given a tax credit here. These people who make a huge profit, billions of dollars, are getting another break here. But the film industry, which is desperate right now for support from the government, support that was promised by the government, gets zero; they get nothing. What is wrong with this picture?

You know that the film industry is coming down here tomorrow. They're going to be outside, on the lawn, and I'm sure they're going to be talking to Liberal members about their situation. I'm quite convinced that a number of the Liberals sitting here in this chamber today will agree with me, and will agree with them, that this is the proper thing to do, the right thing to do. It's a win-win for everybody. It's not often you can stand up in this place and say something like that, that giving this particular industry a slightly higher tax credit, this middle ground, will actually pay off for the government and more money will flow into the government coffers. How can you say no to an offer like that? So I'm looking forward to the film industry being here tomorrow, and of course I'm looking forward to the finance minister saying that he understands the issue now and indeed will keep the promise and raise those tax credits to 33% from 20%.

In my last couple of minutes on this bill, I do want to say that there are a number of issues here that we were not told about when we first got this bill before us. It was quite alarming to see, for instance, as I mentioned earlier, that in this bill the government is ending the PST rebate for modification of vehicles of handicapped drivers. For the life of me, I don't understand why the government is doing it. It's such a little program; not a lot of people utilized it. As we well know, Mr Prue had to help Mr Jason Chenier, who had applied through a legitimate government Web site and was turned down. He was able, through his tenacity, to get that for this particular gentleman. Others who had applied legitimately were turned down because the government had cancelled the program without telling people.

I don't understand how the government can bring in a disability act, even though it's going to take 20 years for people to see improvements, and cancel a small thing like that, which can be so significant to some people at this time, before we actually have the disability bill active in this province. What I understand now is that the monies are being reallocated to a March of Dimes program funded through the Ministry of Community and Social Services. As you know, that's a means-tested program and it doesn't benefit some people who are earning more than \$35,000. I can tell you that \$35,000, when you're raising a person or taking care of a person who has disabilities, is not very much money. So there is a real problem with that.

The other thing, one of the many things I was shocked to see, was that the PST rebate for energy-efficient appliances had expired. That was brought in by the Tories, actually. It was an itty-bitty program. I went for the announcement when the minister was down, and I actually even bought an energy-efficient dishwasher, I think it was, or dryer, and benefited a little bit. I got a rebate back from that. A lot of people didn't know about it.

Let me tell you why that program was important. It was a small program. I think a lot of people didn't know about it and should have been informed. But the government is saying that it has brought on a rebate for the purchase of residential solar systems and is introducing a rebate for wind energy systems, micro-hydroelectric energy systems and other kinds of systems. Well, that's great. I support that and applaud that. But a lot of people are not going to be rushing out right now to do something like that; they will, over time. We need to promote it more. But many people, as we are entering into more and more of an energy crises for a number of reasons, want to start small, or maybe they can only start small. This little program was an opportunity for ordinary people who were not going to be rushing out and getting into wind energy systems and things like that right away; it was something they could do. They were going to get a rebate, and it would be an incentive for them to do their bit to contribute to energy efficiency in this province. That motivation has been taken away from them.

Mr Speaker, I can see you're getting ready to jump up and sit me down, so I thank you for this opportunity.

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments?

1650

**Mrs Mitchell:** It's certainly my pleasure to rise this afternoon to support Bill 149, the Budget Measures Act. This bill will make our tax system fairer and stronger. As I have a limited amount of time, I want to speak to one very specific issue that is part of this bill, and that is the apprenticeship training tax credit. I want to talk about how difficult it has been in our rural communities for our skilled trades. In our rural communities, we do not have some of the opportunities that our urban counterparts have, but what we do have is very bright, young, energetic people, and they can bring forward many of their skills through skilled trades because of the lack of universities and manufacturing businesses within our communities. So this, for me, is a wonderful opportunity, for our rural communities to have the ability for our young people to have the training closer to them as well. This plan contains new funding of up to \$11.7 million annually by 2006-07 and would pay up to \$5,000 for three years. This means good jobs, good jobs for young people from our rural communities. So it is my pleasure to rise and support this bill.

This bill is making the necessary investments in our most important resource, and that is the people of Ontario. The strength of this bill is through our young people and into our future, so again, it is my pleasure to rise and support this bill.

**Mr Yakabuski:** I too want to comment on the bill again. I always appreciate the member for Toronto-Danforth. We don't always have the same philosophical points of view, but I do admire the way she tackles issues and sticks to her guns.

**Mr Qadri:** Tell us about Mork and Mindy again.

**Mr Yakabuski:** No, no. Mork and Mindy—we switched the channel on that one.

But I wonder, when I think of this Liberal government—we see in this budget bill we've had increases in taxes in this province to the tune of about, for the average family, \$1,000. You know, general economics say if you put more money into people's pockets, the economy is going to be positively affected. The Liberals campaigned basically on the fact that they thought our taxes were too low. So they are raising our taxes. They said they wouldn't, but they are; they continue to raise the taxes over and over again. Now, I just wonder where they are. If there is any credence to that argument at all, have they actually thought about at what point they will have raised taxes to such a point that they drive this economy into a recession? I mean, there is a point where there will be no money at all left in a person's pocket. As a matter of fact, a constituent of mine said to me, "You know, when that Dalton McGuinty is through with me, the only thing that is going to be left in my pockets is lint."

**Mr Qadri:** Is that a quote, John?

**Mr Yakabuski:** That is a quote. At that point, I ask this party, will you have realized that by raising taxes and raising taxes and raising taxes, you are succeeding in driving this economy down?

**Mr Prue:** I rise to commend the member from Beaches-East York for a most eloquent speech. She sort of hit the—

**Ms Churley:** Toronto-Danforth.

**Mr Prue:** Sorry. I'm Beaches-East York; you're Toronto-Danforth.

**Mr Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre):** But we'll commend you too.

**Mr Prue:** I'll commend myself as well. Sorry. She referred to me so many times that I got confused myself. But anyway, the member from Toronto-Danforth really—

**Mr Wilson:** She's better-looking.

**Mr Prue:** Oh, yes, she's much better-looking.

She really hit the nail on the head when she talked about the capital tax reductions and how this government is bent on going down the same path that the previous government was bent on, thinking that this was somehow going to do a good thing for the province of Ontario. The only thing it's going to do is a good thing for the banks and insurance companies.

It's not going to do a good thing—she zeroed in on one particular industry that is found primarily in Toronto but increasingly all over the province, and that is the film and television industry. They are really starting to be hit. They are not getting the kinds of funds they need, the kinds of funds that would be available if you stopped the capital tax reductions. If you had a billion dollars, would it not make more sense to take some of that money and put it into the film industry? Would it not make more sense than to leave them mired at a 20% rate? Where the government is subsidizing them at a very small rate, would it not make more sense to move it up to where Dalton McGuinty said it should be, in the last election, at 33%?

We have heard from the finance minister and from the Premier that this simply cannot be done because there isn't enough money. But at the same time, there seems to be enough money to completely eliminate the capital tax reduction to banks and insurance companies. It's going to cost this province about a billion dollars in the next seven years if you continue to embark on that, and I would say she's hit the nail on the head: It's better to spend it where it actually makes money, and that is in the film industry.

**The Acting Speaker:** We have time for one last question and comment.

**Mrs Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex):** I'm ever so glad that the member for Beaches-East York found his way home again.

I want to speak in support of the fall budget bill.

**Mr Yakabuski:** I am surprised, Maria.

**Mrs Van Bommel:** Well, why would I not speak in favour of it, especially when you consider what has happened in the past and look at things such as the fact that in the years from 2000-01 to 2003-04, there was an increase in program spending of about 21%, and at the same time revenues dropped by 0.7%?

Anyone, even in their own household spending, understands that you cannot continue on that course of action.

You cannot continue to dig the hole deeper in terms of your finances. That was the trend that was occurring with the former government. So, through this bill, we are looking at ways to create savings. We have to do that, and that includes looking at things that are not working well. This bill talks to us about nine different tax credits that either have not worked well, are not being used any longer, or don't align themselves with our government priorities.

In doing that, we will save \$85 million over the next four years. That's \$85 million that we have to work at, first, reducing the deficit and, second, dealing with some of the program demands that we now have before us. That is one of the issues that I sometimes hear even in my own riding: The improvements that our government is trying to make, I'm being told, are not enough. I understand that, but we also have to work within the confines of our finances and, as anyone with a household understands, you cannot keep digging your financial hole deeper.

**The Acting Speaker:** The member for Toronto-Danforth has two minutes to reply.

**Ms Churley:** I know that Liberal backbenchers have to stand up, speak in favour of and support government bills. I understand that, but I want to say clearly to them, and even those whom I like—and I do like some of the members, maybe all of them, who stood up and spoke.

**Hon David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal):** Name names.

**Ms Churley:** No, I won't name names. But for a Liberal member to stand up and say that what this bill includes and involves are their priorities, when we're standing up and pointing out to the members today some of the problems with this bill, including the ending of a little but mighty program to help people buy vans for disabled family members—that's gone. We're standing up and pointing out that the government is not keeping a promise for the film industry that would keep jobs in this province, in this city, in this community. Daycare spaces and all of those things, we thought, from what the government said in election period time, were going to be their priorities.

Well, they are not any more. What seems to be a major priority in this bill is giving a tax credit that is mainly going to benefit the big banks and insurance companies.

**Interjection:** That's nonsense.

**Ms Churley:** That is not nonsense. Read the bill. That's why I'm so incensed about this. You talk about these being your priorities. I suggest to you that that will be pretty shocking to the people of Ontario when they figure out all of those things like delisting health services, not ending the clawback of the child tax credit, not giving the tax credit promised to the film industry to create jobs. But this bill is actually giving billions of dollars back to the banks and the insurance companies, and the government member says this bill is about their priorities.

1700

**The Acting Speaker:** Further debate?

**Mr Mario G. Racco (Thornhill):** Contrary to the last speaker, I am in favour of Bill 149. In fact, I'm very pleased to speak in favour of Bill 149. It's a bill that advances the plans our government outlined in the 2004 budget.

Bill 149, among other things, will address to some degree the unfairness of the property taxes charged to our seniors. It also provides more details on proposals that we made in the 2004 budget. For instance, the Ontario property tax credit for seniors will be improved for the first time since it was introduced in 1992, 12 years ago. The basic credit will be increased from the \$500 that now exists to \$625. This is a 25% increase. We estimate that 685,000 senior families will benefit, including 33,000 senior families who presently do not benefit. So there will be an additional 33,000 senior families receiving some of the tax credit. This is an \$85-million initiative.

We will also eliminate the capital tax by the year 2012. This tax has been indicated by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce as a disincentive to investment. We believe we must encourage economic growth, and by eliminating the capital tax we will improve the economy of Ontario. That's one of the tools that will improve our economy. As of January 2008, all small businesses and 13,000 medium-sized corporations will not pay any capital tax, and between 2008 and January 2012, the capital tax will be eliminated. So there will be no more capital tax as of January 2012.

Bill 149 addresses another very important issue that has been discussed for many years; that is, the apprenticeship training tax credit. Unions and businesses for many years have been concerned about the present and future shortage of skilled tradespeople. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce has done a survey which concludes that 41% of the people who responded will experience a shortage of skilled people within five years. That is something we should be very much concerned with.

Our bill will encourage employers to hire and train apprentices in industrial, construction, automotive, power and certain service trades. We will pay up to \$5,000 of the apprenticeship salary each year for up to three years. Businesses will be eligible for 25% of the refundable tax credit for eligible expenses. If the business has a payroll of \$400,000 or less, the 25% will become 30%, so they will get a 30% tax credit. That is to show support for small corporations. We will be investing \$11.7 million more annually by 2006-07 to expand to 26,000 the number of young people registered in apprenticeships.

We are also creating the Ontario commercial investment funds program. This program will provide up to \$36 million in assistance, which will create a pool of \$120 million. Of course, this is seed capital for spinoff technology companies that will be formed by faculty, staff and students. This is a way to assist our grads in succeeding and making our economy stronger.

We must modernize our government. The Minister of Finance has spoken about that. We can do that by stimu-

lating new technology, which will keep our graduates in Ontario. We have done that to some degree in Bill 149. We should also eliminate extra red tape. One way of doing that is by having a single tax collection system—they totally disagree with that—that will assist in being more efficient and will help create a better standard of living.

Mr Speaker, I want to thank you. These are my comments in support of Bill 149.

*Interjection.*

**Mr Racco:** I'm sorry, Mr Speaker. I thought I mentioned that I would share my time with my colleague from Etobicoke North.

**The Acting Speaker:** I'm sorry; I didn't hear you. But you just said it now, so that's fine.

**Mr Qaadri:** Before beginning, if I might, I'd like to echo the words and sentiments of the member for Beaches-East York when he himself was complimenting the eloquence of the member for Beaches-East York.

Le plan repose sur les avantages concurrentiels de la province et vise à moderniser l'infrastructure, ainsi qu'à améliorer l'éducation et la formation de la main-d'œuvre, notamment de façon à utiliser du mieux possible les talents et les aptitudes que les immigrants apportent à l'Ontario.

It's a privilege to rise in support of Bill 149, the fall budget bill. Before discussing both the philosophy behind the bill and some particular aspects, I'd like to compliment, on behalf of the government caucus, the Minister of Finance on the stewardship he has so far displayed in what was a very difficult and challenging fiscal situation.

This bill encompasses fiscal prudence, a transformation for the betterment of Ontario, an introduction of transparency, as well as accountability. Why? Ultimately, to strengthen the foundations of the economic prosperity of Ontario, which is, after all, the foundation of a just and civil society.

As other members have pointed out, this bill encompasses a whole range of provisions, be it on an omnibus level or an ominous level, as some have said. I think in particular there are a number of positive aspects that touch so many different areas, including health care, education, training and infrastructure. Ultimately, it's about balancing that trade-off between prudent taxation, fiscal management and valued public services.

There are many specific commitments, whether we're looking at the tax credit for seniors, which will ultimately affect 685,000 senior families; the capital tax removal, which will help 13,000 medium-sized businesses; the \$120-million commitment for seed capital funding from the Ontario commercialization investment fund; the northern Ontario grow bonds; or the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority, which will ultimately leverage \$2 billion of infrastructure projects into the community.

I'd like very quickly to speak specifically about one thing that I think is a very important aspect and provision of Bill 149, the fall budget bill, and that is the granting of

the apprenticeship training tax credit. This is a four-year program. Ontario is at a crossroads. We have been told by various chambers of commerce, for example, that there is going to be a wave of retirement in the skilled trades over the next several years. We are told that almost 50% of individuals who engage in the skilled trades will be retiring imminently. This particular provision in the apprenticeship training program will help both unemployed and underemployed Canadians.

We find ourselves in a bizarre situation. There is work to be done in the skilled trades, there is a retiring workforce, there are certainly able-bodied men and women who want to engage in these trades, and yet there is a skills shortage. This is in many different industries: industrial, construction, machine power and service trades, just to name a few sectors.

What are some of the specific provisions? There is a \$12-million commitment. Whom will this help? How many individuals will this help? Something like 26,000 individuals will be able to avail themselves of these apprenticeship training programs. There will be, for example, grants to employers directly. Some of the salaries to the tune of approximately \$5,000 per year for three years will be picked up by the government.

As well, there's an initiative to have what's called a one-stop training and employment system. Essentially, it's about getting information out in a coherent manner, mentoring, and actually being the connecting body between employers and the to-be-employed. This will help apprentices, immigrants and, for example, youth in transition from school to work.

Ultimately it's about access, expanding training, employment services and a coherent dissemination of information, and to balance the budget, enhance public services and make our government programs more efficient. Why? Ultimately, to restore and guide Ontario to better fiscal prudence and financial health.

1710

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments?

**Mr Yakabuski:** It's my pleasure again to speak to the bill. We see so many previous tax credits that are being removed to hurt individuals in this budget bill, to hurt working families in Ontario—the home ownership plan, which was so helpful for young people to finally be able to purchase a home, being eliminated by this government. It just never seems to get it right. It takes away tax credits where they're very necessary, and on top of that increases taxes for people who can least afford to pay them: hard-working Ontario families.

The imposition of the health tax on Ontario families has been one of the most painful experiences they've been subjected to under this Liberal government, and I don't think they'll be forgetting about it. We'll be long done the debate on Bill 149 and they'll still be thinking about the broken promise to them on the health tax.

It seems to me they just haven't got it right. They just don't seem to have the balance about what is necessary with regard to budgetary measures in the province, and they haven't really understood the needs that are out there.

Some of the things that are a big concern to people are the broken promises on hydro, the broken promises on the health tax, the broken promises to working families, the broken promises to seniors. They're bragging about this tax credit to seniors, but it pales in comparison to what we were doing for seniors before they cancelled that tax credit and hurt seniors greatly in this province.

**Mr Prue:** I'm mindful of where I represent, my mis-spoken statement last time notwithstanding. Having said that, though, I'd like to comment on the members from Thornhill and Etobicoke North, because if I ever saw a dichotomy in what was being said in such a short span of some 11 minutes, it surely was these two members, who sit side by side but who are poles apart.

The member from Thornhill waxed eloquently about how important the reduction of the capital tax elimination was to the McGuinty government, how he is proud they are going to eliminate \$1 billion in revenue from that government in this period between today and 2012. The member from Etobicoke North spoke about how they were going to spend that money they no longer have on apprenticeship programs, and how important those programs are.

I do not understand how a government can eliminate such a vast amount of money, which will be only \$1 million this year, but will grow to \$40 million next year and \$100 million in the last full year of their mandate, and simply say that this is a fine thing, because we're going to have other programs and we're going to cut other things in order that we don't need that money.

Part of what they are cutting are programs that directly would help the disabled community, because companies no longer—even though they're perhaps going to get extra money back—are going to be able to apply for government programs to help the disabled to work in those workplaces, be they ramps or assistive devices for the disabled. They're no longer going to be able to apply to have child care programs in their companies, because the money is no longer available. They're no longer going to be able to have technological training. So it is all well and good to say you are eliminating the capital tax, but in eliminating that tax you are also eliminating the very programs that have made Canada and Ontario a model place in which to work. This is, in reality, a real disservice to our Ontario.

**Mr Tony C. Wong (Markham):** I'm happy to speak about Bill 149, the Budget Measures Act. I want to speak in respect of a specific area, and that is the growing of the economy. Of course, we know that this bill addresses the balancing of the budget while supporting vital public services as well as encouraging economic growth. We also try to modernize government, and by cutting down and cleaning up the tax statutes, we are really doing small businesses a big favour.

Earlier this year, I went around the province. I've gone to the east, to the west and up north, meaning Thunder Bay and Sault Ste Marie, in an exercise of getting input from our small businesses. A number of the concerns they've expressed include regulatory burden. That is

why, by cleaning up our statutes, especially the tax statutes, we're making it easier for them to focus on their core businesses. Instead of spending their time filling out forms and complying with extremely complex procedures, they can actually work on marketing and providing better services.

I want to also speak on the apprenticeship training tax credit, because this is another area that small businesses have indicated to me where they are in great need of these apprenticeship programs, and our government is surely responding. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has unveiled an extremely intensive and aggressive program in that regard, and that is why, with this tax credit, I'm sure that a lot of the small businesses will be able to get the training-level employees that they've been desiring and in fact demanding for a long time. In respect of the economic development aspect, I think this will certainly be extremely supportive of our overall initiative.

**Mr Dunlop:** I'm pleased to respond to the members from Etobicoke North and Thornhill on their comments.

I've said before in the House, and I will say again, that I think the apprenticeship tax credit is a very positive tax credit, and I support—I know I wanted our government to do it when we were in power, and I know we finally got it on our platform. I applaud the government for bringing it forth and I applaud the minister.

However, that being said, I'm so concerned about the Ontario home ownership savings plan being discontinued by the government. When that plan was in place for the years we were in power, the Conservatives were in power, we saw strong economic growth. A lot of people in this province—I don't have the exact numbers, but I believe it is something like a couple of hundred thousand families who took advantage of that program. That allowed them to get that little bit of extra help to build a new home or to provide the funding for a new home. This has been taken away by this government, and I can't for the life of me figure out why. When it's such a positive tax credit, why remove it? Because the \$2,000 or \$2,500, whatever it is that has an impact on a new home, is a pittance when compared to the overall cost of the home and the economic spinoff to the communities where these new homes are being built. Whether those new homes are in Thunder Bay or Timmins or Toronto or Niagara or wherever, it's still a benefit to that community. I'm most disappointed in that particular aspect of Bill 149, that it removes that.

Anyhow, I appreciate this opportunity to say a few words this afternoon.

**The Acting Speaker:** In response, I recognize the member for Thornhill.

**Mr Racco:** Let me thank the members from Etobicoke North, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, Beaches-East York, Markham and Simcoe North.

I want to make clear to the member from Beaches-East York that the programs that have been eliminated have been eliminated because they were not being used. We are trying to modernize our system, and that is one way of doing it.

Also, the member from Markham—it is very clear when he says that the people want us to eliminate red tape as much as possible, that that is one way of stimulating more economic activity in our province, which means more prosperity for all of us.

**1720**

Of course, from the comments made by the member from Etobicoke North when he spoke about the apprenticeship program, it's quite clear to anyone that in Canada and Ontario we need to stimulate interest for young people to get into apprenticeship programs. Unfortunately, we have not done a good job in the past, and unless we do so, very shortly we are going to have a shortage of this type of employee, as we have now.

In many parts of Europe—for instance, where I grew up—it was quite normal that we do that within the education system, so there were people for every industry that operated within a certain area.

We have moved in that direction, because we believe it to be the right thing to do, and I believe that in the near future our economy will continue to grow, as it is presently, and better. Of course, our system will be more modernized and we will have a better economic future, a better Ontario and a more prosperous Ontario for all of us. When that happens, we can afford even more social services and more programs for our elderly and for younger members of our community.

**The Acting Speaker:** Further debate?

**Mr Wilson:** I'm pleased to rise and speak on this budget bill for a few minutes this afternoon.

This budget bill does nothing to help some 500 people who have been recently laid off in the town of Collingwood from Nacan starch products, Backyard Products Ltd, Blue Mountain Pottery and a couple of other companies. There is nothing in this bill that gives any assistance. There is nothing in this bill that gives an olive branch or lends a hand or any training or retraining for some 500 people who are going to have a very difficult time buying gifts for their kids and their loved ones this Christmas.

It's very, very sad, because it's typical of when Liberals get into office that it seems we lose jobs. It's exactly what happened when David Peterson went in.

Let me read you startling statistics that did not occur under Mike Harris or Ernie Eves. We created a million net new jobs. That means that, with all the job losses and job gains, by the end of our time in government we created over a million new jobs in the province.

Contrast that to when Bob Rae was in between 1990 and 1995. After five years in office, the NDP left us with a negative 10,000 jobs, and it looks like the Liberals are on the same path. Job growth has declined by 32.5% since the Liberals came to office some 14 months ago. The number of single employable people on welfare has increased over the last year.

We saw that when David Peterson was in and Bob Nixon was the Treasurer. They felt that if they increased welfare rates to be similar to the minimum wage, that would somehow encourage people to move from welfare

into the workplace. They called it the steps to employment program.

Nothing could be further from the truth. If you increase welfare rates—and by the way, we did have the highest average welfare rates in the country under Mike Harris. We always made sure our rates were 30% above the national average in all categories and higher for disabled people than in most other provinces and higher than the average for Canada. They are going to raise welfare rates again, and probably continue to raise them over their four years in office. You'll see more people stay at home and do nothing. We're already seeing that in statistics of the last 14 months since the Liberals have been in office.

Housing starts are down by 2.7% this year for the first time in many years, and they're estimated to decline by another 12% by the year 2005.

The average deficit this government will run—we balanced the books after inheriting an \$11.6-billion deficit—\$1 million an hour was being spent every hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year when the NDP was in office. They were spending \$1 million more an hour than they were taking in. That was their deficit: \$11.6 billion. We're going to see this Liberal government have a deficit, on average, of about \$2.5 billion each year over the next four years, and the debt will climb by more than \$10 billion between last year, 2003, and 2008. This is by their own budget documents.

This particular piece of legislation cancels \$85 million in valuable tax credits. Many of those tax credits were directed to assist the most vulnerable people in our province.

The government will cancel, in this bill, the following tax credits: the provincial sales tax rebate on vehicles purchased by those with disabilities—they'll save \$8 million by this act. That's horrible. I can't believe Liberal members are going to vote for a bill that will take \$8 million away from persons with disabilities who need a modified vehicle to get around. It's just absolutely contrary to their own rhetoric with respect to the disabilities act that they've introduced and that I intend to support in this House. One step forward, two steps back, and \$8 million less for people with disabilities.

The Ontario home ownership savings plan will be cancelled by this legislation we're debating this afternoon. When Bob Nixon brought that in years ago, I was a young assistant around here and I was able to buy my first house by using the Ontario home ownership savings plan. It was a good vehicle. It needed to be advertised more so the take-up would be greater, because the government is saying that one of the reasons they're getting rid of it is that the take-up by people wasn't particularly large. Well, if more people knew about it and if more local accountants would explain it to people, I think the take-up would be larger.

Home ownership has to be the goal of any government—not subsidized housing, not co-op housing, not all that other subsidized stuff that, frankly, is ridiculous in many cases; at least, when the Liberals and NDP do it,

it's ridiculous. Home ownership should be the goal and we should be helping, as legislators, to make sure people have some money in their pockets, and are able to afford a house and move out of the apartment they've been renting for years, paying landlords, perhaps in many cases, exorbitant rents.

The workplace accessibility tax incentive—the government will save \$7 million by cancelling that; the workplace child care tax incentive—the government's going to save \$10 billion by cancelling that; the graduate transitions tax credit; the education technology tax credit; the employer tax exemption on stock options; benefits for our research and development employees; and the Ontario research employees stock option tax credit.

As a former Minister of Energy, Science and Technology, I went out to those high-tech sectors in Waterloo and Ottawa, and in London, Ontario, the health sciences centre. I built MaRS; it's being built now. I put the money forward for MaRS, the medical and related research sciences building that's being built down the street, actually just out the front door of this building, on University Avenue and College Street.

The fact of the matter is that these tax credits I've just mentioned were put in place on purpose to make sure we attracted those high-tech employees. We had a brain drain in this province, and these tax credits went a long way in making sure we got these young people back in, including giving them a tax credit on stock options they might receive from their employers as an enticement to work in the Nortels, the IBMs and the RIMs of the world. But no, the government doesn't seem to care about these young, brilliant minds. We're going to see brain drain again because they're taking away the little bit the Ontario government could do in this area, and that was to give them a tax break on some of the benefits they received to entice them to work in the high-tech industries in the first place.

The 10-year property tax exemption for new electricity generating facilities is being dropped. Why? I don't know. In fact, under the government's electricity act, they're now going to tax new alternative sources of electricity, like new hydroelectric projects. It's totally contrary to anything that Dwight Duncan, the energy minister, has said in this House. His finance minister, Greg Sorbara, is really pulling the rug from under him in terms of moving forward on alternative or renewable electricity supply in this province. These particular tax credits on renewable and alternative energy supply are being repealed retroactive to November 25, 2002. That's kind of strange.

*Interjection.*

**Mr Wilson:** Oh, yeah, the government—someone's heckling. They're going to replace it with some new tax credits of some sort, but the net result is that they save \$85 million, so don't tell me you're doing the industry any favours. You're actually robbing them and creating a disincentive to new energy.

In fact, what you are doing in energy is repeating the mistakes of the NDP government. They're starting new NUG contracts, which Dwight Duncan and Dalton

McGuinty, the Premier, used to rail against when we were in government. We used to rail against them when we were in government because the NDP brought them in. These were very expensive electricity purchasing contracts called non-utility generating contracts, NUG contracts. It cost us tens of millions of dollars that we shouldn't have had to spend. A lot of that was put on to the Hydro debt in the province. Now I see that Dwight Duncan is proposing, with these RFPs he's got out—requests for proposals—to give these same guys that ripped off the province when the NDP were in up to 11 cents per kilowatt hour. Your average hydro bill at home right now, in the average household in Ontario, is about \$200 a month, at 4.7 cents per kilowatt hour. At 11 cents, your average bill, by the time Dalton McGuinty is done with you in the next few months, will more than double to over \$425 a month. But they put this in this bill as some sort of positive incentive to the system.

**1730**

The seniors' tax credit: I think this is the most abhorrent part of this budget bill. This bill introduces a credit for an additional \$125, on average, to 685,000 seniors. It's the Ontario seniors' property tax credit that we're all familiar with on the back page of our income tax forms. But they forget to mention that in their last budget bill the Liberal government cancelled the Ernie Eves seniors' education property tax credit, which would have put an extra \$475, on average—actually about \$600, on average, in my riding, with the incomes we have. Some 945,000 senior households would have benefited. So they cancelled our tax credit, which was far more generous, and replaced it with a pittance, and in their press release announcing this budget bill tried to tell the seniors of Ontario they're somehow better off. They're not better off. They would have been better off, on average, by \$350 if they had stuck with the Conservatives and not switched to the Liberals.

We did that because not every senior household has a huge income stream, and during the eight years we were in office, many of our seniors didn't benefit from the 30%, on average, tax cut that we made. So whether you call it the seniors' education property tax rebate or whether you call it the seniors' property tax credit, we were enhancing that, as I said, on average by \$475 a year, or \$600 a year per senior household in a riding like Simcoe-Grey. We were enhancing that to make sure every senior, regardless of income, actually saw a decrease in their overall tax situation. We picked the vehicle of education property tax to do that. That's regrettable. Our seniors are aging. We have this demographic bubble that's going through, of a growing and aging population. They need more help, not less help.

I just want to read a letter from Dave Allamby, of Beeton, Ontario, from my riding. He says:

“The McGuinty government has already got in place some very harsh policies that target seniors and middle-class residents of this province that is going to cost us not only in our pocketbooks but will impact our health big-time.

“Health Minister George Smitherman has entered into a secret deal with the doctors that amounts to blackmail. Doctors are being urged to stop or reduce giving certain medications to older patients on the premise that they are being overmedicated.

“The purpose for this exercise is to save the Ontario drug plan approximately \$200 million on the backs of the most vulnerable of our society.

“However, this misguided policy of Smitherman goes beyond blackmail. It is highly discriminatory as it singles out a specific section of society. There is,” according to Mr Allamby’s comment, “no indication or basis in fact to support that the elderly are being overmedicated. I suspect if, in fact, there is any overmedicating going on it involves young and old alike.” He’s got a good point there.

“Then we have the Minister of Finance, Greg Sorbara, who clearly says it’s the government’s mandate to curb the costs of the Ontario drug benefit program. He bases his conclusions for doing this because it’s costing the government \$2.3 billion a year for the drug plan, which is growing at 15% a year.”

Mr Allamby goes on to say, “Well, does Sorbara not realize that our aging population is also growing, necessitating the rising costs? But the question begs to be asked, why is anyone young or old being overmedicated, as Smitherman/Sorbara claim? Are patients writing their own prescriptions?” Mr Allamby asks.

“This accusation of overmedicating is a direct insult to our doctors and their competency as it is them who dictate what drugs the young and old require. But this is one more example of this government’s deceit in wanting to target the old and the middle class, to deny them drugs they are entitled to and to continue raising taxes.”

That’s Mr T.D. Allamby of Alliston, who sent the letter to the Beeton Record-Sentinel, the Beeton-Tottenham paper in my riding.

I think that speaks volumes. A lot of seniors are still under the impression that Mr Smitherman has changed the OMA deal. He’s going to have to explain that, because a lot of seniors are still under the impression that the doctors are being asked to save some \$200 million in prescriptions and I’m not sure, given that they haven’t released nor have they explained fully—I think they were going to this morning, but they haven’t really explained to anybody in this House that I’m aware of—what the new doctors’ deal is. It’s certainly not a deal, it’s certainly not an agreement, because we know the doctors are having it shoved down their throats by the dictators called Smitherman and McGuinty here. But at the end of the day, seniors aren’t very happy, nor should they be.

Something that should be in this act—and I’m looking for it—is a commitment that was made to me by Peter Wilkinson, the executive assistant or chief of staff to Greg Sorbara, who clearly said to me many weeks ago that by mid-October they would have a new regulation or a piece of legislation in place. If legislation is required, this budget bill would be a perfect vehicle for it, because condominium owners and Intrawest, the new condomin-

ium development in the town of Blue Mountain, were inadvertently put in a commercial class for taxation purposes, which means condominium owners in Blue Mountain are paying basically hotel commercial-based taxes for condominiums. It’s unfair. Their taxes in many cases go from \$4,000 or \$5,000 a year to \$12,000 or \$14,000 a year. It’s ridiculous, it’s out of line with the rest of the province, and a commitment has been made through the chief of staff of the Minister of Finance and other bureaucratic staff, to me and to officials at Intrawest Corp, that this matter would be dealt with. Well, it’s not in this legislation.

I urged the government to move forward with the reclassification of rental condos at Blue Mountain Resorts. People are e-mailing me and they want to know what in the world the government is doing to correct this error that was made in the past. In fact, I have a letter dated September 27, 2004, from George Weider, who is chairman of Blue Mountain Resorts. He says,

“Dear Jim:

“Thank you for sending me the copy of your letter to Bob Comish on the tax issue. This has been a very destructive taxation change. It’s been unfair and senseless to condominium owners to be taxed in a commercial category along with use of a residential assessment method. It’s a potential blow to the local and Ontario economies, as individual condominium owners are needed to finance hotel rooms in this resort area. Visits to Blue Mountain are seasonal, and occupancy rates are too low to support most standard type hotels owned by one owner. The demise of Blue Mountain Pottery and Nacan”—I mentioned that earlier, and I mentioned Nacan earlier—“should be a reminder that the vacation and resort industries are vitally needed, as our mainline industries are threatened by competition from off shore.

“I understand that some attention is being paid to the hundreds of letters and protests, but that no definite actions have been taken yet to change this unfortunate system. Thank you very much for your support on this issue and for your efforts on behalf of Blue Mountain, Intrawest, the Village Association and the owners.”

That’s George Weider, chairman.

Again, I urge the government to correct this injustice. You would be a hero among the condominium owners in the Blue Mountain area. It’s good politics, it’s the right thing to do and I hope you’ll do it.

Finally, in the few minutes I have left, I just wanted to talk to the constituents back home in Alliston, the town of New Tecumseth, Green Briar and Briar Hill, where all members know we need traffic lights outside the Nottawasaga Inn, on the Tenth Side Road. I see Mike Brown and others nodding, to their credit. This is something nice I’m saying about the Liberal government.

I sent Minister Takhar a letter asking him to come to lunch at the Nottawasaga Inn. Then, after lunch, I would take him outside, as Honda is getting out, from about 2:15 to about 4:15, as 2,000 cars go one way and 2,000 cars go the other way, and show him the highway; stand at the side of the road and watch the cars go by. I think he

would see the need. Green Briar and Briar Hill are mainly an adult community. Many people there are seniors, but even if they weren't seniors, I don't care how well you drive or how well you can't drive, the fact of the matter is, you can't get out on this highway, young and old alike. It's a dangerous spot. Two people were killed just last year, about a kilometre west of where we need the lights. That court case actually is going through right now. It's a dangerous piece of road, and we need help.

I want to thank Minister Takhar, the Minister of Transportation. He got the letter and immediately instructed his staff to set up the lunch. So he's not afraid to come into my riding; he's not afraid to deal with this issue. We had announced in June 2003 that we would put the lights up. The engineers from the Ministry of Transportation came with their big bulletin boards and maps and their good science to tell us where we should put the lights and how they should be timed to coordinate with other lights that are many kilometres down the road. I just want to thank Mr Takhar for that. I look forward, along with the residents of Green Briar, the council of New Tecumseth and the owner of the Nottawasaga Inn, Mr Lou Biffis, to getting together and finally resolving this issue.

Finally, I just want to say it's a great personal regret and a regret of many Canadians that Dr Frederick Grant Banting did not win the Greatest Canadian contest last night. He came pretty close. I think he is the greatest Canadian. I congratulate the fans of Tommy Douglas, of whom I am one, for him being chosen as the greatest Canadian, but, again, I remind the Minister of Culture that you have an obligation to preserve the Banting homestead. This is the childhood home of Sir Frederick Banting, the first Nobel Prize recipient in medicine that Canada had, and we need to do everything we can.

1740

Finally—back to the bill—I just want to say that I think this is regressive legislation. It takes \$85 million away from the Ontarians who need it most: our seniors and our disabled.

The NDP went on about capital tax, but I think perhaps if they understood capital tax a little more—capital tax hurts our small businesses. It's a tax on outlays that have already been incurred by a business of whatever size in buying new machinery, in training employees, in capital goods and services that help enhance the business and increase employment in the province.

To cancel that tax is a good thing. You just need to do it in the time frame that we had set out. This bill drags it out another four years. We had set out the cancellation of the capital tax to help create jobs and stimulate small- and medium-sized businesses in this province. We had put in place in our budget bills to cancel that tax four years earlier than the government is planning on doing, because we wanted to coincide with what Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien were doing, which was cancelling capital tax on these businesses to create jobs. For once, I have to say these guys should get in sync with their

federal Liberal cousins and eliminate that tax as per the original schedule.

**The Acting Speaker:** Questions and comments?

**Mr Prue:** I'm privileged to comment on the statements made by the member from Simcoe-Grey. He gave quite a rambling speech and he touched on many factors. Although I can agree with him, and I do agree with him, that many of the tax credits that are being done away with are ill-advised, everything from modifying vehicles for the disabled, the child care provisions for those industries and businesses that want child care on site, technological development and the provisions for the disabled to allow them to work—all of these are being chopped—I do have to say that I disagree with him on many other things that he said.

He talked about the welfare rates, as if somehow a 3% increase in a very low welfare rate is going to do disaster to this province. The 3%, in fact, does disaster to the people who are forced to live on welfare, sometimes through no fault of their own. Remember that nearly 40% of the people in Ontario who are on welfare are children. These are children who are destined for a life of poverty, children who are growing up poor, children who are doing without, children who are teased in school, children who really deserve a lot more than to be told that a 3% increase is somehow bad for the economy and bad for the people of Ontario. What was bad, really, was the 22% reduction that preceded all of this and the eight years when those people were forced to live in increasingly spiralling down destitution.

I also disagree quite clearly with what he had to say about rip-offs of NUGs in the past. If there ever were some rip-offs, I think I saw them in the last government. Everything he talked about NUGS pales in comparison with Clitheroe, OPG and Accenture. If you want to know rip-offs, those were the real ones.

**Mr Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan):** I'm pleased to rise today and add my comments to Bill 149 as well. I would like to make some comments in the context of a northerner on some of the items that are contained in this piece of legislation for northerners, and northwestern Ontario specifically.

First, I did hear a comment from one of the members opposite—I'm not sure which one it was—referring to the welfare rolls and the increase in the size of the welfare rolls. It is certainly our understanding that for every quarter that we've been in government, those numbers have gone down. I'm sure our minister would love to have an opportunity to speak to that, but I'm sure that will be addressed at another time.

My context, in terms of my comments about Bill 149—as many people know, southern Ontario has seen a large growth in its economy in the last five or 10 years. As many people are now aware, northern Ontario for the most part missed that expansion.

What I'm happy to see in this piece of legislation is some accommodation, some recognition, about the challenges that northerners and, in my context, northwestern Ontario are facing. Specifically, there are three or four

initiatives that we believe are going to move us forward in terms of being able to build and expand our economy, and also retain some of those industries that are still there and are challenged today. Some examples: the Go North initiative, which is a joint initiative between two ministries—the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines; the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp, which we are anticipating will see its mandate refocused back toward more private sector job creation—that was its original mandate under the program when it was first introduced in the late 1980s by the Peterson government; and the one that I'm most excited about, which is the grow bonds program. I'm proud of this one because this idea grew out of northwestern Ontario. The Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce came up with the idea. It was adopted in our government's platform and is now contained in this legislation. We're excited about the potential for this to impact on northern Ontario in the near future.

**Mr Cameron Jackson (Burlington):** I'd like to commend my long-time colleague from Simcoe-Grey for his outstanding presentation and the commitment he brings to the Legislature and the debate with respect to the government's second budget bill in its short, 13-month history in this province. Clearly this second budget, although it isn't as remarkable as the first budget, which broke all records for tax increases for Ontarians, still contains within it a significant number of losses for seniors, in particular for disabled persons, and for others.

On the issue of seniors—and I know my colleague speaks from the heart when he talks about advocating for seniors and frail elderly. Both his parents, whom I know very, very well, just do not have the mobility, as age has taken its serious toll on their lifetime contributions. He brings that perspective not only to the House but he brought it when he was Minister of Health, expressing continued commitment and concern for the quality of life for seniors.

It's somewhat passing strange that a government member is bringing forward a resolution later this week about a seniors' bill of rights, yet we're here today debating a bill that removes some of the benefits that seniors have appreciated in our province. So I want to commend my colleague for his commitment. I know he is concerned that hydro rates, a broken promise of this government, are going to most seriously affect persons on low incomes, and seniors in particular—a broken Liberal promise that will cost double-digit increases for them. He's concerned about the government repealing, in its first budget bill, the seniors' education tax credit, which literally takes \$500 out of the average senior's pocket. So I commend my colleague from Simcoe-Grey.

**Mr Lalonde:** I was listening to the people a little while ago concerning the tax credit that people used to get to purchase a vehicle. If the members had looked very clearly, in the past, the government used to have a budget of \$8 million for those tax credits. Now we have added another \$2 million, which makes the program \$10 mil-

lion. So it's not \$8 million, we're not saving \$8 million; we have added \$2 million, which makes the program available at \$10 million.

Besides this, in the past, all you were able to get was a tax credit on the purchase of a car. Let's say you paid \$30,000 for a car; your tax deduction or tax credit was \$2,400. Now, with this new program, you're entitled to get up to \$15,000 per project, either to modify your vehicle for the disabled or to modify your home to accommodate the disabled.

In the past, too many people were getting that tax credit, which was not useful for people who deserved it or needed it. But now we are making sure that everyone will benefit from this \$10-million program. Again, everybody who was entitled to that tax credit before will be entitled up to \$15 million every time they apply for this program.

1750

**The Acting Speaker:** The member for Simcoe-Grey has two minutes to reply.

**Mr Wilson:** Thank you to colleagues from all sides of the House for your responses, and a personal thank you to Mr Jackson, the member from Burlington, for mentioning my parents.

I just want to compliment Cam in terms of his work. Every Sunday morning—it was Saturdays at one time, and now it's Sundays—at 740 AM on your radio dial, Mr Jackson does a phone-in show. He covers seniors' issues, health care and all the issues we've talked about this afternoon. He does a valuable service. I'm not sure too many of us are on local radio faithfully every Sunday morning communicating with the people of Ontario. He does a great job on that. I thank him for his kind comments.

I want to thank my parents. I know my mother is watching now. I don't think I've done that often enough on the public airwaves in the 14 years I've been here. I also want to thank my great-aunt Margaret Wilson and my great-aunt Sister Pauline Wilson, who watch question period every day. God bless them; it's got to be a little tricky for them once in a while, especially when I lose my temper from time to time. But I will remind the several thousand viewers at home that that's theatre arts.

*Interjection.*

**Mr Wilson:** People like Mrs Papatello, whatever she's the minister of—social services these days—have a tendency to get under your skin. She's the only one to have ever called me a liar in public—on a Windsor radio station—in my entire 14 years. As my mother said at the time, "She has no couth." But in Christianity and culture I learned, in my degree at university, that we have to forgive people like Sandra, no matter how difficult it is. So I forgive you, Sandra.

*Interjection.*

**Mr Wilson:** If you'd shut up for two minutes, I could actually compliment you. I could think of something on which to compliment you, but given that I have five seconds left, nothing comes to mind.

I want to thank everyone who spoke in support of my comments this afternoon.

**The Acting Speaker:** Further debate?

**Mr Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East):** I'd like to make a few points in the little time we have left till the end of the evening on Bill 149 and really in regard to what we've done. We've done so much, so many great things over this last year on so many fronts. With what we've been doing on health care, education, the environment, our economy, we've put Ontario on the right course, on a strong footing for a very prosperous future for all—opportunity for all.

One of the things I'd like to talk about is the apprenticeship training tax credit, an important measure we're bringing forth. I had the chance to be at the health and safety stewards' dinner at local 183 a few days ago and got a chance to speak to many of the skilled tradespeople who were at that dinner. They had heard about our apprentice training program and were just raving about it. It's something that has been so needed.

We know that the 2003 Ontario Chamber of Commerce skilled trades survey has come out and said that within the next 15 years, 52% of skilled tradespeople are expected to retire. That's going to be an enormous shortage that has to be dealt with, and this apprentice training tax credit will be able to do that.

As well, 41% of respondents anticipated that they would be faced with a skills shortage in their industry within five years. We're taking proactive measures to make sure that does not happen and that we have those skilled tradespeople in place years down the road.

The purpose of the apprenticeship training tax credit is to encourage employers to hire and train apprentices in industrial, construction and motive power and certain service trades.

Many of these tradespeople were sitting at that dinner that night, many of them well above the age of 50 and looking to retire in the next few years. I could tell you that as we were going through school, many of us were looking at different passions in life and wanted to participate in different professions. Some of us wanted to go on to higher education, as far as colleges and universities, but others did not. They wanted to take different paths. We want to make sure there is opportunity for all those who want to go into those different paths. If you want to be a drywaller or a bricklayer or if you want to work in carpentry, all those are very skilled jobs and, actually, they're very high-paying jobs.

We want to make sure that those jobs are also safe. Thanks to our Minister of Labour here, who has brought through legislation to make sure there is a great deal of emphasis—actually, he set out as his number one priority health and safety in the workplace. It is making a huge difference. There are a lot of savings, actually, to be made in the workplace. There are over 300,000 workplace injuries every year at a cost of \$12 billion to the province of Ontario. So I have to commend the Minister of Labour for the work he's doing on that front and on the savings, not just in terms of the monetary value, but

in making sure that our men and women come home safe every day from the workplace.

So we're looking at good jobs and a better future for our young people. Corporations and other unincorporated businesses would be eligible, with this apprenticeship tax credit, for a 25% refundable tax credit on eligible expenditures incurred with respect to eligible apprentices in the construction, industrial and motive power and certain service trades, as mentioned before. For businesses with a total payroll cost not exceeding \$400,000, the tax credit rate would be increased to 30%.

We're also investing in our workforce by transforming Ontario's apprentice training system. It's also an investment of \$11.7 million of additional monies by 2006-07 to expand the number of young people registered in apprenticeships to 26,000.

I know the member from Thunder Bay just spoke glowingly about the northern Ontario grow bonds. In those northern Ontario grow bonds, we're committed to promoting prosperity in northern communities that have been neglected for many years; that's so important. We're making sure they will prosper in the future. We believe there is an untapped potential in northern Ontario and we need to help showcase that potential to the rest of the world. As part of our northern prosperity plan, it's going to help northern communities attract and retain investment and jobs. We propose, in this bill, the establishment of a corporation to make loans to businesses in northern Ontario. The northern Ontario grow bonds program would help new and expanding businesses in northern communities and improve opportunities for entrepreneurs in the north.

## ROYAL ASSENT

### SANCTION ROYALE

**The Acting Speaker (Mr Ted Arnott):** I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, his Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

**The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr Todd Decker):** The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 18, An Act respecting the Provincial Auditor / Projet de loi 18, Loi concernant le vérificateur provincial.

Bill 26, An Act to amend the Planning Act / Projet de loi 26, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire.

Bill 70, An Act to amend various Acts administered by or affecting the Ministry of Consumer and Business Services / Projet de loi 70, Loi modifiant diverses lois appliquées par ou touchant le ministère des Services aux consommateurs et aux entreprises.

**The Acting Speaker:** It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 pm.

*The House adjourned at 1759.*

# CONTENTS

Tuesday 30 November 2004

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

<b>Water quality</b>	
Mr Murdoch.....	4555
Mr Yakabuski.....	4555
<b>Contaminated properties</b>	
Mr Levac.....	4555
<b>Tommy Douglas</b>	
Mr Kormos.....	4556
<b>Michael Sydock</b>	
Mr Peterson.....	4556
<b>Cattle farmers</b>	
Mr Hardeman.....	4556
<b>Hospital funding</b>	
Mr Rinaldi.....	4556
<b>Curriculum</b>	
Mr Brownell.....	4557
<b>Doctors' services</b>	
Mr McNeely.....	4557

## FIRST READINGS

<b>Jay Lawrence and Bart Mackey</b>	
<b>Memorial Act (Highway Traffic Amendment), 2004, Bill 153, Mr Rinaldi</b>	
Agreed to.....	4557
Mr Rinaldi.....	4557

## STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

<b>Chiefs of police</b>	
Mr Kwinter.....	4557
Mr Dunlop.....	4558
Mr Kormos.....	4559

## ORAL QUESTIONS

<b>Ontario film and television industry</b>	
Mr Flaherty.....	4560
Mrs Meilleur.....	4560
Mr Sorbara.....	4560
<b>OMA agreement</b>	
Mr Runciman.....	4561
Mr McGuinty.....	4561
<b>Water quality</b>	
Mr Hampton.....	4562
Mrs Dombrowsky.....	4562
<b>Employment standards</b>	
Mr Hampton.....	4563
Mr Bentley.....	4563
<b>Hydro generation</b>	
Mr O'Toole.....	4564
Mr Duncan.....	4564

<b>Aerospace industry</b>	
Ms Horwath.....	4565
Mr Cordiano.....	4565
<b>Automotive industry</b>	
Mr Crozier.....	4565
Mr Cordiano.....	4565, 4566
Mr Arthurs.....	4566
<b>Greenbelt</b>	
Mr Hudak.....	4566
Mr McGuinty.....	4566
<b>Government consultants</b>	
Ms Martel.....	4567
Ms Papatello.....	4567
<b>Affordable housing</b>	
Ms Wynne.....	4567
Mr Caplan.....	4568
<b>Hospital funding</b>	
Mr Jackson.....	4568
Mr Smitherman.....	4568
<b>Road maintenance</b>	
Mr Bisson.....	4569
Mr Takhar.....	4569

## PETITIONS

<b>Frederick Banting homestead</b>	
Mr Wilson.....	4569, 4571
<b>Anaphylactic shock</b>	
Mr Levac.....	4570, 4572
Mr Craitor.....	4571
<b>Volunteer firefighters</b>	
Mr Murdoch.....	4570
Mr Arnott.....	4570
<b>Hospital funding</b>	
Mrs Van Bommel.....	4570
<b>Immigrants' skills</b>	
Mr Qaadri.....	4571
<b>District of Muskoka</b>	
Mr Miller.....	4571
<b>Tuition</b>	
Mr Racco.....	4572
<b>Leslie M. Frost Centre</b>	
Mr Miller.....	4572
<b>Children's health services</b>	
Mr Wilson.....	4572

## SECOND READINGS

<b>Budget Measures Act (Fall), 2004, Bill 149, Mr Sorbara</b>	
Mr Hoy.....	4573
Mr Wilson.....	4573, 4577, 4590, 4594
Ms Churley.....	4574, 4577, 4582, 4583, 4587
Mr Lalonde.....	4574, 4582, 4594

Mr Prue.....	4574, 4581, 4586, 4589, 4593
Ms Broten.....	4574, 4578
Mr Levac.....	4576
Mr Qaadri.....	4577, 4588
Mr Dunlop.....	4578, 4589
Mr Hudak.....	4578, 4582
Mr Yakabuski.....	4582, 4586, 4588
Mrs Mitchell.....	4586
Mrs Van Bommel.....	4586
Mr Racco.....	4587, 4589
Mr Wong.....	4589
Mr Mauro.....	4593
Mr Jackson.....	4594
Mr Fonseca.....	4595
Debate deemed adjourned.....	4595

## ROYAL ASSENT

The Lieutenant Governor.....	4595
------------------------------	------

## OTHER BUSINESS

<b>Annual report, Provincial Auditor</b>	
The Speaker.....	4557
<b>Visitors</b>	
Mr Murdoch.....	4564
Mr Colle.....	4569
Mr Watson.....	4569
Mr Miller.....	4559, 4573

## TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Mardi 30 novembre 2004

### PREMIÈRE LECTURE

<b>Loi de 2004 commémorant Jay Lawrence et Bart Mackey (modification du Code de la route), projet de loi 153, M. Rinaldi</b>	
Adoptée.....	4557

### DEUXIÈME LECTURE

<b>Loi de 2004 sur les mesures budgétaires (automne), projet de loi 149, M. Sorbara</b>	
M. Qaadri.....	4588
Débat présumé ajourné.....	4595

### SANCTION ROYALE

Le lieutenant-gouverneur.....	4595
-------------------------------	------